

**Terror By Quota:  
State Security from  
Lenin to Stalin (An  
Archival Study)**

*Paul R. Gregory*

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LENIN TO STALIN  
(AN ARCHIVAL STUDY)

PAUL R. GREGORY

*Hoover Institution  
Stanford University  
Stanford, California*

Yale University Press  
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# Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction: Dictators, Their Enemies, and Repression	i
1. Stalin's Praetorians	33
2. Ranks of the Chekist Elite	60
3. Organizing State Security	81
4. Political Enemies	106
5. Deadly Kremlin Politics	140
6. Planning Terror	166
7. Simplified Methods	202
8. The Repressors' Dilemma	219
9. Conclusions	251
Appendix 1: The Power-Maximizing Dictator	281
Appendix 2: The Organization of State Security	283
Appendix 3: List of Repressed Residents of the Workers' Village of Mogochino, Tomsk Oblast	287

Appendix 4: Framing Enemies to Limit the Loss of Loyalty	289
Appendix 5: A Selectorate Model of Soviet Succession Struggles	291
Appendix 6: A Dictatorial Eliminations Model	293
Appendix 7: Simplified Methods	295
Notes	299
Index	335

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# Introduction

## Dictators, Their Enemies, and Repression

THIS BOOK TELLS HOW the Stalin regime dealt with its enemies: how it spied on, arrested, sentenced, and deported them, forced them to labor in its Gulag, and executed them. Unlike some short-lived regimes, the Soviet Union existed for three-quarters of a century. It endured for a quarter-century in its most extreme form, coinciding with Stalin's rule from his rise to power until his death in March 1953. With the opening of its state and party archives in the 1990s, the Soviet Union became history's best-documented totalitarian system. There is no better source for the study the interplay of dictatorship and repression. The system of repression was in place well before Stalin's one-man rule, but it was Stalin who applied this system with more force and brutality than his predecessors likely could have anticipated. That repression preceded Stalin is a significant fact that decouples it, to a degree, from the personality of Stalin, but he looms large in this study.

### HOW AND WHY?

This book is about the “punitive organs” (*karatel'nye organy*, or simply “organs”) and their state security agents, which, through various names changes, were called (in chronological order): the VChK (Cheka), OGPU, NKVD, MVD, and finally the KGB.<sup>1</sup> During their peak activity

(1937–1938), these punitive organs employed, according to official definitions and statistics, 270,730 persons.<sup>2</sup> We tell how these punitive organs were organized, who worked in them from the highest party officials to the lowest concentration camp guard, how their victims were chosen and punished, and what motivated their repressors. In a word, we explain the “working arrangements” of state security, or how these “organs” functioned.

Just as we study the working arrangements of Soviet enterprises, ministries, and state committees to understand the Soviet economy, so we must study the agencies of state security and their subdivisions to understand the role of terror and repression in the Soviet dictatorship. Most prominently, we must focus on how Stalin managed his secret police, how the system itself was organized, and how state security officials operated. But we must consider as well how repressive organs worked under Lenin and the “collective” rule prior to Stalin’s victory in the power struggle, for the key pillars of repression were already in place under Lenin.

A deeper question is why the Soviet dictatorship, from the first days of Bolshevik power to its last days in late 1991, required more extensive and pervasive state security than other political systems. Insofar as the power and activity of state security organs peaked during the Stalin years, we must pay special attention to Stalin’s use of state security—what did he wish to extract from them and was he successful?

In writing about Soviet repression, the highest priority should go to penetrating the shield of secrecy around the “organs” directly tasked with repression—the Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, and MVD. Although other agencies were involved in state security, such as the prosecutor’s office, the courts, the civil police, and the military, they played subsidiary roles. To understand Nazi repression, it is necessary to know the workings of the Gestapo and SS. To comprehend Soviet repression, we must understand its primary “organs” of state security.

There is already a considerable archival literature on the Gulag administration,<sup>3</sup> but we still lack a comprehensive document-based account of its superior organization.<sup>4</sup> Robert Conquest (writing in 1985) noted: “It is a curious fact that, after nearly a half century, no real examination of the role of the NKVD . . . has been written” despite the fact that “the story of the NKVD in its period of maximum impact is of great moment.”<sup>5</sup> The lack of such a study has been explained by closed

archives. In the 1980s, it was even difficult to determine major personnel changes within the KGB, much less how it worked or how its policies were changing. The most serious scholarly attempts were severely limited,<sup>6</sup> although relatively comprehensive accounts of the Cheka in the Civil War period of 1918–1921 could be constructed from published sources.<sup>7</sup> The main state security records were cloistered in the archives of the KGB and after the breakup of the USSR in those of the Federal Security Service (FSB). There are now enough chinks in this armor to write such an account.

## STATES AND THEIR POLITICAL ENEMIES

All regimes have political enemies. Modern democracies must deal with domestic and foreign enemies, and this threat is magnified during periods of war or major international crisis. The United States took harsh action against suspected German and Japanese spies during World War II, government officials who had belonged to the Communist Party were removed from office in the 1950s, extensive antiterrorism measures were undertaken in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, and there were even rare cases of small-scale state action against presumed extremist groups (Waco, Ruby Ridge). Postwar Germany had to deal with a small group of radical urban terrorists (the Red Army Faction) in the 1970s, with the threat of infiltration by East German agents throughout the Cold War, and in the present with Neo-Nazi groups. National intelligence services from the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Germany, Pakistan, and some Middle Eastern countries cooperate against international terrorism.

In democracies, the battle against political enemies is conducted not by the regular police or military but by special police and intelligence agencies, such as the agencies under the U.S. Director of National Intelligence (the FBI, the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and others); the Federal Information Service (BfV) and the Federal and State Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV and LfV) in Germany; or the Mossad and Aman Military Intelligence in Israel. Such agencies that protect against political enemies typically are granted wider powers and operate under less restrictive rules than their police counterparts.

Totalitarian regimes also combat political enemies with special polic-

ing organizations, but their approach to state security differs from that of democracies for a number of reasons.

First, democracies are more inclined to impose judicial or parliamentary oversight, whereas in a totalitarian state, state security is only answerable to the dictator.

Second, totalitarian regimes use broader definitions of what constitutes a political enemy. Accordingly, state security must deal with a larger number of state enemies, committing political “crimes” that would not be regarded as such elsewhere.

Third, whereas in democratic societies, there are administrative layers between state security and the chief executive, in totalitarian regimes, state security is a direct agent of the dictator.

Fourth, the methods applied against political enemies are less restricted in a totalitarian system by legal constraints, such as the need for judicial review, disavowal of torture, or rules of evidence.

Indeed, the archives confirm that these four fundamentals were firmly entrenched by the early 1920s, well before Stalin’s dictatorship. The first Cheka minister, Feliks Dzerzhinsky, referred to the Cheka as the party’s disciplined “warrior.”<sup>8</sup> Even the highest party inspectorate could not monitor secret Cheka expenditures, and citizen complaints about illegal Chekist actions were turned over to its own presidium.<sup>9</sup> The Cheka disciplined its own and was directly answerable to the party and to no one else.

The decree of November 15, 1923 that founded the OGPU stated as its goals “the massing of the revolutionary forces of the republic in the battle against political and economic counterrevolution, espionage, and banditry.”<sup>10</sup> Unlike other state security services, the OGPU’s mandate covered both political and economic crimes, including some that appeared quite ordinary (such as banditry).

The Red Terror decree of September 1918 gave Cheka officers extraordinary powers, such as summary execution without a court proceeding. The 1923 OGPU decree “About Extraordinary Measures for the Defense of the Revolution” gave it the power to declare a state of emergency.<sup>11</sup> Soviet state security was not to be impeded by legal rules, but could use “simplified procedures” when it felt these to be necessary.

These features, as summarized by the editors of a major documentary series on state security, meant that “the real meaning of a central institution of state security was always broader than the function of a secret

police. It was oriented towards the resolution by extraordinary methods of a whole series of current political or economic tasks.”<sup>12</sup>

Soviet punitive organs, at times, combined interior ministry functions, such as civil policing, border control, and fire services, as well as (the object of this inquiry) state security, such as counterintelligence, codes, foreign intelligence, and protection of state and party leaders. They housed sinister subdivisions, or “main administrations” (*glavks*), which symbolized their excesses, such as Gulag (Main Administration of Camps); GUGB (Main Administration of State Security), later to become an independent ministry; and GUKR (Main Administration of Counterintelligence) or Smersh (“Death to Spies”). During those periods when the state punitive organs combined interior ministry and state security functions, they had more employees than any other state agency, but their core consisted of a much smaller number of party “warriors” who investigated, arrested, and punished enemies of the state under the direct orders of the supreme authority.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REPRESSION

This book is not a political history. Rather, it is a political-economic analysis of two interrelated issues: the role of state security in a communist, or Stalinist, state, and the manner in which the communist, or Stalinist, state organized and motivated state security to carry out its tasks in an effective manner. We study how and why the party, as represented by Lenin, the Politburo, or Stalin alone, used state security to achieve its objectives. Our political-economic analysis assumes that the dictator’s goals are well defined and that he organizes, utilizes, and motivates state security to achieve these goals.

Following the tradition of past studies of “working arrangements” of Soviet enterprises, we study Soviet state security agencies to understand their inner workings. Industrial ministries and their subordinated enterprises produced steel, grain, and machinery for the dictator. The OGPU, NKVD, and MVD produced another product for the dictator—repression.

*Repression* in Soviet parlance connoted punishment of persons who commit acts against the “worker and peasant” state. It was not a term applied to ordinary murderers, rapists, or armed robbers.<sup>13</sup> The most severe repression was reserved for those who “threaten the Soviet or-

der.” *Terror* denoted extreme repression in terms of numbers of victims and brutality, applied to specific groups, such as Polish or German nationals or kulaks.

### Principals and Agents

To apply a political economy approach to this subject, we must divide state security actors into principals (the ones issuing orders) and agents (the ones fulfilling orders). The underlying assumption is that “rational” actors on both sides make cost-benefit calculations based on self-interest. The actors in our state security drama are the “dictator” and his state security agents. The dictator’s enemies close the circle.

*Dictator.* The dictator is in theory the “dictatorship of the proletariat” as represented by the Communist Party. Insofar as the party, as represented by its Politburo or, more broadly, the Central Committee (both under Stalin’s control after 1930), automatically represented the working class, its enemy was an enemy of the people by definition. As Lenin declared: “Dictatorship of the proletariat is not possible other than through the Communist Party,” and: “There is dictatorship of one party. We stand on this and cannot move from this foundation.” Old Bolshevik Grigory Zinoviev expressed the same principle: “We should not be ashamed of what does not need to be concealed. Dictatorship of the party is that instrument we cannot refuse.” And Stalin even more succinctly: “The party is the class.”<sup>14</sup>

The party was the direct representative of workers and peasants; by definition, therefore, any enemy of the party, especially of its supreme leader, was an enemy of the worker-peasant state. As stated by Stalin in a letter to a trusted deputy (V. M. Molotov): the party, “occupied with the magnificent creation of socialism, . . . leads the proletariat into new battles, fighting against class enemies.”<sup>15</sup> No one was allowed to ask whether Stalin was leading in the right direction.

“Dictator” hence refers to the person (Lenin, Stalin) or group of persons (the Politburo or the Central Committee) that made the key policy and personnel decisions of the country. Lenin, until his incapacitation, was the key decision maker for the party, although he appeared to accept input and debate from other top party leaders. In 1920, Lenin’s Politburo consisted of five full members and three candidate members. The Central Committee had nineteen full members (including all Polit-

buro members) and twelve candidate members. After Lenin's departure from the political scene, party decisions were dominated by troikas or majorities of Politburo members, whose most important decisions were, on occasion, ratified by the Central Committee. In 1926, the Politburo had nine full members and five candidate members, while the Central Committee had expanded to fifty-two full members and thirty-four candidate members.<sup>16</sup> After Stalin's consolidation of power, the 1934 Politburo had ten full members and five candidate members, while the Central Committee burgeoned to seventy-one full members and sixty-eight candidate members.<sup>17</sup> Insofar as the power of the Politburo had been largely emasculated, the "dictatorship" of these years would have been Stalin and his inner circle.

*Agents.* The agents were *Chekists* or *Chekist-operational workers*—the "warriors" who carried out the battle "against distortions of the party line" on behalf of the dictator.<sup>18</sup> Chekists were distinguished from the military or police by their application of brutal force and their use of summary justice. Their broad mandate extended from suppression of foreign and domestic enemies to matters of economics. One party directive would call for a purge of Mensheviks in Azerbaizhan,<sup>19</sup> while another would order the protection of state supplies of precious metals "by experienced Chekist-operational workers."<sup>20</sup> When the party needed a special task carried out, be it political or economic, it turned to its Chekists.

In a multilayer organization, agents of the highest principal are principals to their agents, who are principals for their subordinates, and so on down the administrative chain. The Minister of State Security would be the direct agent of the dictator, his department heads would be his agents, and their section heads would be agents of department heads. The sequence of links between the top and the bottom is called the agency chain.

*Enemies.* The dictator's enemies are those who the dictator determines pose in some way a threat to political and economic stability. The early Bolsheviks first focused on enemies from the old regime, such as landlords, clergy, members of banned parties, and specialists. As time passed, Stalin's list expanded to party members who did not support his policies "in their hearts," the unemployed and homeless, minor criminals, slackers, gossips, and other "marginal elements" who did not meet the standards of the "new socialist man." During the Great Terror



Stalin's enemies became the Communist elite who failed to meet his standards and needed to be replaced.

Stalin's list of enemies constituted a disparate group, but the majority of them were treated as political enemies, even if their offenses appeared divorced from politics. If Stalin had limited himself to those actively seeking to remove him from office or to undermine socialism, his enemies would have been few in number. As it was, of the 4.8 million arrested by the OGPU or NKVD between 1921 and 1938, 3.3 million were charged with counterrevolutionary crimes.<sup>21</sup> The overwhelming majority of these were charged under Article 58 of the Russian Federation Criminal Code "On Counterrevolution."

We must be perfectly clear about the meaning of "enemies." An enemy is anyone who falls under the dictator's definition of enemy, whether or not outside observers would agree that that person in some way poses a threat. With this semantic approach, persons are "innocent" if they do not meet the dictator's definition of enemy. Therefore, it is conceptually possible to divide Stalin's victims into "guilty" or "innocent." An innocent victim would be one repressed by state security who failed to meet any of the dictator's criteria of enemy. Accordingly, a former Menshevik, even one trying his best to support the Soviet regime, was an enemy. A common worker caught up in a sweep to meet repression quotas would have been innocent.

*The principal-agent problem.* A "rational" dictator would wish to organize state security so as to avoid principal-agent problems; that is, instances where his agents act contrary to his interests. Principal-agent problems arise when agents have different goals or objectives from the principal and possess more information than the principal, which allows them to conceal from him their opportunistic behavior. Simple theory, therefore, suggests that the Soviet dictator could minimize principal-agent problems by choosing agents who shared his goals, by rewarding agents who carrying out his orders faithfully, and by monitoring agents closely to detect opportunism.

The dictator must also settle on an organizational structure for state security that limits opportunistic behavior. Organizing state security should be less complicated than organizing production. State security produces one basic product—arrests and convictions of state enemies, while an economy produces hundreds of thousands or millions of products and requires a more complicated structure. Simple logic suggests

that the dictator would opt for a state security administration with as few links as possible—a “short” agency chain. In the economy, the administrative distance between Stalin and an enterprise manager was great, with a planning commission, a minister, and a branch administration standing in between. In this case, Stalin’s ability to exercise tight control over plant managers was weak. Presumably, in the crucial matter of defending against hostile forces, Stalin would have wanted to minimize the administrative distance between himself and the actual executors of repression.

### Rationality

Rational choice theory rests upon three assertions: that people are not driven but choose; that their choices are in conformity with their preferences; and that “when a person chooses to incur a cost that could otherwise be avoided, there must be some expected benefit . . . that is equal to or greater than the cost.”<sup>22</sup> Soviet enterprise managers were “rational” when they hoarded inputs, distorted output mixes, or reduced quality; they were simply responding to the incentives and punishments of the planned system. The rationality assumption, as applied to repression and state security, claims that the actors—the dictator, Chekists, and enemies of the state—made cost-benefit calculations in conformity with their preferences. Their behavior was the outcome of weighing costs and benefits of alternative actions.

Stalin’s state security agents may have been perfectly rational in arresting innocent parties, fabricating confessions, hiring flawed associates, or competing with each other for increases in execution “limits.” They, like their economic counterparts, were simply weighing costs and benefits of their actions in the framework of prevailing incentives and punishments.

Stalin’s execution, imprisonment, and deportation of millions of Soviet citizens have been interpreted in different ways. Some attribute his actions to paranoia or even worse forms of mental illness.<sup>23</sup> Others argue that, for Stalin, whose formative years were spent in the violent Caucasus, terror was “business as usual.”<sup>24</sup> Stalin chose repression because he knew of no other options. Yet others interpret Stalin’s repressions as the logical acts of a rational totalitarian dictator, designed to maximize political power and economic achievements.<sup>25</sup>

The assumption of rationality places logical priority on motivations that are general, such as “Stalin killed a million people in 1937 because he believed this would ensure his regime” over those that are idiosyncratic (“Stalin killed a million people in 1937 because of a quirk in his personality”).<sup>26</sup> Although both interpretations may be true in some sense, the possibility of generalization offered by rational choice allows us to apply one historical experience to a broad range of applications. Most importantly, rational choice allows us to “test” the hypothesis that Stalin and his repression agents were rational by examining whether his repression policies and the actions taken by his loyalists in executing them were consistent with the behavior of a dictator who has well defined goals (such as remaining in power or economic growth) and of agents who wish to keep their jobs, be rewarded, and avoid repression themselves.

### Rationality versus Reason and Morality

In political economy, “rational” does not denote “having reason or understanding.” Rather it means taking actions that optimize stated objectives or goals, moral or immoral. Altruists are rational when they organize their resources effectively to distribute goods to the poor. They are irrational if they foolhardily use expensive intermediaries who divert excessive amounts of donated funds to their own pockets. Bank robbers are rational when they design and execute clever plans that allow them to steal large amounts of cash with a low probability of being caught. They are irrational if they enter a bank with no plan of escape. The suicide bombers of the World Trade Center will have been rational if their actions raise the chances of spreading radical Muslim ideology. In these instances, rationality is judged in terms of goals, in one case laudable, in the second case, criminal, and in the third case barbaric. A dictator whose goal is the accumulation of total power in his own hands may be rational in executing rivals or imprisoning huge numbers of his citizens; he is irrational if these policies increase the likelihood of overthrow. The rationality of behavior is judged simply by whether it is designed *ex ante* to promote goals in an effective and efficient manner. The goals themselves, no matter how extreme or unpalatable, are not the subject of assessment. Nor does rational choice claim the dictator’s actions will always lead to the desired result *ex post*. Dictators, like others, can make mistakes.

Rationality is by no means to be confused with morality. Stalin's arrests of the wives and relatives of his closest associates—often taken as a proof of his extreme paranoia and savagery—were morally repugnant and sadistic. However, for a dictator who must be assured of the absolute loyalty of his closest subordinates, their continuing loyal service after the arrests of those closest to them was the ultimate test.

Among others, Stalin arrested the wives of his loyal deputy, V. M. Molotov, of his personal secretary, A. N. Poskrebyshev, and of his titular head of state, Mikhail Kalinin. The impending arrest of Nikolai Yezhov's wife was thwarted by her suicide in November 1938 using poisons supplied by Yezhov himself, who in his own confession declared: "I was afraid that after her arrest she would tell all."<sup>27</sup> Stalin arrested the brother of his industrial czar, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, and the impending arrest of Lazar Kaganovich's brother was also thwarted by his suicide.

All, except the fiery Ordzhonikidze, passed the test by agreeing to the repression.<sup>28</sup> Molotov at first refused to vote for his wife's arrest, but belatedly gave in: "I acknowledge my heavy sense of remorse for not having prevented Zhemchuzhina [Molotov's wife], a person dear to me, from making mistakes and from forming ties with anti-Soviet Jewish nationalists . . ."<sup>29</sup> Kaganovich did not take one step to defend his brother, stating that it was a "matter for competent authorities."<sup>30</sup> Both Molotov and Kaganovich lived to an advanced age and remained staunch supporters of Stalin until they died. Stalin's bizarre loyalty test may have made some sense after all.

## THE MODEL

If a dictator's actions are "rational" in the above sense, his behavior can be modeled. Modeling means that we can formulate theories or propositions about how any dictator in such circumstances will behave, such as creating rules that promote excessive zeal or adopting distinctive recruiting practices to ensure loyalty. Models of dictators offer a powerful tool to generalize about dictatorial behavior, as they can be applied to different times and places.

It is extremely important for the reader to understand that we do not believe that such modeling will capture all or even most of reality. The model may explain 20 to 40 percent; the rest is explained by chance, initial conditions, or historical accidents. What we are testing is whether the model explains a portion of reality in a systematic and consistent

fashion that can be applied in other settings, which are themselves affected by different factors of chance and preconditions. In the language of statistics, we are not testing whether our model produces a good fit; that would be a difficult task. Rather we are testing whether the variables in our model are statistically significant.

There is a young but rich literature on the theory of dictatorship produced by economists and political scientists.<sup>31</sup> We use a series of models found in this literature to capture the specific phenomenon observed, such as the recruitment of Chekists, the organization of state security, and motivation and rewards. We begin with one model, Wintrobe's political exchange analysis of authoritarian dictatorship. Wintrobe defines such dictatorships as involving "massive government intervention into the economic and social lives of the citizenry, motivated by utopian goals of one kind or another and exemplified by communist dictatorships, Nazi Germany, and possibly contemporary Iran."<sup>32</sup> It is a model of political exchange because the dictator offers the citizenry goods, such as roads, hospitals, schools, food, cars, vacations, and privileges to specific persons or groups, typically in the form of rents. By "rents" we mean offering something at less than its market value and perhaps even at no charge. Such transactions constitute political exchange because the dictator expects political benefits in return.

Political exchanges are costly to the dictator; providing goods to citizens consumes the dictator's limited resources and rents could have gone to other purposes. The dictator uses political exchange to achieve benefits, which, as a first approximation, we assume to be political power. Such power ensures the dictator's authority and protects him from rivals. The dictator produces "power" by combining loyalty and repression. The more loyalty or repression, the greater his power.<sup>33</sup>

The dictator may wish to accumulate enough power to just stay in office, or he may want to maximize power—for him there can never be too much. But a dictator cannot produce infinite power, for four reasons.

First, insofar as resources must be expended in political exchanges to purchase loyalty and to pay for repression, the dictator will be limited by his budget constraint—his tax base, broadly defined.

Second, the dictator may have other goals besides political power. He may wish a luxurious lifestyle for himself and his immediate circle, or he may need a surplus for investment. An economy without investment will not grow, which limits the future resources of the dictator.

Third, the amount of loyalty “supplied” by the population may have an upper limit, which is dictated by the interaction with repression. At low levels of repression, citizens and special groups satisfied with the dictator’s provision of goods or rents are content to offer their support and loyalty. However, as repression increases and applies to broader segments of the population, some former loyalists will fear that they themselves could be repressed, especially given that the dictator may have trouble distinguishing loyalists from enemies. At high levels of repression, loyalty is maximized, and the dictator cannot expand power beyond that point.

Fourth, the dictator may not be able to expand repression beyond some limit over the short run. It takes time to recruit and train Chekists. If he orders an immediate doubling or tripling of repression, it may take time to expand state security’s capacity. Until that happens, he is limited in the amount of repression he can apply.

### The Power-Maximizing Dictator

We begin with a model of authoritarian dictatorship that ignores the first, second and fourth constraints (which are considered in later chapters). In this variant, the dictator wishes to maximize power subject only to an upper limit on loyalty. In this variant, the dictator can expand repression at will. We illustrate with a diagram in Appendix 1 that can be skipped (by those who dislike such tools) without loss of continuity. The text adequately describes how the model works.

In this case, the dictator increases his power by expanding both repression and loyalty. At first, loyalty continues to expand with repression, but then expands at a diminishing rate as citizens worry about being repressed themselves or conclude that widening repression is unfair. Eventually, at high rates of repression, loyalty reaches a peak. If repression is expanded further, loyalty will actually decline. The power-maximizing dictator chooses that combination of loyalty and repression which yields the greatest amount of power. If the dictator expands repression beyond that point, the ensuing loss of loyalty will cause his power to decline.

Predictions about dictatorial behavior can be extracted even from this simplest model of dictatorial behavior: It suggests that the dictator may try to relax the constraint on power through policies that exogenously increase loyalty, such as propaganda, a successful economic program,

or the allocation of more goods to the citizenry. Also the power-maximizing dictator might try to expand power by improvements in the “efficiency” of power generation; that is, by finding ways to generate more power from the same combinations of repression and loyalty.

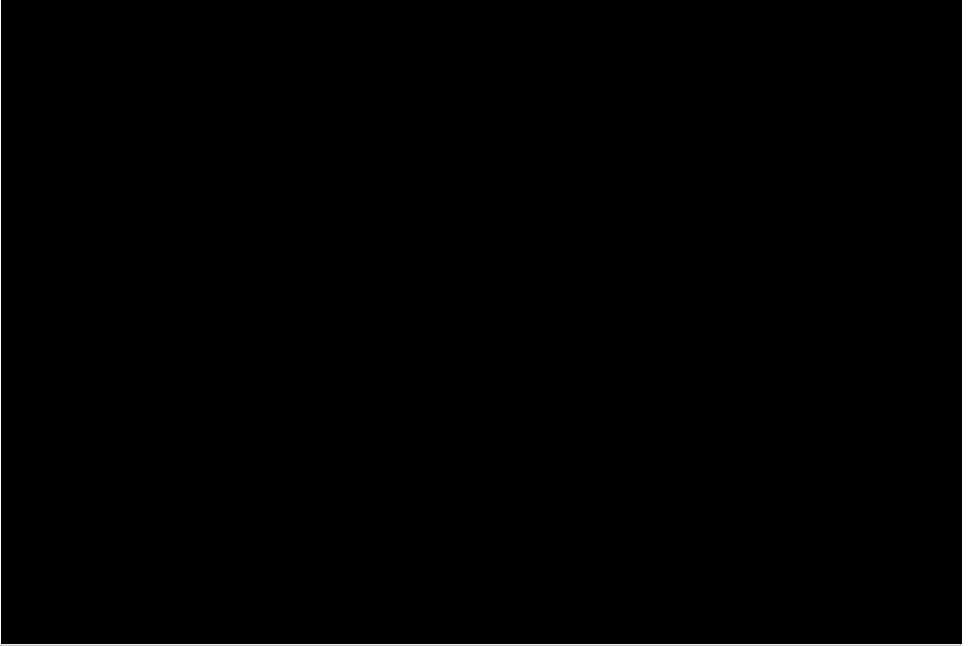
The most important prediction of the basic model is that the dictator must perform a fine balancing act to maximize power. Maximum power is achieved at those values of loyalty and repression where loyalty has actually begun to erode. If from this point the dictator allows the repression to get out of control—in a frenzy of agent enthusiasm—he risks a significant loss of power that can threaten his regime.

The ability of the model to generate predictions about dictatorial behavior expands as it is made richer by adding new considerations. Each addition to the model, however, adds complications, which will be dealt with in future chapters.

## THE STYLIZED FACTS OF SOVIET / STALINIST REPRESSION

With relatively few historical examples, it is difficult to “prove” any model of repression; rather we can only show it to be consistent with the most important historical facts, often called “stylized facts.” As an example, we show immediately below that one stylized fact of repression from Lenin to Stalin was its cyclicity—that it came in ebbs and flows. The task therefore is to determine whether our political economy model of repression predicts or explains this cyclicity or whether a more likely explanation lies outside the model. If the model fails to explain the most important stylized facts of repression, it must be discarded. We could only “prove” the model if we had a large enough number of historical examples to employ formal statistical testing. As it stands, we can only operate at a much lower level of “proof”; namely, consistency with the observed stylized facts.

We use modeling to explain a number of stylized outcomes—among others, the huge numbers of victims of political repression, many apparently posing no real threat, its cyclicity, the equation of economic crimes to political crimes, and the harsh treatment of political crimes, including widespread use of capital punishment. We use modeling also to explain the dictator’s interactions with state security subordinates, such as patterns of hiring and firing, recruitment, and rewards and punishments, and the behavior of Chekists as they responded to the dicta-



*Figure I.1.* Total Number of Persons Convicted by OGPU, NKVD, MVD Extrajudicial Tribunals, 1921–1953. Source: These figures were compiled in 1953 by the head of the First Special Department (Colonel Pavlov of the MVD) in a report entitled “Report of the Special Department of the MVD USSR about the Numbers Arrested and Convicted by the VChK-OGPU-NKVD-MGB SSSR, 1930–1953.” A portion of Pavlov’s figures is cited in N. Vert and S. V. Mironenko, eds., *Massovye Repressii v SSSR, Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), pp. 608–609. The figures for the period 1921 to 1929 are from Pavlov, “Report about the Numbers of Those Sentenced According to Cases of Organs of the NKVD,” December 11, 1953; GARF, Fond 9401, op. 1, del. 4157, l. 205.

tor’s rules of the game. We also consider the rational behavior of victims. What actions could they take to avoid repression?

#### Stylized Fact No. 1: Cyclicity of Repression

Figure I.1 gives the total number of *extrajudicial* convictions, executions, Gulag sentences, and deportations for *counterrevolutionary offenses* levied by *OGPU-NKVD-MVD tribunals* between 1921 and Stalin’s death in 1953. These figures were prepared by the MVD itself shortly after Stalin’s death and use the dictator’s own definition of polit-



ical enemies.<sup>34</sup> As such, they should exclude convictions for other crimes that have no political relevance such as ordinary homicide or theft of private property.

The mass violence of the Civil War during which the number of violent nonbattlefield deaths numbered almost 150,000, is not recorded in these figures.<sup>35</sup> The first episode of mass violence recorded in the chart was the wave of arrests and concentration camp sentences between 1930 and 1933 that accompanied the forced collectivization of agriculture. Although usually separated into two campaigns—forced collectivization and dekulakization—the two were intertwined. The kulaks arrested and deported were largely those rural residents who opposed collectivization. In the two peak years (1930 and 1931), 610,413 persons were arrested and tried by OGPU tribunals, of whom 388,705 were convicted, 220,126 sentenced to the Gulag, and 122,025 deported to remote regions of the USSR. Execution was not then the punishment of choice. In 1930 and 1931, a total of 30,852 persons, or 7.5 percent of the total, were executed. These figures understate the repressions of 1930 to 1932; hundreds of thousands of rural households were forcefully deported or resettled without any sentence or judicial process and were not recorded in the above statistics.

The second campaign of “mass operations” began to build in 1935 and 1936, as the annual number of counterrevolutionary convictions by NKVD tribunals rose to a quarter million, most sentenced to the Gulag. This campaign, often called the Great Terror, exploded into “mass operations” or the “Yezhovschina” in July 1937 with the NKVD’s arrest of 936,750 for counterrevolutionary crimes, of whom 790,665 were convicted. In the following year, 638,509 were arrested, of whom 553,898 were convicted. The savagery of 1937–1938 is reflected in the fact that about half of those arrested were executed—the sentence of choice during the Great Terror—for a two-year total of 681,692 executions. A total of 634,820 persons were sentenced to the Gulag and smaller numbers were deported.<sup>36</sup> The Great Terror ended as quickly as it began, when Stalin halted it on November 17, 1938.

The years 1942, 1945 and 1946 saw final spasms of terror against political enemies as more than 100,000 deserters, presumed collaborators, members of suspect nationalities, and returning POWs were deported, sentenced to the Gulag, or executed in each of these years. Deportations from border regions continued into the early 1950s, albeit at a slower

pace. For the entire 1940–1952 period, 3.5 million persons were forcibly deported to remote regions of Siberia or Central Asia.<sup>37</sup> The MVD's official statistics suggest that mass executions ended in 1938, but they miss the 157,000 Soviet soldiers summarily executed between 1941 and 1945 and the large numbers of victims of operations in border areas during the war and in its immediate aftermath. In Ukraine alone, 150,000 partisans were killed by army and NKVD forces, many by summary executions not recorded in NKVD statistics.<sup>38</sup>

### Stylized Fact No. 2: Most Arrests Were for “Political” Crimes

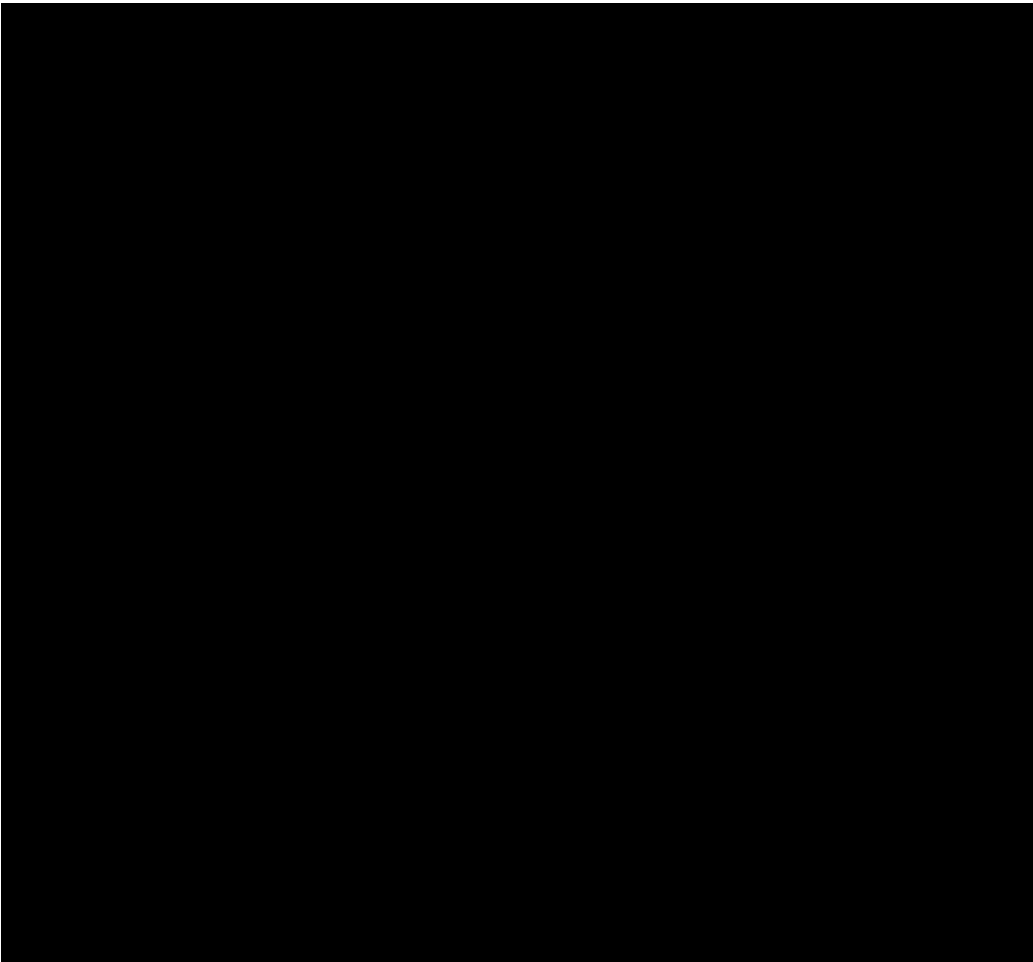
The task of the state security agency was to “battle against political and economic counterrevolution, espionage, and banditry.”<sup>39</sup> This broad mandate allowed the OGPU, NKVD and MVD to tackle a wide variety of “crimes against the state” that would not be regarded as “political” in other societies.

Figure I.2 shows that the overwhelming majority of arrests by the state security agency were classified as political crimes, generically referred to as “anti-Soviet activity.” In the early 1920s, between 1930 and 1936, and during the war, the attention of the “organs” was also focused on “other crimes,” but throughout the entire period arrests for anti-Soviet activity overwhelmed other types of arrests. The list of anti-Soviet offenses varied over the years, but if we take 1950 as an example, it included “espionage, terror and terrorist intentions, diversions and diversionary intentions, wrecking, sabotage, joining the enemy, flight abroad, treason, anti-Soviet agitation, banditry, illegal crossing of the border, contraband, and being a socially dangerous element.” “Other” (non-anti-Soviet activity) offenses, prosecuted by state security, included “revelation of state secrets, desertion, military crimes, the wrecking of trains, ships and airplanes, occupational crimes, and diverse crimes.”<sup>40</sup>

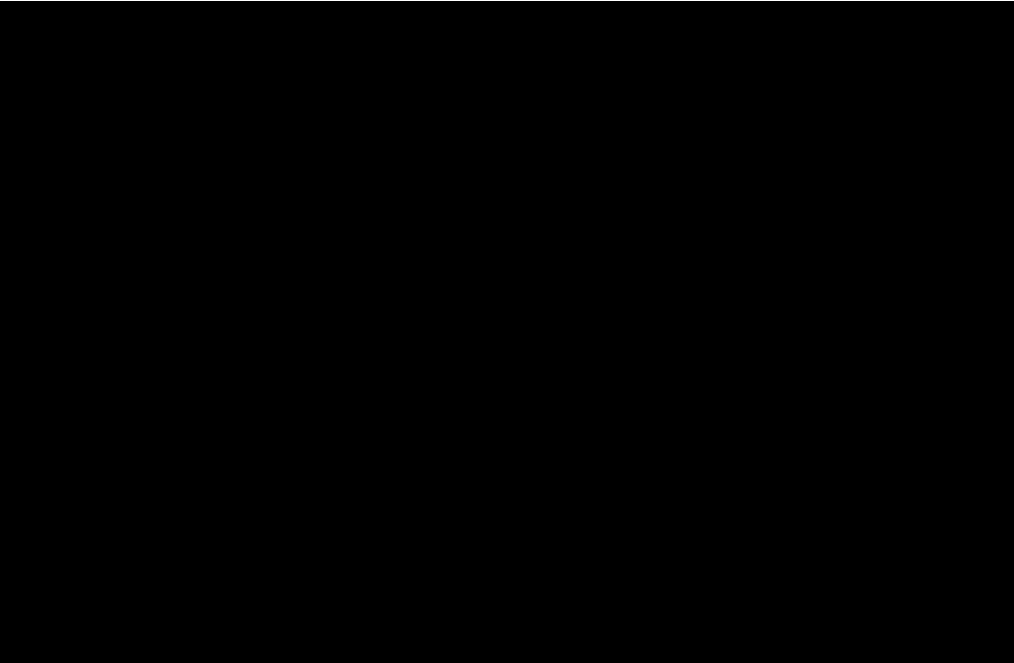
Noteworthy in the above figures is the sheer volume of arrests for political crimes, which underscores the broad definition of anti-Soviet activity and the broad mandate of state security forces.

### Stylized Fact No. 3: Foreigners as Enemies of the State

Foreign nationalities (Germans, Poles, Lithuanians, etc.) were more likely to be the subjects of state security repression than USSR national-



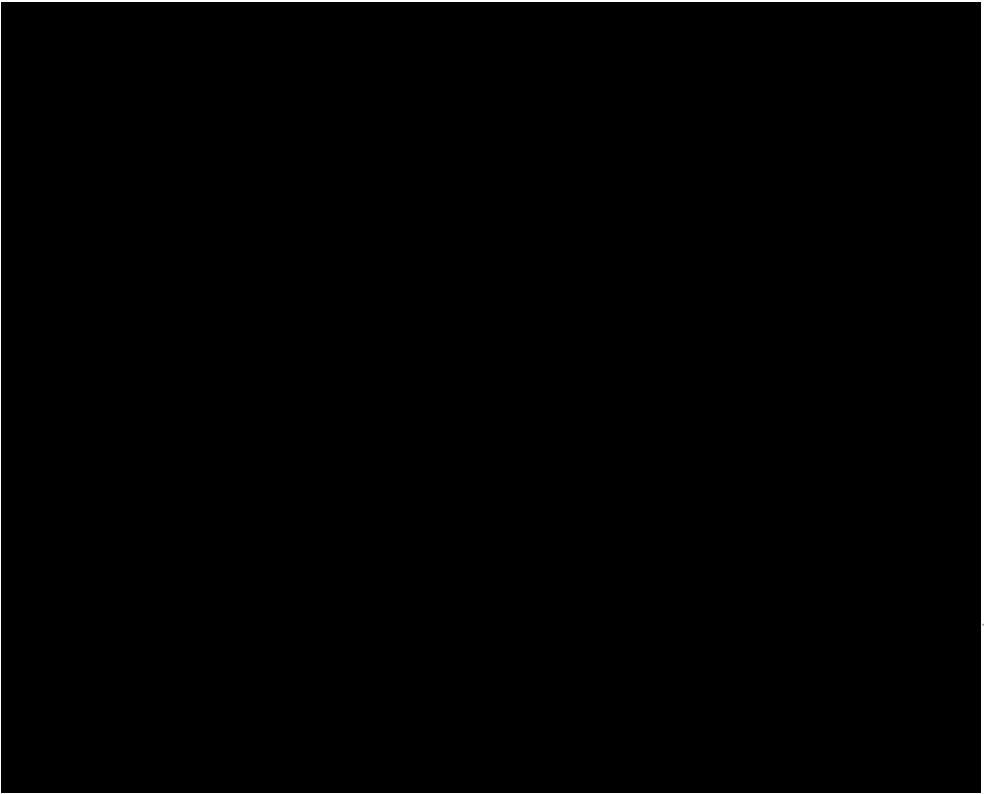
give arrests for the entire period, arrests for the missing years are taken from O. B. Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii: Vnesudebnye polnomochiia organov gosudarstvennoi opasnosti (1918–1953)* (Moscow-Zhukovsky: Kuchkovo pole, 2006), from the section “Circulation of Accused Involved in Investigatory Cases,” various years.



*Figure I.3. Foreign Nationalities as a Percent of All Arrests, 1926–1952.* Source: Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii*, section: “Information about National Characteristics,” each year. For the postwar years, we use the section “Nationals of Other States.” For the prewar years, we add the separate categories of nationalities together where the major groups are Poles, Germans, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Jews, Greeks, and Iranians, among others.

ities (Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Kazakhs, Turkmen, etc.). Figure I.3 shows the number of foreigners arrested by the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD for years in which data are available.<sup>41</sup>

The proportion of foreigners in total arrests by state security ranged from 8 to 23 percent between 1926 and 1951, while the proportion of foreigners in the population (in 1937) was less than 2 percent.<sup>42</sup> It is noteworthy that the percentage of foreigners in total arrests was high (in 1926) even before Stalin consolidated power. Although Stalin took the repression of foreign elements to new extremes, he was continuing a general policy begun much earlier.



*Figure 1.4.* NKVD/MVD Sentences, 1935–1952. Source: The major source of data is again the Pavlov report, which gives the number of capital punishments and prison terms. For 1939 to 1953, Pavlov reports prison terms such that sentences of five years or less can be separated out. For 1937 and 1938, he reports sentences of ten years or less and for 1930 to 1936 reports only prison and camps sentences. We use Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii* (section “Measures of Punishment Applied to Those Convicted by Courts, Special Assemblies of the NKVD, and Troikas, Excluding Court Sentences:”) to approximate the number of sentences of five years or less. We are able to do this only for the period 1935 to 1938 and errors are to be expected, but we feel these figures are reasonable approximations.

#### Stylized Fact No. 4: Harshness of Punishment

Persons convicted by OGPU, NKVD, and MVD tribunals were punished harshly. Figure I.4 divides sentences by state security tribunals into death sentences (euphemistically called “the highest measure of punishment”), prison terms of five years and above (which guaranteed a term in a “corrective labor camp” of the Gulag), and “lighter sentences,” defined as prison terms of less than five years, corrective labor sentences, deportation, fines, and other administrative punishments.

State security tribunals were generally not in the business of issuing light sentences. Immediately prior to the Great Terror, however, about half of their sentences were “light,” but in 1937–1938, they sentenced almost a quarter-million persons to “the highest measure,” and a roughly equal number to the corrective labor camps of the Gulag. During the war years, fewer people were sentenced and “light sentences” were more prevalent to free people for the front. As the war wound down and the early postwar period began, the MVD sentenced fewer people but virtually all were sentenced to terms long enough for the Gulag. The death sentence was abolished in 1947 and was replaced by an obligatory twenty-five-year term (the equivalent of a life sentence). From 1948 to 1951, more than 100,000 persons received twenty-five-year sentences.

Throughout the entire history of the United States, fewer than 40 persons have been tried for treason.<sup>43</sup> During World War I and its immediate aftermath (the Red Scare of 1919–1921), some 1,500 persons were arrested under the 1919 Espionage Act and its precursors.<sup>44</sup> During World War II, 112,000 to 120,000 Japanese residents, of whom 62 percent were U.S. citizens, were interned, along with 11,000 persons of German origin. From the years 1950 to 2000, the number of spies active in the United States averaged only fifteen and peaked at thirty-five.<sup>45</sup> Only two persons (Ethel and Julius Rosenberg) were executed for espionage under civil authority between 1930 and the present.<sup>46</sup>

#### Stylized Fact No. 5: Extrajudicial Tribunals for Extraordinary Times; Regular Courts for Regular Times

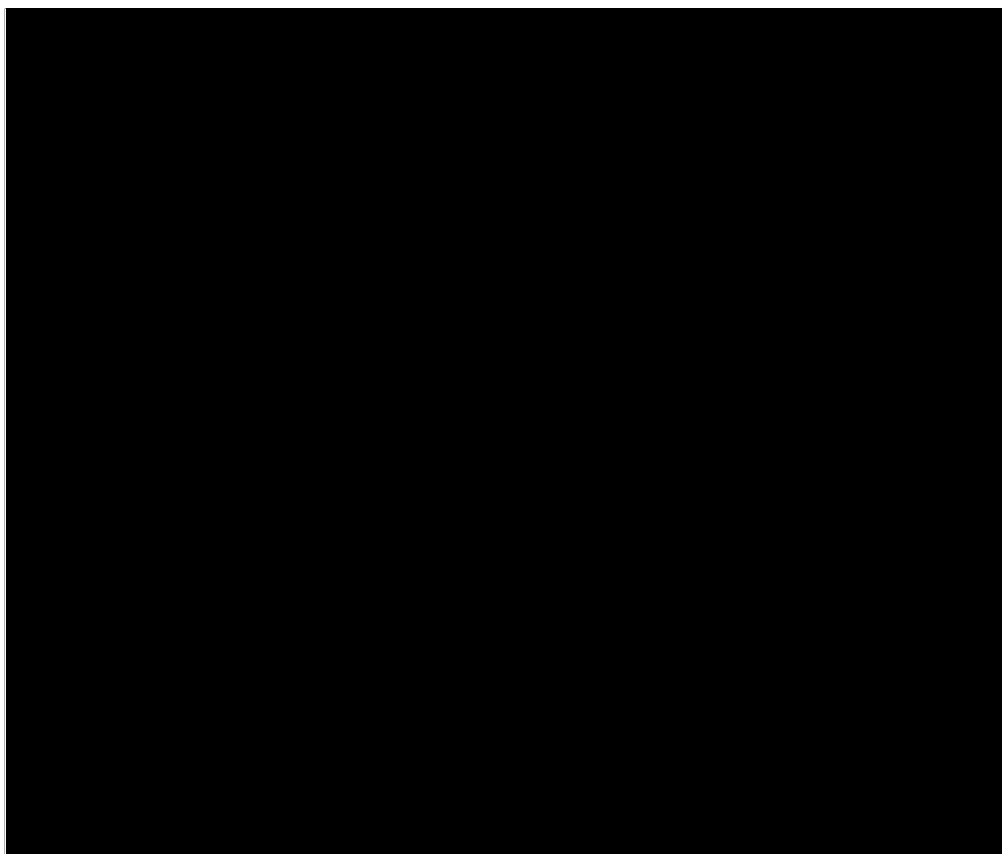
With such a broad definition of political crimes, it was difficult to determine whether a crime should be investigated and tried by the “regu-

lar” justice of the prosecutor’s office and the courts or by the extraordinary justice of the OGPU, NKVD, or MVD. Large-scale campaigns against political enemies, such as dekulakization or the Great Terror, were specified to be carried out by state security. Large-scale campaigns against less serious offenses, such as theft or workplace violations, on the other hand, were left primarily to regular justice.

Figure I.5 shows the distribution of convictions by extrajudicial tribunals and by regular courts for crimes that could potentially be considered crimes against the state. These figures exclude crimes against individuals and their property. It shows that the regular courts were used during periods when no major repression campaigns were underway, such as 1933 to 1936. Stalin used the extrajudicial tribunals of his state security forces to convict state enemies during major campaigns, such as the mass operations of 1937–1938. The percentage of extrajudicial convictions was also higher during operations at the front and in border regions. Starting in 1939 and 1940, emphasis shifted to “lesser terror,” which focused on punishment of theft of socialist property (even petty theft) and on workplace violations. These offenses were left to prosecutors and courts, shrinking extrajudicial convictions to relatively small proportions.

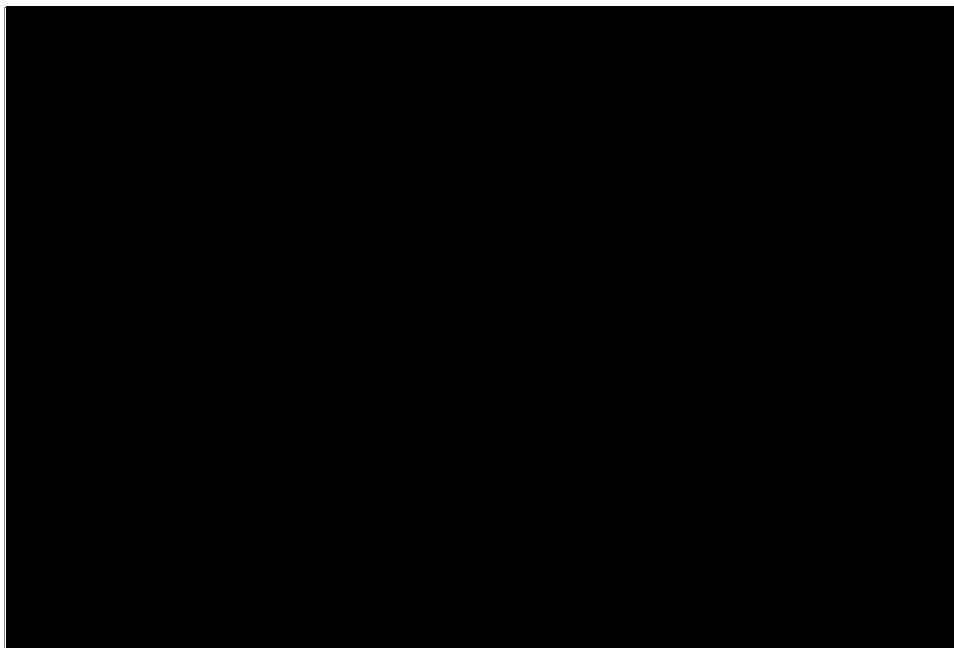
The dividing line between state security and the regular justice system was often blurred. After arrest and preliminary investigation, state security could decide to turn jurisdiction over to the regular courts. In 1926, for example, as a consequence of the OGPU’s investigatory work on 71,435 cases, 39,909 were turned over to the courts, 17,804 were tried by OGPU tribunals, and 13,722 suspects were freed (seventeen died in custody and twelve escaped).<sup>47</sup> In 1937, of the nearly 1 million persons arrested, only a handful were tried by regular courts.<sup>48</sup> In 1942, of the quarter-million persons arrested, the vast majority were tried by regular and military courts, although more than 10,000 died in custody.<sup>49</sup> By 1950, of the 65,000 persons arrested, more than 90 percent were tried by regular courts.<sup>50</sup>

The stylized fact is clear: when the dictator needed a mass campaign against his most dangerous enemies, he turned to extrajudicial tribunals. When he wished to move against less dangerous, but possibly more numerous enemies (such as thieves or slackers), he relied on the regular justice system.



*Figure I.5. Regular Justice versus Extrajudicial Proceedings, 1933–1852.* Source: For the period 1940 to 1953, we have the total number of sentences by all courts and tribunals, from a report prepared by deputy head of the statistical department of the department for preparation for rehabilitation petitions of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, cited in Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye Repressii v SSSR*, p. 610. For the period 1930 to 1939, we use data from Mozokhin, *Pravona repressii*, on the number of cases turned over to the Ministry of Justice (which appears to correspond to the figures reported for the OGPU by Pavlov; see for example pp. 292, 299, 314, 319). The pre-1940 figures are approximations but they should be reasonably accurate. For convictions by regular courts, we use the “General Number of Convictions by Judicial Organs of the Union Republics for 1933–1935,” from GARE, Fond 3316, op. 64. We calculate the missing year 1936 as the average of 1935 and 1937. We subtract out ordinary crimes by assuming them to be 400,000 a year (the figure for 1937). Obviously, the resulting figures for the period 1933–1936 are approximations, but they are unlikely to miss by a wide margin.





*Figure I.6. Number of Top State Security Leaders Arrested, 1936–1954. Source: Calculated from the biographies of Chairmen of VChK-OGPU, Commissars/Ministers of Internal Affairs and of State Security and Chairmen of the KGB and their deputies from 1917 to 1991. From Kokorin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, biographical registry.*

### Stylized Fact No. 6: High Risks for Leaders of State Security

The Ministers of State Security and their deputies were the highest leaders of the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD.<sup>51</sup> Between 1917 and 1953, a cumulative total of 99 such leaders attained such positions in state security under Stalin or his predecessors—an exclusive club, but a risky one to belong to.<sup>52</sup>

Figure I.6 shows the number of top state security leaders repressed between 1936 and 1954, recorded by the date of arrest. The overwhelming majority of those arrested were executed, but some committed suicide or died (perhaps from beatings) in prison. The cumulated total of those repressed equals thirty, which is 30 percent of the total and a third if we do not count those who died of natural causes, such as Cheka head Feliks Dzerzhinsky or OGPU head Vyacheslav Menzhinsky.

Repressions of top state security leaders tended to bunch after changes in leadership. NKVD head Genrykh Yagoda was fired in late 1936, and the repression and execution of him and his deputies followed in 1937. Yagoda's successor, Nikolai Yezhov, was fired in late 1938 and the repression of him and his deputies followed in 1939 and 1940. Yezhov's successor, Lavrenty Beria, was arrested in 1953; the execution of Beria and his deputies followed in 1953 and 1954.

After Stalin's death, there were no further executions (other than of Beria and his top deputies). Thereafter there were cases of dismissal for "discrediting the organs of state security," which probably carried with it the loss of pensions and other privileges.<sup>53</sup> One former minister was temporarily deprived of his pension as a consequence of being on the wrong side of a power struggle.

#### Stylized Fact No. 7: Chekists Recruited from Nationalities That Were Repressed

We noted above that foreign nationalities were more subject to repression than other groups. Among the least favored (most disliked) nationalities were Poles, Germans, and those with Baltic origins. Jews also had high rates of repression.

Surprisingly, among the roughly one hundred top NKVD officials between 1934 and 1941, a substantial percentage were from non-Soviet nationalities, with Jews holding roughly one-third of the top positions between 1935 and 1938, and Poles and Latvians combined occupying another 12 to 14 percent. By the end of the Great Terror, Poles, Latvians, and Germans had entirely disappeared from leadership positions while Jews had shrunk to about 5 percent.

#### Stylized Fact No. 8: Reorganization, Reshuffling, and Job Changing

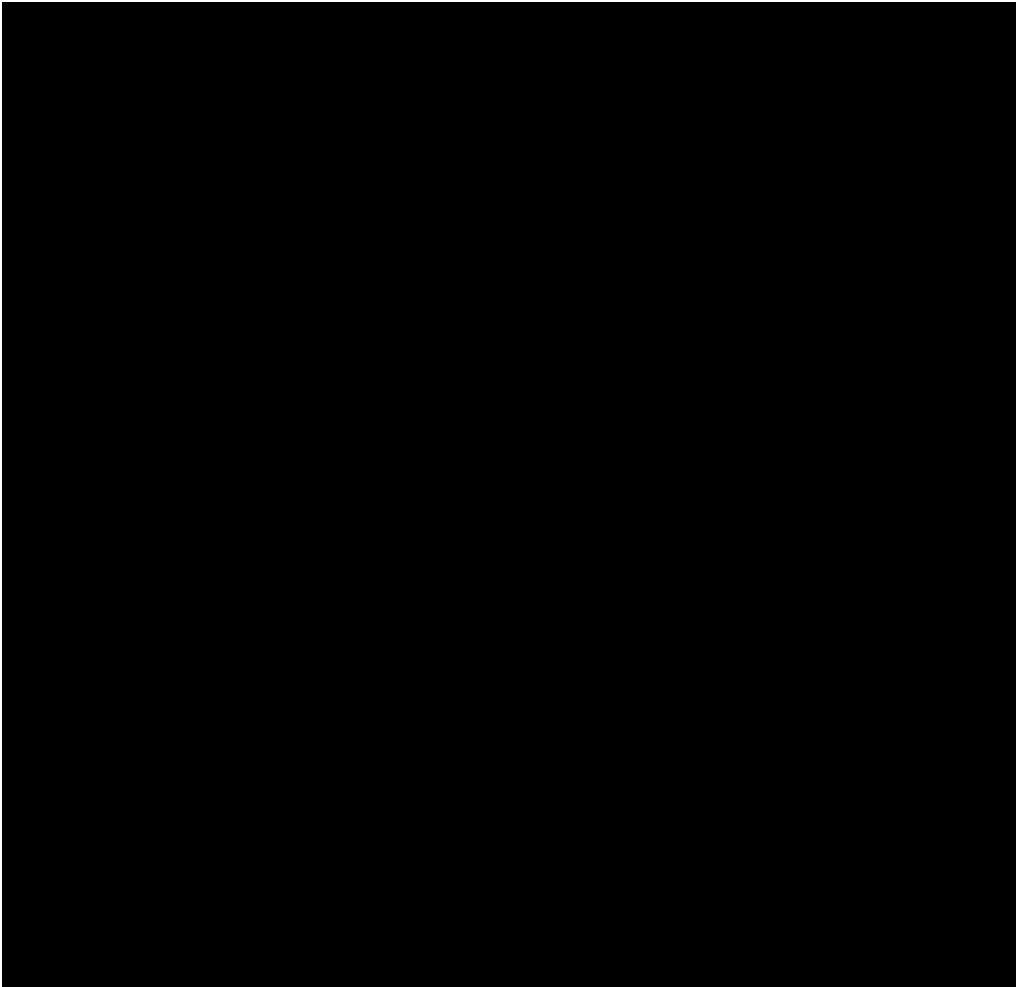
It takes more than 125 pages of a standard study to describe the multitudinous reorganizations and reshuffling of state security agencies.<sup>54</sup> Although there are no comparative studies, a relatively safe guess is that state security was reorganized more than its civilian or military counterparts. The Cheka of 1918 was subordinated to the Council of People's Commissars which Lenin headed. It was folded into the OGPU in 1923. The OGPU was folded into the NKVD USSR in 1934, the first state se-



*Figure I.7.* Nationalities of Leading NKVD Officials, 1934–1941. Source: Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, p. 495.

curity agency designed by Stalin. In 1941 and again in 1943, the NKVD's state security administration became a separate ministry, until Beria brought it back into the MVD shortly after Stalin's death. It is not important to follow such changes at this point, only to note that there was considerable experimentation as the Soviet leadership sought an optimal state security organization.

We cannot measure the pace of organizational change, but we can measure a concomitant of such change; namely, the reshuffling of state security personnel. Figure I.8 captures the period 1934 to 1939. During more "normal" periods, such as 1934 and the first half of 1935, be-



*Figure 1.8.* Top NKVD Leaders Transferred or Removed from Jobs, by six-month periods, 1934–1940. Source: Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, p. 495.

tween 8 and 15 percent of NKVD leaders were fired or transferred every half-year. As preparations were made for mass operations, this turnover percentage rose to 30 percent. During mass operations turnover was around 50 percent (half of the top NKVD leaders were transferred or fired every half-year), and rose to 60 percent in 1939 as the new Beria administration was installed.

## Stylized Fact No. 9: Innocent Victims

Anglo-Saxon law exercises extreme caution to prevent criminal conviction of the innocent. The accused must be proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. "It is better to let ten guilty parties go free than to convict one innocent person." This judicial philosophy imposes harm on democratic societies by freeing guilty parties who do not have to "repay their debt" to society and who commit additional crimes, but its benefits are perceived to outweigh its costs.

Bolshevik judicial philosophy argued, to the contrary, that society (the dictator) is better served by a judicial system that errs on the side of convicting the innocent than of letting the guilty go free. As Dzerzhinsky noted in the first days of Bolshevik power: "The defense of the revolution cannot take into account that it may harm particular individuals. . . . the Cheka must defend the revolution and defeat the foe even if in doing so its sword might chance to fall on innocent heads."<sup>55</sup> Stalin enunciated this policy twenty years later in a speech to the Military Council on June 2, 1937, almost two months before the initiation of mass operations, in which he advised that vigilant Bolsheviks should report enemies even if they were right only 5 percent of the time.<sup>56</sup>

The dictator is free to define guilt and innocence. Therefore, Dzerzhinsky's "innocent heads" would be those repressed who do not fall within the dictator's definition of enemy. A new dictator can also disagree with the old dictator's definition of enemy. Stalin's successors decided that the vast majority of his victims were indeed innocent. In his famous secret speech of February 1956 to the Twentieth Party Congress, Nikita Khrushchev denounced the atrocities committed "against worthy people, against Old Bolsheviks, and Young Communists. How many honest people had perished!"<sup>57</sup> Whereas Khrushchev proclaimed the innocence of the purged party elite, it was left to the Minister of Interior, Sergei Kruglov, and the General Prosecutor, Roman Rudenko, to quietly inform Khrushchev in December 1953 in typical bureaucratic language "of cases of unsubstantiated sentencing of citizens" that had occurred "in the absence of the accused and witnesses, which created the opportunity to conceal the deficiencies of preliminary investigations and lead sometimes to the most crude distortions of Soviet laws."<sup>58</sup> The repression of "innocent" party leaders was condemned in public. The persecution of "innocent" ordinary people was communicated in secret internal memos.

## Stylized Fact No. 10: Continuous Repression

Brutal repression preceded Stalin. It is difficult to compare the number of executions under Lenin with those that followed under Stalin. A ballpark figure for the period December 1917 to February 1922 would be 280,000 violent deaths, some half of which occurred in battle, leaving 140,000 executed in the course of the Bolshevik takeover and the Civil War, for an average of 28,000 per year. Although the average number of executions under Lenin was well below that of the peak years of Stalinist repression, it is on a par with executions from other years of Stalin's reign.

The Red Terror Decree of September 2, 1918, calling on the Cheka "to execute immediately those attempting to organize uprisings or attack guards, to execute summarily all persons in Cheka custody who possess firearms or bombs . . . and those involved in counterrevolution, conspiracies, and uprisings against Soviet power,"<sup>59</sup> was echoed almost twenty years later by Stalin's July 3, 1937 telegram, calling on the NKVD to: "immediately arrest and shoot according to troika procedures the most hostile returning kulaks and criminal elements . . . and to report the number to be executed within five days."<sup>60</sup> Lenin's April 1919 deportation of Cossacks bears a remarkable resemblance to Stalin's deportations of national groups in the 1940s.<sup>61</sup> Lenin initiated the repression of intellectuals as one of his last acts before an incapacitating stroke. Deportation of writers, scholars, professors, and economists began during the "liberal" period of NEP.<sup>62</sup> These repressions affected hundreds of intellectuals; Stalin's later repressions touched thousands. From the earliest days of Soviet power, free thinkers of any kind were feared.

Nor can it be argued that harsh repression was simply a continuation of tsarist policies. Under the tsarist regime from 1866 to 1917, the number of executions was at most 14,000 for the entire period.<sup>63</sup> The first five years of Soviet power saw 28,000 executions per year. The average figure for 1921–1953 was slightly over 23,000 per year. The post-Stalin leadership was aware that Stalinist repression was not simply an extension of past policies. A December 1955 report prepared on the eve of Khrushchev's secret speech cites the most authoritative study of the death penalty in tsarist Russia and concludes that the "number of people executed for political offenses by regional-military courts between 1901 and 1912 [gives numbers for each year] equals 4,191."<sup>64</sup>

Table I.1. Sample of Repression Decrees, Legislation, and Events, 1917–1953

<i>Decrees</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
September 2, 1918, Decree “About Red Terror”	Suppress, prosecute, and liquidate counterrevolutionaries
April 1919, Lenin’s written instructions to deport Don Cossacks	Deport 300,000 Don Cossacks to concentration camps or forced labor
March 8, 1921, Lenin’s order to Tenth Party Congress	All factions must be dismantled and anyone opposing party decisions punished
April 25, 1922, “About the Organization of Assistance Bureaus”	Gathering of systematic information about any form of anti-Soviet activity and counterrevolutionary elements
May 23, 1922, Directive of Lenin to the Central Committee to evaluate the Conference of Physicians	Investigate Conference of Physicians for anti-Bolshevik attitudes
Electoral Commissions for campaigns of 1926–1927, 1928–1929, 1930–1931	Deprive citizens of voting rights and also of rights to housing, ration cards, and education
June 8, 1927 Politburo decree “About Measures in Connection with White Guard Actions”	Arrest and punish and in some cases execute those who fought in White army
May–July 1928 Shakhty show trials	Execution of engineers for wrecking and arrests of engineers and specialists in Donbas coal region
February 2, 1930 directive of the OGPU, No. 44/21, “About the Liquidation of the Kulaks as a Class”	Operational instruction for the imprisonment, execution, or deportation of peasant households
August 7, 1932, “Law of Protection of Collective (Socialist) Property”	Punished thefts of state property by execution and long prison sentences
December 27, 1933, “About the Introduction of a Passport System”	Deport from cities undesirable elements such as former kulaks, gypsies, and unemployed persons
1933, Purge of Communist Party	Expulsion of 18 percent of all Communist Party members
July 30, 1937, operational decree of the NKVD No. 00447 “About Operations for the Repression of Former Kulaks, Criminals, and Other Anti-Soviet Elements”	Operational decree initiating the Great Terror

June 26, 1940, decree "About the Change to an Eight-Hour Day, a Seven-Day Week, and about the Prohibition of Willful Departure by Workers and Employees of Enterprises"	Criminalized workplace violations
August 10, 1940, decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet "About the Responsibility for Petty Theft at the Place of Work and for Hooliganism"	Punished petty theft at place of work and hooliganism with one-year prison sentences or more.
August 27, 1941, NKVD order for the resettlement of Volga Germans	Beginning of mass deportation of Soviet Germans to remote regions
February 28, 1944, NKVD order for the completion of operations of deporting Chechens and Ingush	Mass deportation of Chechens and Ingush to remote regions
April 13, 1944, NKVD order to purge the territory of the Crimea of anti-Soviet elements	Mass deportation of Crimean Tatars
August 18, 1945, decree of State Defense Council to deport Red Army soldiers taken prisoner by the Germans and serving in the German army	To deport to special settlements in remote regions of the USSR returning POWs, with severest punishment for those aiding German forces
June 4, 1947, Supreme Soviet decree "About Criminal Responsibility for Theft of State and Collective Property"	Imposed minimum five-year sentences for any theft of state and collective property
June 2, 1948, decree "About the Deportation to Remote Regions of Persons Refusing to Work or leading Anti-Soviet Parasitic Forms of Life"	Deportation of uncooperative peasants from collective farms
January 29, 1949, decree of Council of Ministers "About Resettlements from Lithuania, Latvia, and Lithuania	Mass deportation of Baltic nationalities to remote regions
January 23, 1951, decree "About the Deportation of Kulaks and Their Families from (specified) Provinces of Ukraine"	Permanent resettlement of Ukrainian kulaks and their families in Krasnoiarsk region

Table I.1 shows that throughout the entire 1918–1953 period, repression was “permanent.” In almost every year some decree or order would be issued that resulted in deportation, imprisonment, or death. The only question was severity. Was the latest decree one that would repress small or large numbers of victims, and would their sentences be severe or mild?



## SUMMARY

This book is a political economy study of the working arrangements of repression from Lenin through Stalin. The fundamentals of repression were in place before Stalin, but Stalin carried it to magnitudes not anticipated by the Bolshevik founders, many of whom perished in his purges. We are interested in how—the working arrangements of repression—and why—the reasons that totalitarian regimes require an overarching state security apparatus.

We use a rational choice model of totalitarian dictatorship that assumes the dictator's goal is to maximize power subject to loyalty and resource constraints. We use this model to extract predictions about dictatorial behavior. Insofar as the dictator's repressive policies must be carried out by agents working with subordinates, we consider as well how the totalitarian dictator deals with his agents of repression. We define the "dictator" as those in the Communist Party who dictate its policies and decide personnel appointments, Chekists as the operational workers who form the core of state security, and enemies of the state as those who the dictator concludes are hostile to his regime.

Our model of repression must explain the ten stylized facts of repression enumerated above, or, if not, be discarded. To repeat, these facts include the cyclicity of repression, the predominance of political crimes, the singling out of foreigners, the harshness of punishment, the use of extrajudicial tribunals for mass campaigns, the high risks for leaders of state security, the recruitment of compromised state security leaders, the frequent reorganization of state security, the large number of innocent victims, and permanent repression. We do not expect any political economy model of repression to explain "everything." Clearly, most of what happened was due to chance, personalities, and historical preconditions. Instead, we are trying to capture that portion of "reality" that follows distinctive patterns as suggested by a rational choice model. It is this portion of reality that can be generalized to other times and places.

The first chapter turns to the dictator's state security agents—to his Chekists.

# 1 Stalin's Praetorians

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS EVOLVE much like plants and animals. Some survive; others become extinct, and others mutate into forms scarcely recognizable from the original. Dictatorships and totalitarian regimes are more ancient than democracies and have had more time to evolve special institutions to protect the dictator; yet an optimal arrangement remains elusive.

This chapter is about Stalin's strategies of recruiting, managing, rewarding, and removing state security leaders. This was part of the dictator's search for an optimal arrangement to ensure that his OGPU, NKVD, and MVD protect him and his regime, despite the fact that he might betray them.

Totalitarian leaders throughout history have used special guards. The Roman emperors had their Praetorian Guard, Napoleon his Imperial Guard, Papa Doc Duvalier his Tonton Macoutes, Nikolai Ceausescu his Securitate, Hitler his Gestapo, and Saddam Hussein a personal guard headed by his sons. Most totalitarian regimes do not last long enough to test the durability of their institutions for protecting the dictator.

The Praetorian Guards are an exception. They served as a personal bodyguard for Roman emperors from their founding by Caesar Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14) to their disbanding by Constantine in A.D. 312. Praetorians were commanded by a Prefect—Rome's equivalent to a

chief of state security. The Roman emperors offered the elite Praetorians a lifetime contract: reduced terms of military service, generous pay, special bonuses upon the accession of a new ruler, additional payments in times of trouble, and, upon retirement, approximately three year's salary plus a land settlement outside of Rome.

Such arrangements to secure the Praetorians' loyalty throughout the reign of the emperor and to pass their loyalty on to his successor failed to achieve their goals. Although the Praetorian Guards remained loyal to their founder, Caesar Augustus, Prefects subsequently assassinated three emperors, one rose from their ranks to become emperor, and the Praetorians changed loyalty numerous times. In A.D. 193, the Praetorians auctioned off the throne to a wealthy senator, whom they murdered sixty-six days later.<sup>1</sup>

## THE CONTRACT COMMITMENT PROBLEM

Totalitarian leaders face a "contract commitment problem," be it a Roman emperor with his Praetorian Guard or a Lenin, Stalin, and their successors with their Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, MVD, and KGB. They cannot enter into credible contracts that secure the interests of both parties.

Praetorians or Chekists must have extraordinary power and accumulate sensitive information to protect the dictator, both of which could be turned against him. A rational dictator, therefore, must select, organize and incentivize his mighty Praetorians to insure their loyalty. He must enter into a contract with them that aligns their interests with his. Caesar Augustus devised such a contract for his Praetorians—high pay and generous retirement—which worked during his lifetime but not thereafter. The contract ultimately failed because dictators, in principle, cannot offer their subjects credible contracts.

Countries that have a stable rule of law have credible contracts for public officials. Civil servants in the United States, Japan, and Germany are covered by rules, which are unaffected by leadership changes. Judges are elected or appointed to office for terms prescribed by law, sometimes for life. The loyalty of the U.S. Secret Service automatically extends to the new president (and agents continue to protect former presidents). Political regimes change through regular elections rather than by coups or violent overthrow. Political figures who lose elections retire with pensions and are free from prosecution and punishment un-

less they have violated the laws of the land. Officials occupying patronage positions accept the loss of jobs if the opposition wins, and they often find work as lobbyists.

Dictatorships lack such a rule of law. The dictator is the law. If the dictator dies or is assassinated, a new dictator means new rules. In a dictatorship, the fulfillment of any contract depends upon the will and whims of the dictator. By definition, the dictator, not bound by a rule of law, can arbitrarily change contractual conditions. Even if he does not act arbitrarily, there remains a threat that he will. If the dictator replaces a deputy, the newcomer may bring in his own loyalists and sweep others out of office. Dictatorships lack firm property rights, for the dictator can change them at will. Rewards are associated with an office, such as enterprise manager, minister, or state security head;<sup>2</sup> the rewards of office are lost with the position. Dictators cannot commit to contracts that transcend their reigns; they cannot commit the next dictator to honor their contracts. With a dictator unable to commit to credible contracts, his agents must decide whether to remain loyal.

The Roman Praetorian Guard betrayed the emperor on numerous occasions. Stalin reigned for a quarter-century as an absolute ruler; he was not betrayed by his Chekists even after he became infirm. During his rule, his Chekists carried out a series of repressions against different victims—specialists, intellectuals, peasants, marginalized urban residents, and the political elite. They never balked. In return, he executed three Chekist ministers<sup>3</sup> and their immediate staffs and replaced them with new teams. In one case (Yagoda), he purportedly displayed the body of the repressed leader on the grounds of his dacha.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that Stalin was not assassinated or overthrown by his Praetorian Guard does not mean that the possibility did not exist. It means that the “outside option” (Stalin being betrayed) was not exercised, and the “inside option” (Stalin remaining in power) prevailed.

## A MODEL OF STALIN'S PRAETORIAN GUARD PROBLEM

The introduction presented a rational choice model of a dictator combining loyalty and repression to maximize power. The only constraint on the magnitude of the dictator's power was an upper limit on loyalty, which eroded as repression increased.

The dictator faces three types of threat of overthrow. The first is that

of a popular uprising, whereby the loyalty of the citizenry reaches such a low level that they organize and rise up against him. The second is the threat of a "palace coup," whereby the dictator's political associates/rivals form a coalition to overthrow him. Or the overthrow is a combination of the first and second options, whereby a rival faction takes advantage of popular dissatisfaction to replace the dictator with one of their own. The model presented in the introduction of a dictator combining repression and loyalty to maximize power applied to the first scenario and, to a lesser degree, to the mixed option.

The third threat to the dictator is that his own Praetorian Guards, who require considerable power to protect the dictator from the first two threats, remove him. In this chapter, we analyze the second and third threats, whereby the Praetorians use their considerable power to remove the dictator or they join a coalition of rivals in a palace coup.

The Praetorian Guard model is useful for studying their decision whether to "defect" from the dictator or remain "loyal." It assumes that the Praetorian Guards will approach this decision in a rational manner by weighing the costs and benefits of "defection" or "loyalty." In adopting either strategy, the Praetorians know that commitments from either side are not credible. The dictator—as dictator—can change any of his commitments at will, and any successor can—as the new dictator—change the commitments.

Loyalty carries with it benefits, such as the rewards offered by the dictator assuming he does not renege. Betrayal offers other benefits (such as becoming dictator yourself or obtaining a more favorable contract from the dictator's rival) and risks (punishment, usually death, if the betrayed dictator remains in power). The current dictator will lose the loyalty of his Praetorian Guards, if they conclude that the expected benefits from betrayal exceed the benefits of remaining loyal.<sup>5</sup>

This condition can be expressed in a simple formula:

$$\text{"Defect" if: } \mu B_d < \pi \rho B_p$$

Where  $\mu$  is the probability that the dictator will honor his contract

$B_d$  is the benefit promised by the dictator

$\pi$  is the probability of a successful coup

$\rho$  is the probability that a new dictator will honor his contract

$B_p$  is the promised benefit of the plotters.

Expressed in words, the formula says that Praetorians should betray the dictator if the expected value of benefits from a successful coup outweighs the expected value of the benefits offered by the current dictator. Note that this decision is made under conditions of uncertainty: Will the current dictator honor his promises; will the coup succeed; will the new dictator honor his promises? These uncertainties carry extreme risks for Praetorians. The wrong decision can mean prison or execution. The “benefits” may actually mean the absence of extreme punishment, rather than plush jobs and the exercise of power.

The task of a challenger in forming a winning coalition is formidable, because he will also face a commitment problem vis-à-vis his co-plotters. How can he convince his potential allies that his promises of rewards are more credible than those of the dictator?<sup>6</sup> How can he convince potential allies that he can actually pull off a successful coup? A prescient dictator would move against his Praetorians at the first sign of wavering. To wait longer would risk total defeat. Far-sighted Praetorians, for their part, would have to anticipate a preemptive strike well in advance and would have to try to organize a revolt when loyalty is still high among the Praetorian ranks. An inexperienced dictator might wait too long; a prescient Praetorian head might have the wherewithal to organize a Praetorian coalition with dispatch. The odds, however, appear to favor the dictator.

What does the Praetorian Guard formula tell us about the expected behavior of the dictator?

First, the dictator should offer his Praetorians generous rewards for loyalty and, correspondingly, extreme penalties for betrayal.

Second, the dictator should place in positions of power in his Praetorian Guard individuals with limited personal initiative, lacking in the ability to organize or inspire others, and without a personal power base. They should also be “risk-averse”—that is persons not willing to take big risks.

Third, The dictator should recruit for positions of power gullible persons who are more likely to believe in the credibility of his promises.

Fourth, the dictator should create conditions within his “palace” to make conspiracy as difficult as possible.

Nobel laureate F. A. Hayek, writing in 1944, came to similar conclusions about the characteristics of those who serve the dictator: “The chances of imposing a totalitarian regime on a whole people depend on

the leader's first collecting around him a group which is prepared voluntarily to submit to that totalitarian discipline which they are to impose by force upon the rest. . . . He will be able to obtain the support of all the docile and gullible, who have no strong convictions of their own but are prepared to accept a ready-made system of values . . . ”<sup>7</sup>

Georgy Egorov and Konstantin Sonin argue, using the dictator's credible contract problem, that the dictator will deliberately recruit mediocrities,<sup>8</sup> who are unlikely to attract followers into a coalition against the dictator. They emphasize that considerable charisma, leadership qualities, and organizational skills are required to overthrow a dictator; a rational dictator would avoid selecting persons with those very skills.

The current author discussed, in an earlier work, Stalin's practice of removing (usually by execution or extreme intimidation) those within his inner circle who showed initiative or ambition.<sup>9</sup> Two cases cited were Stalin's independent-minded industry czar, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, whom Stalin drove to suicide in 1936, and his strong-willed deputy prime minister and planning chief, Andrei Voznesensky, whom Stalin executed in 1950.

## THE CHEKIST THREAT

Stalin, with his intuition for power, clearly understood the Praetorian Guard problem posed by an elite state security service. Not only did they protect the “Soviet order.” It was NKVD and MVD officers who protected him and his closest associates. The NKVD's First Administration,” which guarded top party officials, was the largest of its administrations.<sup>10</sup> Each Central Committee secretary was assigned seven security guards and eight servants (whose costs were carefully budgeted), all employees of state security.<sup>11</sup> Stalin's bodyguards were Chekist officers; his food was prepared under the supervision of state security; his drivers were from state security.

To be an effective protector of his person and regime, Stalin's Praetorians would have to have considerable power. Their activities would have to be protected from scrutiny; if monitored by outsiders they would not be free to do their duty. Even Party Control Commissions could not monitor expenditures on their “secret” operations.

Nikita Khrushchev, in his memoirs, reported that Stalin clearly understood the dangers of a powerful state security apparatus. After not-

ing Stalin's intense fear of assassination and poisoning (personally dictating routes to his driver using a map of Moscow, having Politburo members taste his food, requiring guards to accompany him to the bathroom), Khrushchev concludes: "Stalin and Beria [his NKVD head] had developed very refined methods for killing people; they thought up incredible ways of doing it. Now he was projecting all this back on himself, thinking: 'Why couldn't the people who want to see me wiped off the face of the earth use similar methods against me?' I think that these kinds of thoughts began to torment him."<sup>12</sup> Stalin's concerns were legitimate. A personal guard would make an ideal assassin.

In the course of his accession to power, Stalin gained control of the "power ministries" of his day—the military, where he replaced his chief rival, Leon Trotsky, with a loyalist, K. E. Voroshilov (after purportedly arranging the death of M. V. Frunze),<sup>13</sup> and the OGPU, where his loyalist, Genrykh Yagoda, was in operational control after Dzerzhinsky's death. Yagoda himself gradually extended control over the civil police. By 1930, Stalin had control of all those power organizations that could bring armed might against an external enemy, guard borders, gather information, and arrest and prosecute political enemies.

The power of the OGPU and its successor, the NKVD, was exceptional. They had their own elite forces to carry out the most sensitive of missions. They had a vast intelligence-gathering system, which, by the mid-1930s, had a half-million informants. They could reach into every town and village.

Chekist leaders well understood their extraordinary powers: The first Cheka minister, Feliks Dzerzhinsky, boasted of his power and belittled police, prosecutors, and judges as "bureaucrats" constrained by petty rules and procedures.<sup>14</sup> As Nikolai Yezhov proudly stated in Kiev in February 1938: "the Chekist apparatus is for the immediate execution of direct orders of the party and state using *any measure of force against any elements* not subordinating themselves to the Soviet state."<sup>15</sup> Chekists commanded fear, respect, and loathing. As a local NKVD interrogator declared: "I am the investigator, the judge, and the executioner."<sup>16</sup> Yezhov's presence in the Lubyanka headquarters created panic in its corridors.<sup>17</sup> Chekists swaggered around in black leather jackets with the inevitable pistol on their hips. As noted by Yezhov with considerable understatement: "Chekists are less controlled in their activities than workers of any other administration."<sup>18</sup> Yezhov could have stated this



differently: "Chekists answer only to Stalin." Would Stalin fear that eventually they would answer only to themselves?

Chekist control of information would have been of equal concern to Stalin, who rose to power by collecting incriminating information on others. State security interrogators, "working over" state and party officials, were privy to the most sensitive confessions and denunciations. After Stalin arrested a top security official in July 1951, his anxious successor quickly washed his hands of sensitive files, writing to Stalin: "Our archives contain cases of persons currently occupying responsible positions in party and soviet organizations. These cases contain confessions of persons arrested in 1937 and 1938, anonymous declarations, and other materials that are difficult to check. We consider it sensible to excise these cases from the archives and to remove them from our operational accounts."<sup>19</sup> State security officials guarded Politburo members round the clock and took care of their every daily need.<sup>20</sup> The homes, offices and dachas of top state and military officials were bugged.<sup>21</sup> A top secret note from MVD minister Lavrenty Beria to Stalin of September 1945: "I report that the testing of the telephone no. 31-93 of A. Ia. Vyshinsky [then foreign minister] has been carried out by the Sixth Department of the Ministry of State Security" (and that a defective part had been replaced).<sup>22</sup> An unfortunate NKVD "supply" official was rumored to have been executed for his knowledge of Stalin's liaisons with women.<sup>23</sup>

NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov was charged with examining all incoming and outgoing diplomatic mail along with the foreign minister or his deputy.<sup>24</sup> At a March 9, 1936 Politburo meeting Yezhov was given the entire Trotsky archive, a rich source of compromising material against any party official having prior contacts with Trotsky.<sup>25</sup> Stalin shared with Yezhov denunciations of high party officials, such as a letter (from a Comrade Balashev) denouncing none other than Stalin's deputy, Lazar Kaganovich, presumably with instruction to file if needed in the future.<sup>26</sup> Khrushchev recounts Beria's gathering of incriminating information, such as from the Lvov MVD head, who was told that they would make "prison dust" out of him if he refused.<sup>27</sup>

The Politburo's secret department used the security agency's special communications system to distribute classified party decrees according to special instructions.<sup>28</sup> Their contents were so secret that "persons having the right to be informed about decisions of the Central Commit-

tee are categorically forbidden to reveal . . . that these are instructions of the Central Committee.”<sup>29</sup> Although arrest threatened OGPU or NKVD workers who failed to keep their signed pledges “to keep absolutely secret any information associated with their work and their membership in the OGPU,”<sup>30</sup> they could misuse this information. Although other Soviet organizations were fair game for complaints, no public criticism of the NKVD was allowed.

Nikita Khrushchev, in his indictment of MVD minister Lavrenty Beria at the plenum of the Central Committee of July 2–7, 1953, summarized the threat to the party’s “leading role” posed by a too-powerful security czar. Khrushchev recounted his conversation with another Politburo member (Nikolai Bulganin) at Stalin’s deathbed: “I said: ‘Here is my concern. After Stalin’s death, Beria will use all his powers to seize the position of minister of the MVD. Why does he need this position? He needs this position to spy on members of the Politburo, to eavesdrop, to fabricate cases, to engage in intrigue, and this will lead to bad consequences, and perhaps even worse, for the party.’”<sup>31</sup> By “the party,” Khrushchev meant himself and other high-level potential victims of a Beria regime.

## CHOOSING CHEKIST HEADS

From the first days of Bolshevik power, one of the most important “leading roles” of the party was to nominate and approve all high-ranking appointments to industrial, state, and military positions. Stalin created his power base through his control of appointments to party and state positions as general secretary of the Central Committee. After his consolidation of power in 1930, Stalin dictated who would head state security and who would serve them as their deputies and head regional administrations.

The four most notable Chekist ministers—Feliks Dzerzhinsky (Cheka/OGPU), Genrykh Yagoda (OGPU/NKVD), Nikolai Yezhov (NKVD),<sup>32</sup> and Lavrenty Beria (NKVD/MVD)—symbolize the excesses of the Soviet era. Only Dzerzhinsky died of natural causes. Dzerzhinsky oversaw the creation of Soviet punitive organs; Yagoda orchestrated the killing, imprisonment, and deportation of millions of peasants and other presumed class enemies and the first large infrastructure projects of the Gulag. Yezhov was in charge of the Great Terror, referred to as the “Yezhov-

shchina" in Russia, a dubious honor for its namesake. Beria was in charge of punitive organs during the "mobilization years" leading up to, including, and immediately following World War II, during which his NKVD/MVD deported hundreds of thousands of ethnic minorities, conducted savage military operations at the front and behind the lines, and dealt with prisoners of war.

The leaders of state security selected by Stalin, which would exclude Dzerzhinsky who was appointed by Lenin, embodied the traits that he desired in his Chekist leaders. Institutions are marked by the people who man them. The U.S. Marines recruit young persons with great physical strength and endurance and with strong feelings of patriotism. Investment banks are manned by young energetic people who welcome risk taking and can quickly size up business opportunities. Political parties recruit as candidates people with political ambitions who are able to appeal to voters. Our model of the power-maximizing dictator suggested what kind of leaders Stalin wanted. An examination of his appointments reveals the characteristics that Stalin sought in his leaders of state security.

### Lack of Charisma or Independent Power

Unlike Dzerzhinsky, who was a major figure in his own right (head of the Supreme Economic Council and a candidate member of the Politburo), Yagoda and Yezhov lacked independent power bases. Beria, after an early stint in state security, served as party secretary of the small republic of Georgia, where he distinguished himself only by his brutal purges. Yagoda and Yezhov had occupied minor positions; they had not served as party secretaries of major regions or cities. The colorless Yagoda's rise to power is explained by his marriage to the niece of a high party official (Iakob Sverdlov). Yezhov's rise to power was based on unbridled loyalty to Stalin: "Not distinguishing himself in education or intellect, he [Yezhov] distinguished himself by his blind faith in Stalin and by the brutality of his character."<sup>33</sup>

Yagoda was poorly educated. After an elementary-school education, he studied for several months to be a pharmacist. A detractor described him as "a Jew," with "a yellow-deadly-pale face with a patch of a mustache below his lips and a vacant, insane look in his eyes . . . a conniving pharmacist, unusually and deeply embittered, and as a failure, pathologically envious of everyone . . ."<sup>34</sup> Yagoda served many years as sec-

ond in command of the OGPU and was elevated to its head with the death of its minister (V. R. Menzhinsky) in the spring of 1934.

Yezhov had an elementary-school education and worked in a factory before joining the party in 1917. He served as a military commissar in the Civil War, after which he was an obscure party worker in remote Central Asia. Yezhov was “short, almost a dwarf with a baritone voice, short crooked legs, . . . dull coloring, a strained smile, large ears and deep irony in his voice. . . . He hated Yagoda, his dangerous competitor.”<sup>35</sup> Yezhov’s texts were full of crude errors, and he was a poor speaker. Although he took a one-year course on Marxism-Leninism in a Central Committee training program, he remained (according to one colleague) “Little cultured and in a theoretical respect a totally ignorant man.”<sup>36</sup>

Beria brought a different set of skills to the job. He was better educated, having graduated with honors from a polytechnic institute in Baku. He served an apprenticeship with the Nobel company. While Yezhov and Yagoda were never admitted to Stalin’s inner circle, Beria was. Beria, along with Khrushchev, Malenkov, Voroshilov, and Molotov, was a frequent guest at Stalin’s dreaded dinner parties and visited Stalin when he was on vacation. He became a candidate member of the Politburo in 1939, a full member during the war, and served as deputy head of state during the war.

Beria knew how to make friends and influence people and was able to dominate others. Khrushchev gives an account of his first impression of Beria: “In the first stage of our acquaintance he made a very good impression on me. We always sat side by side at plenums of the Central Committee, exchanging opinions and sometimes joking, as often happens between people who are on good terms.”<sup>37</sup> Beria had the skills to convince Stalin of his loyalty despite his obvious personal ambitions, as he admitted in his 1953 interrogation: “I would say that I am not a person of particular modesty—this is a fact.”<sup>38</sup> Beria achieved the zenith of his power as Stalin’s infirmities and memory lapses worsened. A younger and more vigorous Stalin would have eliminated Beria.

## No Moral Qualms

Chekists were required to inflict terror and repression on the enemies of the state without restraint or hesitation. The first Chekists displayed incredible barbarism and cruelty, such as Maizel Kedrov who person-

ally executed almost nine hundred officers and drowned refugees and soldiers by locking them in barges and sinking them.<sup>39</sup> Kedrov's feats of cruelty during the early years of Bolshevik power were matched by his successors in the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD.

Stalin showed considerable acumen in selecting persons to head his state security agencies who did not hesitate to torture, lie, and discard rules of moral behavior. Of the three state security heads (Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria), Beria had already revealed to Stalin his capacity for cruelty at the time of his appointment. During the Great Terror, as party secretary of Georgia, Beria barraged Stalin with execution requests, complaining that he could kill more were it not for crowded prisons.<sup>40</sup> As MVD head Beria set up secret laboratories in which he killed 150 prisoners as guinea pigs for exotic poisons.<sup>41</sup> Under Yezhov, torture was done at night to spare office workers; under Beria it was done round the clock.<sup>42</sup> During the war, Beria bragged to Stalin about his "removal" of almost a quarter-million enemies from the front.<sup>43</sup> Stalin liked Beria because he could be relied upon (like Stalin himself) to kill friend and enemy alike.<sup>44</sup>

Stalin also sensed that Yezhov had a strong streak of sadism. But at the time of Yezhov's appointment to replace Yagoda, some of his colleagues were relieved. His superiors from his earlier Central Asian posting described Yezhov as "a nervous but well-meaning and attentive person, free of arrogance and bureaucratic manner." Another colleague wrote that he "made the impression of a good lad, a good comrade."<sup>45</sup> Nikolai Bukharin considered Yezhov a "normal person, honest and devoted to the party."<sup>46</sup> A short time later, Bukharin faced brutal interrogation and torture from the same Yezhov, who was described as reaching a state of "ecstasy" while beating prisoners, with the blood of his victims staining his shirt.<sup>47</sup> Yezhov was implicated in the poisoning of a rival.<sup>48</sup> As described by a contemporary: "This almost illiterate proletarian did not like intellectuals. He could not conceal his joy when they were placed against the wall."<sup>49</sup>

Stalin appointed Yezhov as the Central Committee's overseer of Yagoda's NKVD. During the early purges of the party elite following Kirov's assassination in December 1934, Yezhov managed expulsions from the party and already by February 1935 had expelled or deported almost twelve thousand. In all, Yezhov oversaw the expulsion of a quarter-million party members and by December 1936 had arrested 15,218 "enemies of the people."<sup>50</sup>

Yagoda's primary responsibilities during his tenure as acting OGPU head and then NKVD chief were deporting and arresting elements hostile to Soviet power. Arrest and deportation, rather than execution, were the punishments of choice at that time. Nevertheless, Yagoda did not hesitate to call for extrajudicial OGPU tribunals with the power to hand down death sentences. During the mass starvation of 1933, Yagoda organized the arrests of peasants caught stealing grain and supervised executions through his OGPU collegium.<sup>51</sup> Yagoda regularly sought permission from the Politburo to execute guilty parties in "wrecking" cases, such as with his November 11, 1929 "question" asking permission "to execute and publish in the press those caught setting fires."<sup>52</sup> On September 9, 1930, Yagoda's OGPU informed the Politburo that it had executed the most evil speculators in silver coins and gold.<sup>53</sup> Nor did Yagoda shy away from the execution of the party elite. In a report to Stalin of May 12, 1935, he requested permission to "shoot all" six officials judged most guilty in the "Kremlin Affair," and he imprisoned or deported another 106.<sup>54</sup> At the November 5, 1929 Politburo meeting, Yagoda requested permission to shoot sixty out of 164 persons arrested as part of the Khopersk affair.<sup>55</sup> The first of Stalin's high-level purge victims, Lev Kamenev, purportedly confessed when Yagoda promised that his oldest son would be spared. Not only Kamenev's oldest son but also his sixteen-year-old younger son was shot.<sup>56</sup> Yezhov promised Yagoda he would be spared, a promise offered in turn by Beria to Yezhov.

Of the three, Yagoda's penchant for cruelty and barbarism may have been the most unreliable. He questioned the evidence prepared for the Shakhty trial against engineers and specialists of the coal industry and argued against proceeding, only to be overruled by Stalin.<sup>57</sup> He also failed the crucial test—failing to fabricate a case out of thin air against Zinoviev and Kamenev after Kirov's murder. Despite Yagoda's ruthlessness, Stalin found him wanting.

### Compromised Backgrounds

One way to ensure the loyalty of state security heads was to "have the goods on them." Compromised subordinates had little choice but to remain loyal if Stalin could at any time reveal the skeletons in their closets.

Stalin gathered compromising information on his fellow Bolsheviks from his first days as general secretary of the Central Committee in the

early 1920s. He purportedly had a central tap on the phone lines of Politburo and Central Committee members and Peoples' Commissars, which gave him access to their most intimate conversations. (The bugging system had been installed by a Czech technician whom Stalin purportedly arrested and executed as a spy.) His two personal assistants (I. P. Tovstukha and Grigory Kanner) conducted "dirty tricks" for their boss. He placed one of them (Tovstukha) in charge of Lenin's papers after Lenin's death to ferret out unfavorable written comments from the sainted Vladimir Il'ich on Stalin's Politburo colleagues.<sup>58</sup>

Compromised associates proved to be of considerable value to Stalin. On a daily basis, they saw former fellow Mensheviks, Cadets, or Social Revolutionaries terrorized as a stark reminder that they could be discredited at any time. Personal "black marks" were less serious than previous membership in a banned party or than service to the Okhrana, but they would later be included in formal charges to intensify the disgrace. Stalin's inner sanctum was full of such compromised associates. Sergei Kirov had belonged to the Cadet Party. Stalin's long-serving finance minister (G. F. Grinko) had worked for a Cadet newspaper, and the Gosplan and heavy industry head (V. I. Mezhlauk) had been a Menshevik, along with the notorious USSR prosecutor, Andrei Vyshinsky.

Yagoda was Jewish, as well as a notorious womanizer and gambler.<sup>59</sup> More seriously, he was purported to have been an agent of the tsarist Okhrana, and rumors had it that Stalin had evidence to this effect in his safe.<sup>60</sup> Yezhov was an alcoholic and bisexual, and was suspected of having poisoned his superior; his death sentence cited, among many other offenses, his personal depravity.<sup>61</sup> Beria had a predilection for underage girls, and Stalin would not allow his teenage daughter to be in his presence without a guard.)<sup>62</sup> Beria's interrogation by USSR prosecutor Rudenko required that he answer to charges of moral decadence, designed to destroy his last shred of dignity.<sup>63</sup>

Q: Do you admit your criminal-moral decadence?

A: Yes, there was some of that. I am guilty in this regard.

Q: Do you admit that in your criminal-moral decadence you were together with women associated with foreign intelligence?

A: Maybe. I do not know.

Q: According to your instructions, Sarkisov and Nadariia kept lists of your lovers. I am showing you 9 such lists in which are mentioned 62 women. Is this a list of your lovers?

A: Most of the women on this list are my lovers.

Q: In addition, Hariliia kept 32 lists with addresses of women. I am showing them to you. Are these also your lovers?

A: Yes, these are also my lovers.

Q: Did you suffer from syphilis?

A: I was sick with syphilis in 1943, it appears. I undertook a course of treatment.<sup>64</sup>

Beria's most serious black mark was the rumor that he had collaborated with British intelligence during their occupation of Baku in the Civil War. According to Khrushchev, an accuser (a Grisha Kaminsky) reported on such rumors that he had heard as chairman of the Baku Soviet in 1920 at a 1938 Central Committee plenum, after which Kaminsky was arrested and disappeared.<sup>65</sup>

### Good Organizers

The task of state security was too important to leave to incompetents, and Stalin's three state security heads were all noted as good administrators. Indeed, an official evaluation of Yagoda prepared in 1927 characterized him as "having rare energy, orderly, dedicated to duty and a good organizer."<sup>66</sup> Yagoda organized the huge infrastructure projects built by his Gulag labor in the early 1930s. His success in completing the Baltic–White Sea Canal won his OGPU and NKVD additional infrastructure assignments. He also oversaw the deportation of millions of peasant families from central regions to Siberia and Kazakhstan between 1930 and 1932, which, although far from smooth, was the first major "mass operation" of the Stalin dictatorship.

A colleague who knew Yezhov well described his organizational work: "After charging him with a task, you did not have to check up on him: he will accomplish the mission. Yezhov has only one, indeed essential shortcoming—he does not know where to stop."<sup>67</sup> Yezhov's management skills were impaired by his rampant alcoholism, which was on display during an inspection trip to Ukraine: "After the meeting and before Yezhov's departure, there was a drunkfest in Uspensky's apartment, with a number of NKVD officials. . . . At this orgy, a number of colleagues were named to leading positions in the NKVD leadership."<sup>68</sup>

Yezhov was only one of many alcoholic top Soviet officials, but apparently, this did not destroy his usefulness. The fact that an order is



sued by Yezhov in July 1937 in faraway Moscow to 65 regions often separated by thousands of miles from Moscow could result in hundreds of thousands of local residents being shot or sent off to concentration camps provides stark evidence of his organizational abilities.

Beria, too, had undeniable organizational abilities, which caused Stalin to place him in charge of key projects, such as the development of the USSR's atomic bomb.<sup>69</sup> Even his enemies recognized Beria's talent; as Khrushchev put it: "Beria was the most dangerous of them all because he was intelligent and had great abilities as an organizer."<sup>70</sup> Beria proudly trumpeted the successful deportation of almost 200,000 Crimean Tatars in a two-day operation in a series of telegrams addressed to Stalin—the final one stating: "Today, May 20, the operation of deportation of Crimean Tatars was completed. Exiled and transported in echelons—180,014. Echelons sent to new places of settlement in Uzbek Republic. In the course of the operation, the following weapons were seized—49 mines, machine guns—622, automatic rifles—724, magazine rifles—9,888, and cartridges—326,887. There were no incidents in the course of the operation."<sup>71</sup>

### The Stalin Factor

Loyalty can also be maintained by the good interpersonal skills of a superior. Stalin, when he wished, he could be a master cajoler, flatterer, charmer, and persuader. In his correspondence with colleagues, Stalin would inquire about their health and send greetings to their wives ("Greetings from Nadia [Stalin's wife] to Zemchuzhina [Molotov's wife whom Stalin later arrested]).<sup>72</sup> He composed witty poems "dedicated to Comrade Kalinin" (head of the Central Executive Committee, whose wife he also imprisoned), and invited colleagues to visit him in Sochi (to Sergo Ordzhonikidze: "It is good that you have decided on a vacation. Come to me along the way. I would be very glad").<sup>73</sup> The personal attention of the supreme leader was a heady experience. When Stalin delivered a toast in honor of an old Chekist (Ostrovsky) the latter "almost died from ecstasy."<sup>74</sup>

As Stalin consolidated his dictatorship, he relied less on praise and more on threats, cunning, and intrigue. He played off one associate against the other; he publicly humiliated his most loyal and closest subordinates such as Molotov, Mikoyan, and Kaganovich, and kept them

perennially off balance. He made sure that they knew that they served at his pleasure and could be removed if they became too powerful or important. Colleagues fell out of favor, were kept on the sidelines, and allowed to return when he wished. Some drew, as Khrushchev would say, "lucky tickets,"<sup>75</sup> and survived. A large number did not. Even his most powerful subordinates knew that their replacements were lurking in the wings.

Within state security, Stalin kept rivals in competing positions. Yezhov as Stalin's Central Committee overseer kept Yagoda in check. Stalin appointed Beria as Yezhov's deputy after Yezhov had attempted to arrest him. Stalin kept Beria in check by appointing S. N. Kruglov interior minister, a person with no apparent ties to Beria. Stalin also fired close Beria MVD associates, replacing them with Beria's opponents.<sup>76</sup>

When security issues arose that were too important for local authorities to handle, such as the removal of powerful regional party or NKVD officials, Stalin deputized his most trusted associates to handle the matter. When Stalin purged regional party bosses in 1937 and 1938, he sent Politburo members, such as Lazar Kaganovich, Nikita Khrushchev, and K. E. Voroshilov, to do the job. His first deputy, Kaganovich, arrived by special train, organized the denunciation of the doomed officials, arrested them on the spot, and moved on with his entourage to his next purge.<sup>77</sup>

Stalin approached the firing of key associates with patience and caution. The removal of a state security chief is not without dangers that a dictator must consider. Even though the state security head may be uncharismatic or lacking in a power base, he still commands special troops, has incriminating information at his disposal, and may wish to put up a fight.

Stalin fired Yagoda and Yezhov with these facts in mind. His first dismissal of a state security head was that of Yagoda, which he did by using cynical flattery. On September 25, 1936, Stalin bluntly informed the Politburo (of which Yagoda was not a member) that Yagoda was to be removed ("Yagoda is clearly not up to the task . . ."). The next day he used the following language to demote him to minister of communications: "Comrade Yagoda: The Ministry of Communications is a very important matter. This is a defense ministry. I do not doubt that you will be able to put it back on its feet. I very much ask you to agree to work in the Ministry of Communications. Without a good minister we feel as if

we are lacking our hands. It is not possible to leave the Ministry of Communications in its current situation." The memo was read [not clear by Stalin or by someone else] by telephone from Sochi on the same day at 9.30 P.M.<sup>78</sup> Stalin's asking Yagoda's "agreement" was a charade. An experienced Stalin bureaucrat like Yagoda probably understood what was going on, but others were left confused about whether this was a promotion or demotion. Being kept on as a minister offered the doomed Yagoda a thin reed of hope (until his arrest) and facilitated the smooth transition of power without incident.

Stalin used the Yagoda firing procedure on numerous occasions. Powerful city or republic party leaders (after the timely discovery of a scandal of some sort) were first demoted to head smaller regions, prior to their arrest. Politburo members, fired from their Politburo positions, were allowed to remain on the Central Committee before their arrest.

In Yezhov's case (like Yagoda's) a competitor was first appointed (Beria). Yezhov was then transferred to another ministerial position. The dispirited Yezhov, having witnessed Yagoda's firing and execution, better understood the handwriting on the wall when Beria was appointed as his deputy. He wrote Stalin: "I survived even the naming of Comrade Beria. I saw in this a lack of confidence in me, but I thought this will pass. I honestly consider him a strong worker. I consider that his appointment is preparation for my release."<sup>79</sup> When Yezhov was similarly demoted (to minister of transportation), he knew his fate was sealed. He appeared at work late and intoxicated and spent his time making paper birds during meetings.<sup>80</sup> His appeals, such as his March 13, 1939 memo: "Comrade Stalin: I plead to speak with you for one minute. Give me this chance,"<sup>81</sup> were dutifully ignored by his beloved Stalin.

Beria was the one state security head who survived Stalin, despite the fact that he built up an independent power base (as a Politburo member and deputy prime minister). Unlike Yezhov, he lacked a personal sense of devotion to Stalin and ridiculed the increasingly infirm dictator behind his back. According to Khrushchev, Stalin in his last few years grew to fear Beria to the point of dismissing all Georgians assigned to guard him by the Georgian Beria. As Khrushchev wrote: "It even seemed to me sometimes that Stalin feared Beria, as I have said, that he would have been glad to get rid of Beria, but didn't know the best way of going about it."<sup>82</sup>

## Segregating Chekist Leaders

Stalin appointed as Chekist leaders individuals unlikely to organize a coalition to unseat him. Generally, he made it difficult for any party leader to organize a conspiracy against him. Indeed, a dictator wishing to prevent associates from conspiring against him must do his best to keep them apart. Stalin forbade Politburo members to meet in private outside of formal sessions—a rule that he himself ignored. After Stalin consolidated power, even casual meetings or hunting trips could be considered as conspiracies against the supreme leader. Stalin took this practice to the extreme, such as his accusation against Old Bolshevik and Central Committee member A. P. Smirnov of plotting “against the party line” in private meetings with two other party officials in his apartment. The transcript of the Politburo meeting in which Stalin accused Smirnov reads as follows:<sup>83</sup>

SMIRNOV: I did not discuss politics with them. I declare one more time that I did not criticize the policy of the party with these comrades. I could not conceivably give even the appearance of criticizing the general party line and to be accused of this is onerous.

STALIN: You can take a negative line, but you must tell the Central Committee about this. When you act against the party and gather together people illegally to destroy the party—this is incorrect. Three witnesses have spoken out against you.<sup>84</sup>

Stalin could only remove Smirnov from the Central Committee for his sins at the time of this exchange in 1932. Smirnov was executed six years later.

Insofar as Stalin knew that treachery could come from within a dictator's inner circle, he would need special guards more loyal than his closest associates and as separated as possible from them.

Stalin kept a strict distance between his top officials and state security. In the early years of Soviet rule, members of the party's policing body, the Central Control Commission, could not serve simultaneously on the Politburo. Despite their power of life or death, neither Dzerzhinsky, Yagoda, nor Yezhov were full members of the Politburo, although Yezhov and Dzerzhinsky were candidate members. Only Beria became a full member of the Politburo. The highest party officials were prosecuted by the party itself, although state security helped out with interrogations. Top party and state officials were not allowed to intervene with

the NKVD even to save their closest relatives—such as Ukraine party chief S. V. Kosior or industry czar Sergo Ordzhonikidze, whose brothers were both arrested by the NKVD.<sup>85</sup> Pleas from the influential minister of justice Nikolai Krylenko for his brother, an engineer in Urals metallurgy arrested by the NKVD, went unheeded.<sup>86</sup>

The heads of state security also tried to keep their republic and regional offices as independent as possible from local influence. Although regional state security officials were part of regional government, they were ordered to retain their independence and stay outside of the local “clan.” As Yezhov warned at a plenum of the NKVD’s Administration of State Security in February 1935: “You are becoming a subordinated body of the regional party committees and are carrying out work not related to counterrevolution. It is fine to be on good terms with the local party. Maybe you’ll be regarded as good fellows but from the Chekist point of view, you are a failure.”<sup>87</sup> Beria, in 1940, again had to warn regional party committees not to use state security officers for purposes other than the battle against state enemies.<sup>88</sup>

### Minorities as a Segregating Factor

Throughout history, dictators have employed foreign bodyguards who, due to their ethnicity, could not take power themselves and would hold themselves apart from the ruling elite. Historical examples include the Varangian Guards of the Byzantine emperors, the papal Swiss Guards, and the Manchukuo Imperial Guards during the last Chinese emperor’s brief reign in Manchuria. During the War of Independence, George Washington himself was guarded by Germans.

The Chekist elite were drawn disproportionately from ethnic ranks—a factor that would have made it more difficult for them to succeed the dictator (although Beria, a Georgian, apparently hoped to succeed Stalin, another Georgian). By placing ethnic minorities in leadership positions, including even heading the Cheka and NKVD, the Soviet leadership, from Lenin to Stalin, lessened the Praetorian Guard problem.

According to Stalin’s secretary, who defected and escaped assassination, there was fear of a too powerful OGPU after Lenin’s death when the USSR was run by a troika of Politburo members, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin. (Both Zinoviev and Kamenev were Jews and Stalin was a Georgian). The troika kept the OGPU in check by having

two Poles (Dzerzhinsky and Menzhinsky) in the top positions. Of the two, Dzerzhinsky was weighed down by his job as head of the Supreme Economic Council and Menzhinsky, who suffered from a disease of the spinal cord, directed the OGPU "half-heartedly." Yagoda was in practical charge, but he "had no weight in the party, was considered to be of little account, and was very aware of his dependence on the party apparatus."<sup>89</sup> Stalin himself was strongly anti-Semitic in an anti-Semitic country and was probably convinced that Yagoda's Jewish background would keep him from having higher ambitions.

Stalin may have concluded that Yezhov's dwarf-like appearance and known bisexuality would help keep him under control. Stalin, despite his own minority status as a Georgian, was convinced that only Russians could hold the most important posts and deliberately chose only Russians, such as Molotov, to head the Soviet state. According to this logic, Beria, a Mingrelian from Western Georgia, could not have ascended to power.

### Material Rewards

State security heads can also be kept in line by material rewards and social adulation. Those of Stalin enjoyed power, privilege and accolades. Fearful officials named factories after Yezhov in the hopes of currying his favor. The NKVD-MVD elite had military titles and wore elegant uniforms. Yagoda was the first to be named General Commissar of State Security—a heady title for one who had begun as a lowly pharmacist. (Yagoda was conveniently placed in the reserves when arrested).<sup>90</sup> Yezhov and Beria were also awarded the General Commissar title. Chekist military titles were distinct from those used in the armed forces. Even administrative staff had such titles as "Colonel of the Administrative Services of State Security," and the highest state body passed detailed decrees on "new uniforms and marks of distinction for the highest, senior, middle, and junior staffs of organs of state security."<sup>91</sup> Yagoda used his position for philandering and was known for his opulent banquets.<sup>92</sup> Beria used the threat of arrest to silence the mother of an underage girl he was later accused of raping.<sup>93</sup> Beria enjoyed his magnificent summer home built on the Georgian coast, and when he was arrested huge sums in cash and jewels were found in his safe.

## STALIN'S "TWO PATHS" FOR CHEKISTS

The Praetorian Guard model suggests that the dictator will be vigilant for signs of wavering of political loyalty and should strike at the first sign of trouble. We have three cases of dismissals and arrests of state security heads—those of Yagoda and Yezhov and the lesser-known case of Viktor Abakumov, the state security minister (as opposed to the minister of the interior) from 1946 to his arrest on 1951. We also have the exception of Beria, who served off and on as state security head from 1938 till his arrest shortly after Stalin's death. In each case, it is important to pinpoint the event or events that triggered Stalin's wrath.

If we look for a general rule, we could say that Stalin could not allow his Praetorian Guard to threaten the political foundation of his system—the “leading role” of the party, which Stalin exercised by personally controlling appointments and by setting the party's “general line” of policy. As general secretary, he was in charge of nomenklatura appointments whereby the most responsible positions were vetted by his Central Committee. If Stalin's Praetorians threatened either his control of appointments or the general party line, they had to be removed.

There was no middle ground for Chekists; they were either on the team or they were not. Stalin's own words of 1951 express this fact of Chekist life succinctly: “Chekists have only two paths—advancement or prison.”<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately for those Chekists who had already perished during the Great Terror, Stalin's “rules of the game” came too late. After this pronouncement, there were no further executions of top Chekist leaders during Stalin's lifetime; Beria, Abakumov, and Merkulov (the latter two ministers of state security) were executed after Stalin's death, although Abakumov was arrested under Stalin.

Stalin used the still-unexplained assassination of Leningrad party boss Sergei Kirov to launch his merciless attack on anyone he considered unfaithful among the party elite. Although there was no substantiating evidence implicating his political enemies—former Trotsky allies Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev and the “Right Deviationists” Nikolai Bukharin, Mikhail Tomskey, and Aleksei Rykov—Stalin pounced on this opportunity. He ordered his NKVD head Yagoda to place the blame on Zinoviev and Kamenev.<sup>95</sup> The uncharacteristically tin-eared Yagoda failed to comprehend Stalin's new “party line” even after Stalin telephoned and ordered him “to beat their faces in!” Even worse, in Janu-

ary 1935 Stalin made a significant editorial change to Yagoda's closed letter to the NKVD, changing Yagoda's "blame counterrevolutionary anti-Soviet organizations" to "blame the terrorist group of Zinoviev."<sup>96</sup> Although Yagoda tried to assure Stalin of his forceful handling of the case in a July 1, 1936 report—"As a consequence of interrogations, we have uncovered new data on the murder of Comrade Kirov and about the role of the so-called Moscow Counterrevolutionary Center"<sup>97</sup>—Stalin remained unimpressed.

Half a year after Stalin informed the Politburo that "Yagoda is clearly not up to the task" and demoted him to minister of communications, the other shoe dropped on March 31, 1937 when Stalin placed the following decree before the Politburo: "In light of the uncovered anti-Soviet and criminal activities of the minister of communications, Yagoda, carried out during his term as NKVD commissar and after his transfer to communications, the Politburo considers his exclusion from the party and the Central Committee and his immediate arrest essential . . ."<sup>98</sup> Yagoda was sentenced to death as a German-Trotskyite spy in the Moscow show trial of March 1938.

Yagoda's "betrayal" was his failure to execute Stalin's party line—namely to physically annihilate Stalin's remaining opponents.

Yezhov's "betrayal" was the fatal mistake of appearing to be more powerful than the party, thereby challenging the party's leading role. In his memoirs, Khrushchev, Moscow party secretary at the time of Yezhov's fall, wrote: "In this period [1938], the party began to lose its authority and was transformed into a subordinate body to the NKVD. Inasmuch as every promotion or transfer of party officials had to be carried out according to directives of the NKVD, the party was wasting its leading role."<sup>99</sup> Indeed Khrushchev's concern was justified: in the course of the Great Terror, turnover of regional party secretaries was rapid as they were arrested or transferred, so that the slower turnover of regional NKVD officials made them more powerful than the party.<sup>100</sup> Yezhov also may have crossed the line between gathering information on party officials and "spying" on the party, as was reflected in his recruitment of party officials for work in the NKVD, a practice that was halted by Beria in December 1938.<sup>101</sup>

Ironically, Yezhov's greatest sin was his faithful execution of Stalin's Great Terror, which destroyed not only the regional party elite but also hundreds of thousands of ordinary people. In November 1938, Stalin



concluded that he needed a scapegoat, and Yezhov was perfect for the role.

Stalin's motivations for firing Yezhov can be seen in his actions. After Yezhov's removal, Stalin moved to reassert party authority. On November 14, 1938, he ordered regional party committees to "prepare lists of all responsible workers in local bodies of the NKVD and to prepare a file for each of them no later than December 5, 1938 and to prepare a careful review of each of them. and to approve for work in the NKVD honest proven Bolsheviks, devoted to our party. The party secretary is obliged to get acquainted with each proposed candidate."<sup>102</sup> The reassertion of party control was not seamless. Stalin's overseer of the process, Georgy Malenkov, received reports from party emissaries about NKVD resistance and foot-dragging. In Amur, the local NKVD chief "delayed submitting lists to the party committee and complicated their work from the very beginning."<sup>103</sup> There were disputes with the local NKVD in the Jewish Autonomous Republic, and one party emissary was threatened by a powerful NKVD chieftain (Gorbach), who warned that he would expose his deficient work during the Civil War.<sup>104</sup>

Yagoda and Yezhov were not the only state security heads removed. Thirteen years after Yezhov's fall, in 1951, Stalin arranged to have the minister of state security, Viktor Abakumov, denounced (by another state security official, Mikhail Riumin) as "a dangerous person, especially given his sensitive position in the Ministry of State Security, who has staffed the most important positions, in particular in the Investigations Division in especially important cases, with persons who owe their careers to him and willingly carry out anything that Comrade Abakumov wishes."<sup>105</sup> Abakumov's apparent sin was to accumulate too much information for Stalin's comfort. He was arrested in July 1951 and executed in December 1954 by Stalin's successors.

Beria survived the Stalin years despite having the blood of hundreds of thousands on his hands. Beria quickly moved to replace Yezhov's deputies with his own loyalists in late 1938 and 1939 and used the NKVD to vet high-level appointments. As noted by the hostile Khrushchev: "No one in leadership positions could be promoted except with Beria's prior consent."<sup>106</sup> Beria's survival under Stalin may also have been due to the fact that the most sensitive Chekist functions were transferred to a new ministry of state security (NKGB) in 1943 (headed by a Beria loyalist), and Beria himself left his position as MVD head at the

end of 1945 to become the deputy prime minister. In his other positions, however, Beria was never far from state security matters.

The Praetorian Guard problem applies not only to a single dictator, but also to a collective dictatorship, such as was formed after Stalin's death—a point that the otherwise savvy Beria overlooked.

On the day of Stalin's death, Beria arranged to be appointed both deputy prime minister and head of a rejuvenated MVD that again managed state security functions. Feeling secure now that Stalin was gone, he made the fatal mistake of challenging the party's leading role. Beria made his own appointments, submitting them for pro forma approval by the party.<sup>107</sup> In fact, the most pressing charge against Beria was that he as MVD minister named his own people to positions and even dismissed party officials without going through proper channels.<sup>108</sup> Beria admitted to "intervening in an area where I did not belong," such as his "improper" removal of officials (Strokach, Patolichev)—a matter that "should have been dealt with in another venue [the party]."<sup>109</sup>

The plenum of the Central Committee of July 2–7, 1953 decided the fate of Beria. Nikita Khrushchev played the role of chief prosecutor.<sup>110</sup> Twenty-four top party leaders (including Stalin Politburo members Molotov, Bulganin, Kaganov, and Mikoyan) spoke against Beria in an overwhelming display of solidarity. Khrushchev's indictment of Beria included charges that he was a "great intriguer" who knew how to turn Stalin against other comrades, that his ministry had failed to uncover any real plots, that he was a dangerous provocateur who "threw poisonous comments against Malenkov and Molotov" and who "considered us puppets in his hands."<sup>111</sup> Khrushchev's main charge was that "Beria was not a Communist but a careerist and provocateur" striving to "free the MVD from any kind of party control to carry out arbitrary actions." It was left to the most senior Politburo member, Molotov, to charge that Beria was aiming "to place the MVD above the state and party . . . so that he has the real power in his own hands."<sup>112</sup>

Beria's prosecutors veiled their attack on Beria as a response to a danger to the party. In fact, their main concern was for their own safety. They had drawn "lucky tickets" and had survived Stalin. They did not want to experience another lottery where their lives were at stake.

Beria's case was turned over to the Supreme Court with the charges of "betrayal of the Fatherland, the organization of anti-Soviet plots, the carrying out of terrorist acts, active struggle against the working class

and the revolutionary movement of the working class, as evidenced by his secret agent position in espionage organs . . . in the period of the Civil War.”<sup>113</sup> Beria along with six other MVD colleagues were condemned to the “highest measure of punishment.”<sup>114</sup> He was executed on December 23, 1953,<sup>115</sup> and his closest relatives were sent into exile.

## CONCLUSIONS

The state security system was established well before Stalin, and it lived on after him until the end of the Soviet regime. But it was Stalin who perfected its working arrangements and employed it in extreme ways probably not envisioned by the Bolshevik founding fathers.

Stalin's solution of the Praetorian Guard problem was successful in the sense that, throughout his rule, there was no serious attempt on his life. Although his regime would not have withstood a defeat in World War II or the rejection of collectivization by the Soviet countryside, his overthrow in these circumstances would have been the consequence of policy failures, not of betrayal by the state security forces. Stalin fired and executed two heads of state security (Yagoda and Yezhov) and purged their loyalists with remarkably little resistance, even though they commanded forces powerful enough to deport millions of peasants and to kill or imprison more than a million citizens in less than two years.

Stalin's Praetorians and their leaders were, by conventional standards, a sorry lot. They were highly compromised by current and past transgressions; they were poorly educated; they were followers not leaders; and they lacked any independent power base. In other societies, they may not have been welcome in polite company.

Stalin's selection of state security heads offers one of the simplest tests and illustrations of the rationality assumption. A democracy would be loath to place such persons, whom the general public would regard as abhorrent if their true characteristics were known, in such offices. Yet a dictator with Stalin's objectives could not have made better choices. In fact, his selections can be readily explained via the simple rational choice model presented at the beginning of this chapter. His appointees did not mind having blood on their hands; they could not attract followers. They were nobodies who became somebodies only because of Stalin. Their flaws made them dependent upon their patron, and (with the exception of Beria) they were not terribly bright.

The fact that they were removed and the timing of their removal also seems consistent with a rational choice model. At the first sign of unreliability (Yagoda's hesitation and Yezhov's excessive power over appointments) they were brutally wiped out, as the model predicts. Ultimately, all heads of state security under Stalin made one fatal mistake that cost them their lives; yet each mistake was different. Yagoda was killed for not killing Stalin's political rivals quickly enough; Yezhov was executed for thinking that he was as powerful as the party, and a scapegoat for the party purge was needed. The wily Beria survived Stalin but underestimated his fellow survivors.

The sorry collection of characters who headed Stalin's state security were not selected by chance. They possessed the very traits that Stalin was seeking. They provided Stalin what he most wanted—security for himself and his regime—and served as scapegoats when he needed someone to blame.

Did Stalin's state security heads fit Hayek's description of "docile, gullible, with no convictions of their own but prepared to accept the values of others"? Yagoda and Yezhov indeed fit. It would be hard to imagine any two high Soviet officials less likely to organize a plot against the supreme leader.

Beria was less of a mediocrity, and he was ambitious, as was shown by his actions after Stalin's death. He lacked an independent power base. His main source of power was Stalin's support which he won largely by hard work, cruelty, and strong organizational abilities. Beria was also strongly compromised by his past and knew that Stalin could destroy him, but as Stalin grew more infirm, Beria realized that the dictator would not be able to remove him.

Yezhov clearly met Hayek's description of gullible. Stalin made sure that he received the highest awards, such as the Lenin Prize, and appointed him to the rank of general. According to one historian Stalin's influence on Yezhov was "total, unlimited, and even hypnotic."<sup>116</sup> On the day of his trial, Yezhov requested the military collegium to "tell Stalin that I shall die with his name on my lips," and just hours before his execution he naively declared to the prosecutor: "I want to appeal for pardon. Perhaps Comrade Stalin will do that."<sup>117</sup>

## 2 Ranks of the Chekist Elite

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER examined the selection of Chekist heads from Lenin through Stalin's successors (who decided not to "hire" Beria). Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria were clearly an unusual cast of characters. They were poorly educated for the most part. They lacked charm; they had deep personal flaws that made them vulnerable. Their most distinguishing feature was loyalty to Stalin, actual or feigned.

The Soviet dictatorship was a nested dictatorship,<sup>1</sup> meaning one in which the supreme dictator is the "dictator" to a number of subordinates. Each of these subordinates is a dictator to his more numerous subordinates, and these subordinates are dictators to their subordinates. In this nested system, every subordinate has his own dictator and every dictator has his subordinates, except at the bottom rung.

This notion of nested dictatorship may be fairly obvious, but it has operational significance. It suggests that each lower-level dictator will emulate the dictator next up the ladder. Hence, we would expect to see Stalin's Chekist appointment practices followed by his immediate subordinates and by their immediate subordinates and so on down the administrative hierarchy. This greatly simplifies the analysis of a hierarchy because it suggests that if one understands the behavior of the top figure, the actions of others lower down will be predictable. If the supreme dictator is maximizing power subject to a loyalty constraint, so are his sub-

ordinates and their subordinates. Even if we are unable to observe the behavior of the dictator directly, we can perhaps infer it from that of his subordinates.

We examine the top-echelon leaders of the Cheka-OGPU-NKVD-MVD to compare them with the state security heads described in the previous chapter, and we confirm that the notion of a nested dictatorship applies to the state security hierarchy as it has been previously shown to apply to the economic hierarchy.<sup>2</sup>

### COMPROMISED HIERARCHS: CLASS ORIGINS AND NATIONALITY

Stalin's practice of employing compromised top-echelon state security leaders filtered down through the NKVD hierarchy. As an example, a Moscow suburb NKVD administration actively recruited flawed subordinates. One officer was hired despite his former superior's statement that his departure will "make the air cleaner here." Another official, confronted with compromising material that he was the son of a kulak and had participated in anti-Bolshevik demonstrations, concluded that "there is nothing left for me to do but to commit suicide." To his surprise, he was hired on the spot by the local NKVD head, who stated "there is nothing special about this file. He is 'our' person. He should be sent to a more important region." Another state security official, who had killed a militia officer in a drunken fit, was recruited as a paid "resident" in a regional department.<sup>3</sup>

Yezhov's appointment letter of an associate (V. S. Zhukovsky) to head the Department of Operational Technology of the State Security Administration noted: "There are documents in the special archive of the Party Control Commission," meaning that the appointment was being advanced despite compromising materials.<sup>4</sup> With Zhukovsky's arrest in September 1938 (two months before Yezhov), his file consisted of eight denunciations, two anonymous, one sent directly to Stalin.<sup>5</sup> He was sentenced to death on January 14, 1940.<sup>6</sup>

Supposedly, an ideal Chekist leader would have been drawn from the working class and would have been a Russian or Ukrainian by nationality. He would also be a dedicated party member with an unblemished record. The personnel records of the top-echelon NKVD leaders show something quite different.

Table 2.1. Social Origins of Top NKVD Leaders, 1934–1940<sup>a</sup>

	1934 <i>Yagoda</i>	1937 <i>Yezhov</i>	1940 <i>Beria</i>
Worker	24.0	23.9	36.6
Peasant	17.7	21.2	45.4
Employee	25.0	21.2	7.0
Commercial, professional, other	28.1	23.0	5.2

Source: Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, p. 494.

<sup>a</sup>Figures are percentages.

Table 2.1 shows that (until Beria) only a quarter of top OGPU and NKVD leaders were drawn from the working class, leaving three-quarters from “less desirable” classes, such as potentially unreliable peasants, employees, and the commercial class. By the time of Beria’s tenure, more than 80 percent came from worker and peasant backgrounds—the beneficiaries of education and advancement policies of the 1930s that promoted the proletarian class. But under both Yezhov and Yagoda, one-quarter of their top subordinates came from commercial backgrounds—social origins closely linked with supporters of the old regime.

Indeed one of Yezhov’s few “positive” characteristics was that he had been a worker in Petrograd at the time of the Revolution. Others had less “positive” social origins. The father of Matvei Berman, who rose to become a deputy minister of the NKVD, had owned a brick factory and Berman had graduated from a commercial college. Abram Buzdes’s father had taught in a Jewish school. The father of Iakov Deich, who went on to head the Azov-Black Sea NKVD, had been an employee of a commercial firm. The father of V. N. Merkulov, who rose to become minister of state security, had been a captain in the tsarist army.<sup>7</sup>

If top NKVD leaders had been drawn randomly from the population, three-quarters would have been Russians and Ukrainians. There would have been virtually no Jews, Poles, Latvians, or Georgians. In fact, under Yagoda and Yezhov, Russians and Ukrainians were grossly underrepresented, and Jews, Latvians, and Poles were grossly overrepresented in the top echelons of the NKVD leadership. Under both, the number of top Jewish leaders roughly equaled the number of Russians. Under Yagoda in 1934, minorities (Jews, Poles, Latvians, and Georgians) accounted for more than half of the NKVD top leadership.

Table 2.2 Nationality of Top NKVD Leaders, 1934–1940<sup>a</sup>

	1934 <i>Yagoda</i> (n = 96)	1937 <i>Yezhov</i> (n = 111)	1940 <i>Beria</i> (n = 166)
Russian (58.1)	31.3	33.6	64.5
Jewish (1.7)	38.5	31.9	3.5
Ukrainian (16.3)	5.2	4.4	16.9
German (7.1)	2.1	1.7	0.0
Latvian (0.4)	7.3	6.2	0.0
Polish (0.4)	4.2	3.5	0.0
Georgian (1.2)	3.1	3.5	6.6

Sources: First column, Iu. A. Poliakov et al., eds., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia, 1937 goda: Obshchie itogi* (Moscow: Rossphen, 2007), pp. 86–87. Otherwise: Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, p. 495.

<sup>a</sup>Figures are percentages: in first column, of total 1937 population; otherwise, of total top leadership.

Stalin did not initiate the practice of hiring ethnic minorities. Minorities had been overrepresented in top leadership positions from the founding days of the Cheka. Dzerzhinsky was a Pole who spoke Russian with a strong accent. In September 1918, the 113 Russians among the Cheka's central officials accounted for only 30 percent of Cheka head-quarter staffing, and the other 70 percent belonged to minorities. Lower field-level jobs went to Russians, and in May 1924, 1,670 Russians accounted for 70 percent of OGPU Chekists at this level, while Jews, Latvians, and Poles accounted for 21 percent.<sup>8</sup> The Russian and Ukrainian Chekists in the field received their orders from Jews, Latvians, Poles, and underrepresented Russians and Ukrainians in Moscow.

In the early years of Bolshevik power, the national origins of leaders was not a matter of great import, although there was sensitivity to the charge that the Bolshevik Party was dominated by Jews. Trotsky purportedly did not accept the Cheka leadership so that foreign enemies could not make this accusation.<sup>9</sup> Stalin's principal Politburo rivals in the mid-1920s—Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev—were Jews. The first two ministers of the OGPU were Poles.

Table 2.2 shows that in Yagoda's NKVD 14 percent of his top leaders were Poles, Latvians, and Germans, and 39 were Jews. In Yezhov's NKVD, the share of non-Soviet nationalities shrank slightly to 11 percent, and the percentage of Jews diminished slightly. These figures are



Table 2.3. Membership of Top NKVD Leaders in Banned Parties, 1934–1940<sup>a</sup>

	1934 Yagoda (n = 106)	1937 Yezhov (n = 113)	1940 Beria (n = 172)
SRs, Social Democrats, Anarchists	19.8	10.7	0
Bund, Zionists	8.3	5.3	0
Other parties	3.2	6.5	1.0
Total	31.3	22.5	1.0

Source: Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, p. 499.

<sup>a</sup>Figures are percentages.

quite high because the share of “suspect” nationalities in the USSR population (as of 1937) was only 8 percent, and share of Jews was less than 2 percent.

The Great Terror “corrected” these nationality imbalances. By the time of Beria’s rule, top Jewish leaders had shrunk to a handful, and Latvians, Germans, and Poles had been purged entirely. The terror had rendered the NKVD an organization run 90 percent by Russians, Ukrainians, and Georgians. Only the Georgians, presumably through Stalin’s and Beria’s influence, consistently retained much higher shares in top-echelon NKVD leadership positions than their miniscule share of population.

Table 2.3 shows that many top leaders of the NKVD, from its formation in July 1934 through Beria’s assumption of power in late 1938, had been associated with rival political parties or organizations (Social Revolutionaries, anarchists, Bundists, the Whites, Okhrana, Mussavat). The recent compilers of these statistics have the following to say: “The percent of leading Chekists participating in their younger years in socialist and even anti-Leninist parties and the White movement was extraordinarily high in 1934. It is clear that they should have been the first candidates for arrest in the course of a purge of the NKVD. In the period of Yezhov some of these people successfully hid their past. Some were close to Yezhov who valued them.”<sup>10</sup> It is quite possible that these authors misinterpret these statistics. They may have been recruited because they were compromised!

Tables 2.1 through 2.3 show the striking parallels between Stalin’s recruitment of state security heads and the recruitment of their top subordinates. The subordinate figures add weight to the argument that the

dictator deliberately recruited persons with black marks in their “characteristics.” Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria are only three persons and their selection could have been by chance. Their subordinates represent much larger numbers for which percentages can be calculated and compared with the overall populations from which they are drawn. These combinations could not be the result of chance.

#### CHEKISTS: NOT THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST

We are accustomed to the image of the urbane, educated officer of the Soviet state security administration—as exemplified by former KGB head Yury Andropov or by former KGB officer Vladimir Putin. A primary responsibility of Chekist leaders was gathering, processing, and acting upon information—activities that presumably require high levels of education and training. In fact, in the post-Stalin era, the stereotype was that of a rather dull party leadership supported by a well-trained and well-educated KGB.

The original Bolshevik Party was made up of a small number of secretive revolutionaries, who spent their formative years underground. Few had much formal education or administrative experience. They took over a country populated primarily by illiterate peasants. They regarded the relatively small class of professionals—doctors, engineers, accountants, banking specialists—with deep suspicion. The first massive repression campaign was in fact directed against “specialists” in 1928 and 1929. Prior to that, university professors were fired; medical conferences were monitored; and the professional staff of the State Planning Commission was replaced by political hacks who celebrated the unrealistic plans of the party leadership.

After two decades of promotion of technical and higher education, there was still a huge mismatch between high-level jobs and educated people. As of 1937, the “*intelligentsia*” of administrators, managers, bureaucrats, academicians, party functionaries, doctors, and teachers numbered 9.6 million.<sup>11</sup> There were few already educated or trained people to fill these positions. They had to be produced by Soviet education.

The early Chekist ministers themselves had limited education. The first Cheka minister, Dzerzhinsky, had a high-school education, and his successors, Yagoda (despite some limited training in pharmacy) and

Table 2.4. Education of Top NKVD Leaders, 1934–1940<sup>a</sup>

	1934 Yagoda (n = 96)	1937 Yezhov (n = 111)	1940 Beria (n = 172)
Illiterate (18.9)	0	0	0
Primary, excluding illiterates (67.9)	40.6	36.3	18.0
Middle, complete or incomplete (9.6)	41.7	42.5	39.5
Some higher or above (3.5)	15.6	11.5	37.8

Sources: First column, Iu. A. Poliakov et al., eds., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia, 1937 goda*, pp. 114–115; otherwise, Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, p. 496.

<sup>a</sup>Figures are percentages: in first column, of total 1937 adult male population; otherwise, of total top leadership.

Yezhov, had only an elementary education. Beria was the first to have higher education, having attended a polytechnic institute in Baku. These relatively poorly educated state security ministers did not hire better-trained subordinates. Of Yezhov's five deputies in 1937, only one had some higher education (V. D. Feldman).<sup>12</sup> Of Beria's four deputies in 1940, also only one (V. N. Merkulov) had a higher education.

Table 2.4 summarizes the educational background of the hundred or so top leaders of the NKVD. It shows clearly that they had relatively limited formal education through the end of the Great Terror. Under Yagoda and Yezhov, almost 80 percent had only primary or secondary education. Only under Beria did the share with higher education increase. Under Yezhov in 1937, 11.5 percent of top NKVD leaders had some higher education. Under Beria, in 1940, the percent soared to 37.8 percent.

Although the educational attainments of top-echelon state security leaders may appear modest to modern observers, it should be noted that they were better-educated than the adult male population from which they were largely drawn (ages 30–64 in 1937), more than 70 percent of which had only a primary education, if they were literate at all.<sup>13</sup> However, a dictator would not draw his leaders from the general population but from its elite. So a more appropriate question is whether the leaders of state security were deliberately drawn from the ranks of the less educated.

Although the numbers of adult males with higher and specialized ed-

ucation were low, there were indeed highly trained people for high-priority jobs. Presumably state security had one of the highest priorities, and there were almost three-quarters of a million trained specialists from whom to choose.<sup>14</sup> In 1939, 11,498 experts in the *nomenklatura* of Soviet and economic organizations had higher education and of these almost half were recent graduates.<sup>15</sup> The justice ministry had even better-educated personnel in its ranks.<sup>16</sup> The fact that the economic and justice administrations could attract highly educated leaders suggests that the choice of less-educated NKVD leaders was deliberate. In 1933, the OGPU employed slightly more than 20,000 Chekist operational workers (see below, Table 3.1). If Stalin had so wished, there were more than enough educated persons to fill these positions.

Dzerzhinsky, Yagoda, and Yezhov may have avoided more highly educated subordinates for fear of being outshone. There were, of course, reasons that the dictator himself might have preferred educated Chekists. After all, they were in the information business, and the gathering and processing of information requires intellect. Stalin would indeed have needed accurate information about foreign foes and their military forces. In fact, the heads of the state security Foreign Department (M. A. Trilisser, A. Kh. Artuzov, P. M. Fitin, V. G. Dekazov, A. A. Slutsky, and S. A. Messing) had higher educational attainments or had at least been educated in classical gymnasiums.<sup>17</sup> In professions where higher intellectual quantities were needed, persons possessing them could be found.

But there were also reasons for Stalin to want less-educated leaders for state security. The smarter the Chekist leader, the more able he might be to organize a coalition against the dictator. Also, the dictator may have assumed that higher education was not an important trait, compared to loyalty, brutality, and obedience. The intelligence reports sent to Stalin from the countryside and city were mind-numbingly detailed reports on events—strikes, anti-Soviet conversations, gossip, illegal gatherings, and the like.<sup>18</sup> They were devoid of analysis. Stalin perhaps wanted facts that he and his closest associates could examine.

## PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND IDEOLOGY

Old Bolsheviks, those who joined the party before the October Revolution, must have had strong ideological convictions. They had to toil

Table 2.5. Length of Party Membership of Top NKVD Leaders. 1934–1940<sup>a</sup>

	1934 Yagoda (n = 96)	1937 Yezhov (n = 113)	1940 Beria (n = 172)
Joined party 1817 or earlier	40.6	33.6	1.7
1918–1924	56.3	44.5	20.3
1925–1937	1.0	6.2	73.2
No information	2.1	10.6	4.7

Source: Skorkin and Petrov, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, p. 498.

<sup>a</sup>Figures are percentages.

underground, risking imprisonment and deportation. The party was poorly financed, and they were poorly paid if at all. Most spent years in prison or exile. Their chances of success appeared limited.

Table 2.5 shows that one-third to 40 percent of Yagoda's and Yezhov's top NKVD leadership had joined the party by 1917 or earlier. By the time Beria assumed leadership of the NKVD, the Old Bolsheviks had been exterminated in the course of the Great Terror and its aftermath. Under Beria, only a handful of such veterans remained. Three-quarters of Beria's top NKVD leaders were latecomers who had joined the party in 1925 or later. Just as the Great Terror gave rise to a new generation of state and party leaders, it created new, younger NKVD leaders, who replaced those whom Stalin liquidated in 1937, 1938, and 1939.

The transition from Old Bolsheviks to party newcomers would have affected the ideology and commitment of the NKVD leadership. At the top, the three state security heads were not notably ideological. Although Yezhov may have been motivated by ideology (but more by devotion to Stalin than anything else), there are few hints that Yagoda and Beria were true believers. True, Beria joined the party in March 1917. Prior to that he had served as treasurer of a Marxist organization at his school. Yagoda joined the party in 1907 but did not distinguish himself in party work. Their official correspondence concerning Chekist matters is devoid of ideological considerations but sticks instead to matter-of-fact business issues.

The Old Bolsheviks were different. Feliks Dzerzhinsky provided the prototype Chekist image. His devotion to the Revolution was unwavering; he applied brutal methods, and he literally worked himself to death despite doctor's orders to "moderate his passion for work." According

to one account, "Vladimir Il'ich [Lenin], learning that Dzerzhinsky was working himself to the point of physical collapse, ordered Dzerzhinsky to take two weeks vacation . . . on a state farm near Moscow where there was good food and no telephone."<sup>19</sup> Such warnings, even from Lenin himself, went unheeded, and Dzerzhinsky's death was announced in OGPU Order No. 153 on July 29, 1926: "Dear Comrades: Dzerzhinsky has died. We no longer have in our ranks our irreplaceable, unique chairman of the Cheka-OGPU. We no longer have in our ranks the first Chekist, our friend-comrade, our teacher-leader."<sup>20</sup> Dzerzhinsky's victims, such as philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, characterized him as a "fanatic" whose religion was Bolshevism.<sup>21</sup> It was the Dzerzhinsky image that inspired heroic novels and films about dashing Chekists, battling the evil enemies of Soviet power. It was in the spirit of Dzerzhinsky that Yezhov declared that "the most honored title is that of a Chekist,"<sup>22</sup> and that "the opportunity to work in the organs of the NKVD represents the highest reward of the party and the state."<sup>23</sup> "Honored Chekist" or "Esteemed Worker of the NKVD" were among the most prestigious of awards.

Efim Evdokimov, who served as a key OGPU officer during the Civil War and dekulakization, offers a truer image of the Old Chekist than the Dzerzhinsky immortalized by Soviet propaganda. Evdokimov, a former member of the Social Revolutionary Party, fought in the October Revolution and the Civil War. He headed the OGPU's Secret Operational Department. "Evdokimov was a terrorist who became a communist out of expediency." There was in him "a ruthless lack of humanity" that "commanded the respect of the fanatical Chekists and party functionaries that he trained and inspired."<sup>24</sup> Along with Yagoda, whom he regarded as too soft, he worked out the operational plans for kulak deportations and the early operational orders were signed by him. But Evdokimov was no armchair Chekist issuing orders from Moscow. When the OGPU administrator of the Northern Caucasus region failed to "take repression to its limit," Evdokimov was transferred in to take his place. Within a short time, 13,803 people had been arrested and 285 shot.<sup>25</sup> Evdokimov's brutality caught Stalin's eye, as did Beria during the Great Terror. It was Stalin who proposed to the OGPU: "wouldn't it be useful to make him a member of the OGPU collegium."<sup>26</sup> Evdokimov personally directed collectivization and dekulakization in the North Caucasus and Central Asia in 1931 and 1932. In 1934, he was

appointed to serve as the first secretary of the Northern Caucasus, Azov-Black Sea, and Rostov party committees, and he disappeared from Chekist work. Evdokimov's remarks at the March 3, 1937 Central Committee plenum show his disdain for Yagoda's "soft" NKVD, which was "isolated from the working class" and lacked belief in the danger of wrecking, and whose leaders (Yagoda) need to be brought to their "legal responsibility."<sup>27</sup>

In most other societies, Evdokimov would have been the leader of a gang of thugs, but as a top Chekist official he could practice his brutality and cruelty under state sanction. Evdokimov applied for and got postings in regions of conflict. Wherever he was in charge, the number of executions rose. Evdokimov pioneered many of the procedures that would be used in the Great Terror—torture and fabrications of anti-Soviet plots. It was Evdokimov's people who formed the core of Yezhov's mass operations team of 1937–1938. In the tug-of-war for more or less repression, Evdomikov was a steady advocate of terror.

After his arrest in 1938, Evdokimov held out for a record seven months of torture and interrogation before confessing. After all, he had written the book on this subject. At his judicial proceeding, he stubbornly retracted his confession, stating that that it had been forced by torture. Evdokimov was sentenced to death by a military tribunal on February 2, 1940. His wife and twenty-year-old son had been executed a week earlier.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to Evdokimov, the terrified Yezhov confessed immediately when confronted with two of the NKVD's most notorious interrogators.

Whereas the Chekists who served with Dzerzhinsky may have had strong ideological convictions, Yezhov's NKVD was populated at the top by Evdokimov's graduates and by opportunists in lower ranks, many chosen randomly by Yezhov. One new recruit for the Ivanovo branch was a wet-behind-the-ears former physical education instructor, who became a sadistic torturer. An incompetent "foxtrotter" (Abakumov), whose meteoric rise under Yezhov eventually brought him to head the state security administration, rendezvoused in NKVD safe houses with young women, whom he conveniently co-opted to sign denunciations of people they had never met.<sup>29</sup> NKVD officers arrested persons with prime Moscow apartments for their own use. Yezhov's NKVD, to use the words of a disenchanted older Chekist, was populated by "young falsifiers and fabricators subordinated only to Yezhov and to Stalin."<sup>30</sup>

It was the Evdokimovs who did the unglamorous Chekist work. Already under Lenin, they had persecuted intellectuals and specialists, organizing elderly scientists, philosophers, and authors into labor brigades. Under Yagoda, they deported peasant families under horrific conditions in which tens of thousands of men, women, and children died. Under Yezhov they beat and terrorized to force confessions. They also managed youth colonies and detention centers for children left parentless by Chekist operations. The real-life Chekists were far from exemplary citizens. They were poorly educated; many had criminal backgrounds; and they engaged in graft and corruption, much like their Gestapo counterparts.

Unlike the Nazi regime, which assigned enlisted men to firing squads, the NKVD required that its officers carry out executions themselves. The condemned were brought to the place of execution in closed vans, many rendered semiconscious by the gas fumes.<sup>31</sup> A number of Chekist leaders prided themselves on doing their own shooting. Even regional party secretaries got into the act. The new party secretary of Ivanovo used his own service revolver to dispatch condemned victims.<sup>32</sup> More commonly, Chekist officers did their shooting inebriated. An ample supply of vodka was on hand on nights of mass executions.

A Chekist officer assigned to a town near Novosibirsk in 1937 recounted in chilling detail how he conducted executions.

"I just today, March 10, received permission for the execution of 157 persons. We dug four pits. It was necessary to use explosives because of the permafrost. I took six persons for the operation. I'll carry out the sentences myself. I can't and won't trust others. Because of weather conditions, I could transport the victims only in small sleighs, and I took six sleighs. We will do the shooting ourselves, we'll transport them ourselves in seven or eight trips. It takes too much time, but I am not going to trust more people." Later he wrote: "So that the typists don't read this, I am writing you myself. The operation decided upon by the troika was carried out only on 115 persons, because the pits could not handle more than 100 bodies. The operation was carried out with enormous difficulty. When I am there I can personally report in detail. So far everything is quiet and the prison does not even know."<sup>33</sup>

At first glance, this report appears from a Chekist who was dedicated to the cause. In reality, it was from a minor Chekist-operational worker, in charge of repression in a small town during the height of the Great



Terror. The self-serving account of devotion to duty concealed his own nervousness that any mistake on his part could turn him from repressor to victim.

## REWARDING THE CHEKIST ELITE

A dictator can secure the loyalty of an elite by offering economic rents, where rents are defined as goods, services, and other privileges provided below their value or even free of charge. Chekist leaders received pay well in excess of what they could earn elsewhere, opulent housing, and privileges not enjoyed by others, such as free vacations or chauffeur-driven cars.

Stalin was no fan of “leveling”—equal pay under socialism. The rationing system of the early 1930s, which Stalin personally devised, used the principle: “He who does not work on industrialization will not eat.”<sup>34</sup> Five thousand members of the party, state, and cultural elite received the generous “Kremlin ration,” lived in state dachas, and were driven in chauffeured automobiles. Stalin understood how to use rents to motivate supporters, and he applied them liberally to his Chekist elite.

Stalin personally made sure that his Chekist elite was exceptionally well paid. One day after the terror decree of July 30, 1937, Stalin assigned the NKVD a supplemental budget of 75 million rubles; Yezhov used much of this money to raise salaries of operational workers.<sup>35</sup> The Politburo itself set the salaries of those state security employees working in locations of intense repressive activity, such as in its decree of July 17: “To Permit the NKVD to Raise from July 1, 1937 the Pay Scales of Workers of the GUGB [Main Administration of State Security] Operating in Ukraine, Moscow and Leningrad Provinces in the Amounts Shown in the Attached List.”<sup>36</sup> Chekists assigned to these areas were soon to be ordered to execute 17,000 victims in the first round of the Great Terror. By October 17, 1937, Ukrainian Chekists alone had the assignment of executing 28,000.<sup>37</sup> Compensation schedules for specific NKVD employees were set by special government decrees, which specifically forbade their publication to conceal their generosity from the public.<sup>38</sup>

In September 1946, at a time when the average worker earned some 475 rubles per month,<sup>39</sup> an MVD department head earned an astro-

nomical 4,200 rubles, not counting seniority supplements ranging from 5 to 40 percent.<sup>40</sup> The top NKVD brass received fourteen times the average worker's salary—an unheard of differential for that time.<sup>41</sup> High salaries were not awarded lightly. Yezhov was at times a penny-pincher, who saved NKVD funds by keeping two thousand party, communist youth, and specialist workers, newly transferred to the NKVD's State Security Administration, at the lower salaries of their previous jobs.<sup>42</sup>

In Stalin's Russia, money income alone did not determine living standards. The "Kremlin ration" meant access to the best goods, apartments, vacations, medicine, and even more exotic benefits. Special employees of the NKVD had their own stores, access to which was regulated by the NKVD minister (Beria) and the prime minister (Molotov).<sup>43</sup> Yagoda was known for luxurious living and elaborate entertaining, and some of his events were even attended by Stalin.<sup>44</sup> One lackluster officer in a local NKVD administration was known as the "Great Blatmeister [master of *blat*—the fix]," whose job "was to take care of the personal and family affairs of my bosses," including having their underwear mended.<sup>45</sup>

The son of an upper-level NKVD official remembers: "With the transfer to the Lubianka [NKVD Moscow headquarters], our material conditions improved dramatically. In that time, even a secondary official of the 'organs' could live better than a highly placed party official. Earlier we shared in the summer a modest dacha with three other families. Now our father received a magnificent two-story dacha with all comforts, inlaid furniture, crystal tableware, billiard table, tennis court, and garage."<sup>46</sup>

Chekists used "self-supply" to supplement their already substantial material rewards. Local NKVD administration offices were filled with fruits, vegetables, and furniture "gifted" to them by intimidated collective farm and enterprise managers. NKVD officers avoided payment for automobile or motorcycle purchases by arresting the owners. Money confiscated from detainees was not registered in protocols. Arrestees were routinely interrogated about their living conditions, and the better apartments were confiscated to the inventory of the local NKVD. An administration head from a Moscow suburban NKVD administration received a three-room apartment with a view of the Kremlin after the arrest of a Korean Comintern official. His superior falsified an arrest warrant (writing "Pole" instead of "Jew") to arrest a "counterrevolution-

ary” occupying a coveted three-room apartment. He then reneged on a deal with the “Pole’s” wife to move into his own one-room apartment (in return for a visit with her jailed husband) by arresting her as a spy.<sup>47</sup> After the termination of the Great Terror, the Politburo conveniently agreed to let the NKVD keep the “dachas of the repressed” in a decree of July 1939.<sup>48</sup>

The enormous power over other human beings was probably also a source of psychic incomes for Chekists. Chekist ministers, deputy ministers, department heads, interrogators, and investigators had power of life or death. Women were raped or threatened if they did not confess and were given promises of leniency if they did.<sup>49</sup> “Cohabitation with” (rape of) women was widely practiced by low-paid Gulag guards. An October 1941 report of the Gulag administration complained that “In the fourth platoon, the guards [four names] cohabit with female prisoners. A guard of this platoon cohabited with female prisoners [four names]. When this became known in the platoon, he committed suicide. . . . A guard of this platoon, on October 4, 1941, guarding nine prisoners at the Zhanaarka station, left the prisoners by themselves, went to drink with his girlfriend, and remained there until the prisoners found him themselves.”<sup>50</sup>

State security was a haven for sadists, starting with the early days of the Cheka, some officers of which proved to be criminally insane.<sup>51</sup> The NKVD had more than its share of sadists. A former Yagoda deputy, who had volunteered to arrest him, began to beat Yagoda instead of carrying out an orderly search of his apartment as required. Another “quite normal” person who had worked in the NKVD’s Economic Department became a dedicated torturer as complaints came down that “enemies of the people are being interrogated with white gloves.”<sup>52</sup>

## CHEKIST CLANS

In order to reach every urban or rural locality, the OGPU, NKVD, or MVD had to be organized by geographical administrations, such as republics, cities, provinces, or districts. Under Yagoda’s OGPU, its regional administrations were called PP OGPU, loosely translated as OGPU representative offices. Under Yezhov’s NKVD, regional offices were called UNKVDs, denoting the Administrative Office of the NKVD for that location. It was these regional offices that carried out repres-

sion. Of the more than a million victims of repression between October 1936 and October 1938, only 12,571 were tried and arrested by the central administration of the NKVD.<sup>53</sup>

The dictator (Lenin, Stalin, the Politburo) would have liked a state security system in which each Chekist official was loyal first and foremost to the dictator. In the complicated economic hierarchy, this goal was not achieved. Industrial ministry officials were loyal first of all to their branch. Regional administrators owed their first loyalty to their region.<sup>54</sup> Stalin hoped that his elite Chekists would be more faithful. Many were recruited by him personally; they received exceptional rewards; and they produced a relatively homogeneous product (arrests, deportations, and executions) which could be more easily monitored.

Surely to Stalin's chagrin, the regional administrations of the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD formed into clan-like groups for self-support and protection like regional state and party administrations.<sup>55</sup> Criminals, members of banned parties, and others with black marks were hired because they would be "our people." Transferred administration heads would try to take "their people" with them. They wanted subordinates they trusted; they could ill afford to work with "others" who might denounce them or otherwise not be fully supportive. Evdokimov himself built a series of teams that accounted for the largest numbers of executions during the Civil War, the 1920s, and dekulakization. Former Evdokimov protégés (M. P. Frinovsky, V. M. Kursky) formed the core of Yezhov's management team during the Great Terror. State security clans continued even after Stalin passed a decree (of August 5, 1931) forbidding OGPU officials from taking with them their own people when transferred.<sup>56</sup> Such attempts to limit networks were few and far between. Throughout the Great Terror, NKVD administration heads took with them their loyal subordinates to assist in the struggle against the networks they were invading.

NKVD subordinates could be counted on to support their clans because they would fall with their patrons, unless they replaced them, as when Beria replaced Yezhov. It was in the interest of the head of the Ukrainian NKVD for Yezhov to be successful because if Yezhov fell so would he. There were risks to creating clans. At the March 3, 1937 Central Committee plenum, NKVD leaders were accused of losing their "vigilance" as one after another of their clan members was discovered to be an "enemy of the people." The already disgraced Yagoda was ac-

cused of “loss of party loyalty and Bolshevik principles by intriguing to appoint his own people.”<sup>57</sup>

Major personnel changes meant massive shakeups as one clan replaced another. Yezhov replaced Yagoda’s people with his own from his clan, from the Party Control Commission, which he continued to chair. Joining Yezhov proved to be a dangerous undertaking for his subordinates. From the sixty-one-person commission staff, twenty-nine were eventually repressed.<sup>58</sup> Beria replaced Yezhov’s clan with his own. A thirteen-page memo of personnel changes by Beria’s successor (S. N. Kruglov) prepared for the Politburo removed more than one hundred officials from the MVD’s central and regional departments and restored officials removed by Beria.<sup>59</sup>

## FILLING STATE SECURITY POSITIONS

Our model of the power-maximizing dictator does not consider a scenario in which so many Chekist recruits are unwilling to work in state security that they thereby define an upper limit on repression. New recruits simply refuse the job, despite its material rewards. Given the job’s considerable risks and unpleasant work, a possibly large number of candidates would not accept appointments.

There were indeed examples of people who did not want to work in the “organs”: In the Perm region, party members took a negative view of work in the NKVD, taking the attitude “leave me out of this. I want to live.”<sup>60</sup> S. B. Zhukovsky, a Yezhov colleague in the Party Control Commission, told his wife that if he were appointed to the “organs,” “This will be the end of me.”<sup>61</sup> Zhukovsky’s prediction was accurate; he was executed in January 1940 along with Yezhov. Zhukovsky refused Yezhov’s first offer to transfer to “operational work in the NKVD” but: “Calling me in a second time, Yezhov proposed that I transfer to the NKVD for economic work, declaring that the matter was already decided and that I would shortly receive the excerpt from the Central Committee decree about my appointment as head of the Economic Administration of the NKVD. Indeed, I was appointed to this position in October 1936.”<sup>62</sup> Zhukovsky somehow believed that working in economic administration would increase his chances of survival.

As the Zhukovsky case demonstrates, officials were appointed to

state security positions by decree and not by choice. Although special schools and training centers fed state security with trained employees, most appointments were made from party or military positions. Of the 14,506 new employees in operational positions in 1939, only 10 percent entered from NKVD schools; the rest were transferred in from party positions.<sup>63</sup> Of the 181,113 new employees replenishing the NKVD's bleeding ranks in 1944, only 4,248 came from NKVD schools.<sup>64</sup>

Administrative appointments to top state security positions were by Politburo decree. High-level appointments were placed in the Politburo's top secret "special files" and the relevant excerpts were sent to the OGPU, NKVD, or MVD as Politburo orders. In the December 8, 1931 Politburo meeting, Kaganovich's item "No. 15. About the OGPU Leadership" transferred army and navy officers "for training and service in the OGPU."<sup>65</sup> Politburo transfers could set off chain reactions such as its August 1, 1933 decision to "release Rapaport from the Urals, replace him with Reshetov from Gorky, replace him with Pogrebinsky from Bashkiria, and replace him with Zelikman." At its March 3, 1932 session the Politburo approved an OGPU request to transfer recruits called up in the 1930 and 1931 conscriptions plus 350 officers (including necessary arms) to the OGPU.<sup>66</sup> The Politburo on September 9, 1937 "commanded to employment by the NKVD the following [nineteen names]," and its November 27, 1938 decree "About Workers for the NKVD" transferred twenty-five party workers to the NKVD.<sup>67</sup> Beria was transferred from his position as Georgian party secretary to serve as Yezhov's first deputy (along with a trusted subordinate) by Politburo decree.<sup>68</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, as Stalin's personal emissary, ordered massive personnel changes in the Ukrainian NKVD in January 1939.<sup>69</sup>

We know the cases only of those who were appointed to state security and their fate. We do not know those who successfully avoided appointment. Once within the NKVD, officers could apply for positions that carried less risk, such as managing remote Gulag operations.<sup>70</sup> It is notable that Beria himself officially resigned his state security position in December 1945 to work in the state apparatus. This move may have saved Beria's life.

We have a few cases of new recruits to the "organs" who were allowed to leave because they could not stomach work there. A new hire

to the Kuntsevo NKVD, after being shown how to interrogate and torture, declared that he did not want to work in this manner. His superior tried to persuade him: "In battle with enemies all means are good."<sup>71</sup> NKVD administration heads may have wanted to avoid potential whistle blowers, such as a twenty-one old state security sergeant who complained in a long letter to the new NKVD head Beria that he had been told he could be accused of complicity with the enemy if he did not torture.<sup>72</sup> (The letter was written, as might be expected, after the reversal of terror in 1939.) Although it may have been a wise move to release those who could not tolerate Chekist work, the press of work was demanding. During the peak of the Great Terror, university students and Communist Youth members were brought in. There was protection from whistle blowers: A naïve representative of the prosecutor's office who traveled to the periphery to investigate charges of torture was himself arrested.<sup>73</sup>

Yet some "contested" for Chekist leadership positions despite the risks. Yezhov intentionally maneuvered to unseat Yagoda. Beria probably did the same to Yezhov, and in both cases, they won by being more brutal at a time when Stalin needed a change. At lower levels, there was no lack of applicants. In 1944—an atypical war year when other options may have been worse—of nearly 200,000 new employees of the NKVD, almost 70 percent joined at their own request.<sup>74</sup>

Although recruits could scarcely refuse work in the "organs," there was a real constraint on expanding the number of operational workers quickly. They had to be carefully vetted; they had to be right for the job. They had to be known by the right people; they had to tolerate the conditions of work. They could not be troubled by moral qualms. The next chapter will show that the numbers of operational workers did not expand and contract with the level of repression, although it did rise over the long run.

People were willing to contend for state security positions, besides the obvious fact that it gave them material privileges and prestige, for a number of reasons. First, although a substantial number, including much of the top leadership, were executed along with their families, this outcome could not be known as they began their operational work. We have no way of knowing whether Stalin planned to liquidate his top Chekists when he appointed them. Second, some, such as the gullible

Yezhov, may have been true believers. Younger persons, brought up on the myth of the heroic Chekist, may also, at least initially, have joined for ideological reasons. There may have been those who joined because they, like Stalin and his inner circle, truly hated the “enemy” whom Stalin routinely described as “vermin and scum.”<sup>75</sup> A Chekist operative carrying out terror near Novosibirsk in 1937, echoed Stalin’s contempt: “Some people cannot be processed” which would be a shame because “we are dealing here exclusively with riff-raff.”<sup>76</sup>

#### POWER TO SELECT ONE’S OWN PEOPLE?

Nominations to responsible state, party, and security positions were presented to the Politburo as proposals. This practice did not mean that heads of administrations, committees, and security organizations could not name their subordinates. Many personnel proposals were accepted perfunctorily but the higher the level of position, the greater the scrutiny. During the critical period June 20 to July 31, 1937, the Politburo named two new department heads of the Main Administration of State Security (the GUGB of the NKVD). Presumably, these two positions would have been carefully scrutinized by the Politburo (Stalin).<sup>77</sup>

In most cases, long lists of proposed appointments were presented to the Politburo as only one of thirty or even fifty questions for that day. On June 10, 1937 Yezhov submitted such lists, which must have been approved without discussion. On July 2, 1937, the Politburo approved more than one hundred troikas (three-person extrajudicial tribunals), again lists so long that they would have been approved pro forma.<sup>78</sup>

The ability to initiate nominations gave Chekist leaders the opportunity to name their “own people,” even though the decision was formally made by the Politburo or by the NKVD or MVD central administration. Proof of this is the widespread practice of transferring entire teams when an administrative head was transferred. Of course, the dictator could always intervene. Yezhov was rightly terrified when Beria was named as his deputy, but such cases were the exception rather than the rule. When it really mattered, Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria did not have the power to choose their own subordinates. Instead, Stalin or the Politburo chose them, and they were often their superiors’ forthcoming replacements.



## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter moved from the heads of state security to their immediate subordinates, the Chekist elite. It confirmed a principle, already noted for the economic hierarchy, that state security was a nested dictatorship in which subordinates dealt with their subordinates as their superiors dealt with them. Just as Stalin selected relatively uneducated and incriminated heads of state security, so did Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria select their own immediate subordinates. Although the pool of educated personnel was small, it was more than adequate to fill the leadership of state security. The fact that relatively poorly educated people were selected for leadership positions was deliberate. That they were drawn from ethnic minorities and had black marks on their records was not by chance. The chapter also confirms the use of instruments predicted by a political maximization model: the payment of rents to ensure loyalty and the hiring of those who could be blackmailed into loyalty.

The three heads of state security under Stalin do not appear to have been motivated by ideology, unlike the first head of the Cheka, Dzerzhinsky. Until their annihilation during the Great Terror, the NKVD elite were Old Bolsheviks who must have joined the party for ideological reasons. After their replacement by a younger set of leaders, there is little evidence of ideological motivations. The true face of the Chekist core was that of Efim Evdokimov, who formed a gang of thugs that created the practice of mass terror.

The dictator did not have to concern himself with limits on the supply of repression. Chekists were administratively appointed and typically did not have the option of refusal. Despite the material rewards, many party workers sought to avoid work in the “organs” out of fear for their lives.

# 3 Organizing State Security

THE PREVIOUS TWO CHAPTERS discussed how a power-maximizing dictator selects heads of state security and their subordinates. He must be concerned about their loyalty because to perform their jobs they must be extremely powerful, and they could turn this power against him. We devoted particular attention to Stalin's appointments of NKVD leaders during the period leading up to, during, and in the immediate aftermath of the Great Terror.

A dictator can secure loyalty by appointing the "right" people. He can also assure loyalty by creating an organizational structure that maximizes monitoring and control. This chapter analyzes the evolving structure of the Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, and MVD from Lenin through Stalin and his immediate successors. We show why the organizational structure of state security changed frequently as the dictator sought an arrangement that fit his changing needs.

## PRINCIPAL-AGENT PROBLEMS

Principal-agent problems arise in hierarchical organizations when the principal and agent have different objectives and the agent possess more information about local circumstances than the principal. The CEOs of corporations may want to maximize profits; their vice presidents may

want an easy life. The rank-and-file members of labor unions may want higher wages and job security; union leaders may want to feather their own nests. Principal-agent problems are attacked by organizational arrangements that limit opportunism through monitoring or by reward systems that cause the agent to act in the interests of the principal, such as performance-based bonuses.

Stalin was beset by principal-agent problems from all sides. One of his most bitter disappointments was that his most trusted associates represented the “narrow” interests of the industry or region which they headed.<sup>1</sup> Stalin wanted his economic subordinates to represent what he called “encompassing” interests; namely, his own goals.

The pursuit of “narrow” goals by economic agents threatens the dictator’s (in our case Stalin’s) goals of rapid growth, military power, or economic modernization. The consequences of a state security head pursuing “narrow” goals could be more serious, such as a weakening of dictatorial power, or worse, an overthrow attempt. Because of the greater danger of state security opportunism, we expect the dictator to organize state security so as to optimize control and monitoring.

In an ideology-based system, the dictator is the official interpreter of orthodoxy. Like a pope issuing dogmatic pronouncements from the Vatican or a council of mullahs issuing fatwas, Stalin dictated the official ideology of the Soviet Union. Unlike Lenin, who allowed some dissent among his immediate associates, Stalin branded any disagreement with his “unified party line” as a sin of “deviation,” colorful language that derived from Stalin’s formative years in the seminary.<sup>2</sup>

The “encompassing” goal of state security was to protect the dictator and his regime, where the dictator himself defines his enemies. State security promotes this encompassing goal by gathering information about “sins of deviation” and capturing and punishing the “deviationists.” The encompassing goal could be dictated as Politburo decrees, related in private conversations, or even conveyed as subtle hints. As Stalin’s alter ego, state security had no room for error in interpreting him. State security officials required an experienced ear to detect nuanced changes that Stalin may not have wished to articulate directly. As Stalin’s former secretary, Boris Bazhanov, wrote (from exile after narrowly escaping an assassination attempt): “Stalin had the extraordinary gift of silence and, in this way, was unique in a country that said too much.”<sup>3</sup>

## SHORT AGENCY CHAINS

Organizing state security should be less complicated than the organization of production. State security produces one basic product—arrests and convictions of state enemies, while an economy produces hundreds of thousands or millions of products. The *dekulakization* campaign divided class enemies into three categories, and Stalin's mass operations of 1937–1938 placed political enemies into two categories (category 1 for execution and category 2 for imprisonment). Although law enforcement can be subdivided into a larger number of categories—political crime (for which state security is responsible), ordinary crime, white-collar crime, and so on, it does not have to be broken down into hundreds of branches according to product type, location, or technology, as in the economy.

A dictator's order for more steel will go through a number of bureaucratic layers. If the dictator wishes someone's arrest, he can order it himself (in the case of high-level enemies) or turn the matter over to state security. If he wishes to have specific numbers of citizens executed in each of his regional divisions, his state security chief can issue the necessary targets for each regional administration.

Organizations can be characterized by their "agency chain," which measures the number of links between the top and bottom officials of the organization.<sup>4</sup> In the Soviet administrative-command economy, there was normally a four-link agency chain between Stalin and a steel mill:

Stalin → Council of Ministers → Minister of Metallurgy →  
Director of Steel Administration → Manager of steel mill

In this case, the dictator can manage an enterprise only indirectly through its superiors. The dictator can shorten the agency chain in some cases, such as the strategic enterprise that produced the USSR's first atomic bomb, by issuing orders directly to its manager or by placing a personal deputy in charge. Georgy Malenkov and Lavrenty Beria, for example, played such roles during World War II and the early years of the Cold War. But the dictator can shorten the agency chain in only a few cases; otherwise he would be in charge of hundreds of enterprises.

Given the simpler “production function” for repression, the dictator can organize a shorter agency chain for state security:

Stalin → Head of state security → Head of regional administration

A regional organization of state security is inevitable because enemies are dispersed throughout the country (although they may be concentrated in particular locations). They must be investigated and arrested and perhaps tried and punished in the city, town, or village where they are located. The dictator must still decide on the number of regional administrative links, a matter that will be discussed below.

For high-level cases, Stalin could even bypass the head of state security to shorten the chain. Although in most cases, Stalin worked through Yagoda, Yezhov, or Beria, in some instances he inserted personal emissaries. He dispatched Politburo members to the provinces on special assignments, such as Andrei Andreev, who requested from Sverdlovsk in March 1937 Stalin’s “approval to arrest seven district party chairmen against whom there are serious accusations and whose conduct tells us they are Rightist Diversionaries. We can find replacements on the spot.”<sup>5</sup> Stalin wrote to the itinerant Andreev, now in Saratov, on July 28, 1937: “The Central Committee agrees with your proposal to send to the courts and to execute the former workers of the Machine Tractor Station.”<sup>6</sup> Stalin also used trusted officials, such as L. Z. Mekhlis, editor of *Pravda* and head of the Political Administration of the Army, who requested from Irkutsk on October 25, 1938 higher execution “limits” for Ulan Ude because “their prisons are filled with nationalists and counterrevolutionaries.”<sup>7</sup>

As Stalin concluded in 1937 that enemies had penetrated the ranks of the regional party administrations, he sent his deputy, Lazar Kaganovich, into the field to conduct purges. Kaganovich organized meetings of regional party committees, arrested the current party secretaries, and introduced the new secretaries brought in from Moscow to the assembled party workers. In the evening, he would telephone Stalin in Moscow to brief him on the day’s events.<sup>8</sup>

The dictator also could appoint a watchdog to watch his main watchdog. Nikolai Yezhov, served as Stalin’s eyes and ears within the NKVD from his position as a secretary of the Central Committee until he replaced Yagoda as its head at the end of 1936. It was Yezhov’s NKVD

that oversaw the mass operations of the Great Terror.<sup>9</sup> When Stalin's trust in Yezhov waned, he appointed Beria to watch over him as his purported "deputy."

The need for a direct link with state security was not lost on Lenin. An early party communiqué described the Cheka "as the direct organ of the party according to its directives and under its control."<sup>10</sup> Lenin kept a firm grip on the Cheka, although Politburo support for it was far from unanimous. Despite his many other responsibilities, Lenin spent hours closeted behind closed doors with Feliks Dzerzhinsky.<sup>11</sup> As Lenin moved against "non-Soviet" physicians and intellectuals in May 1922, he immediately directed "Dzerzhinsky's OGPU to work out measures . . . and to report to the Politburo."<sup>12</sup> Keeping the OGPU on a short agency chain continued after Lenin's incapacitation. The Politburo decreed: "To give S. Yenukidze [a Georgian associate of Stalin] responsibility to ensure that not one issue associated with OGPU is transmitted to the government without agreement with the Politburo."<sup>13</sup> The short agency chain for state security was endemic to the system; it was not Stalin's invention. The directness of the link between dictator and the state security agency was most evident during the mass operations of 1937. Yezhov spent 527 hours behind closed doors in Stalin's office receiving direct orders on the terror campaign.<sup>14</sup>

## ORGANIZING RELATED STATE SECURITY SERVICES

The organization of state security is defined not only by the length of the agency chain. "Repression" requires "core inputs" which are provided by Chekist-operational workers, who, at a minimum, identify potential "enemies of the state." The full repression cycle requires investigation, arrest, trial, conviction, sentencing, carrying out the sentence, and guarding those incarcerated. Should related inputs be done "in house" or outsourced to other organizations?

Judges or special tribunals are needed to sentence enemies. Police are needed to maintain public order, conduct investigations, and arrest or assist in arrests. Border guards prevent enemies from escaping or entering the country illicitly. Firemen extinguish fires caused by wreckers. Camp guards watch over those imprisoned. Should these functions be under one roof or divided among a number of agencies?

The consolidation of these functions "in house" could divert state se-

curity from its core functions. But subcontracting could also weaken state security. Civil judges may be too lenient or slow. Civil police may focus too much on common crime and ignore political crimes. A regular prison administration may not guard enemies of the state as closely as Chekists.

The search for an optimal structure addressed two basic issues: the appropriate length of the agency chain between the dictator and his repressors; and the repression functions to be directly controlled by state security or delegated to other organizations.

### THREE ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS

More than two hundred pages of text are required in the standard guide to the organization of Soviet state security to detail the chronology of “the organs of internal affairs and state security, the structure of organs of internal affairs and state security, the directory of name changes and chronology of structural administrations” from 1917 to 1991.<sup>15</sup> But against this background of change, we can define three basic organizational models for state security.

#### The OGPU Model

From the first days of Bolshevik power, it was clear that state security was to be the responsibility of a special agency, despite Trotsky’s argument that his Red Army could handle this task.<sup>16</sup> The result was the founding in early 1918 of the Cheka with Dzerzhinsky as its head, and its growth to an organization employing 90,000 persons, not counting 60,000 “secret” workers, by the end of the Civil War in 1921. With the formation of the OGPU in February 1922, state security employment fell to 60,000, not counting 30,000 secret workers, falling further to 33,152 workers and 12,900 secret workers in 1923.<sup>17</sup> In 1926–1927, the OGPU employed 18,725 people apart from secret workers.<sup>18</sup> OGPU special troops numbered 117,000 as the Civil War wound down in 1921 and 78,000 in 1923. The central office employed 1,415 officials in 1921, 2,649 in August 1923 and 2,419 by 1929. In short, Dzerzhinsky’s OGPU was a state security empire, which, in the relatively calm year of 1923, numbered approximately 125,000 (33,000 employees plus 13,000 secret employees plus 78,000 special forces).

The Cheka, however, shared the task of protecting the state with other security organizations. Camps and prisons were operated by the justice ministry and by the NKVD of the Russian Republic. The OGPU operated a special camp, the Solovetsky Camp of Special Designation (SLON), for political prisoners, which served as a prototype for later “corrective labor camps” of the Gulag. The militia was largely under the control of and financed, albeit poorly, by local governments.

Genrykh Yagoda served as deputy to the ailing OGPU head, V. P. Menzhinsky, who was appointed after Dzerzhinsky’s death in 1926. Although listed as first or second deputy, Yagoda, in effect, ran the OGPU throughout much of its history. He officially became the leading state security official with Menzhinsky’s death in May 1934 and the folding of the OGPU into a new revitalized NKVD in July 1934, which he headed as the first security head selected directly by Stalin. It was the OGPU, under Yagoda’s direction, that conducted Stalin’s first major terror campaign—dekulakization—between 1930 and 1933.

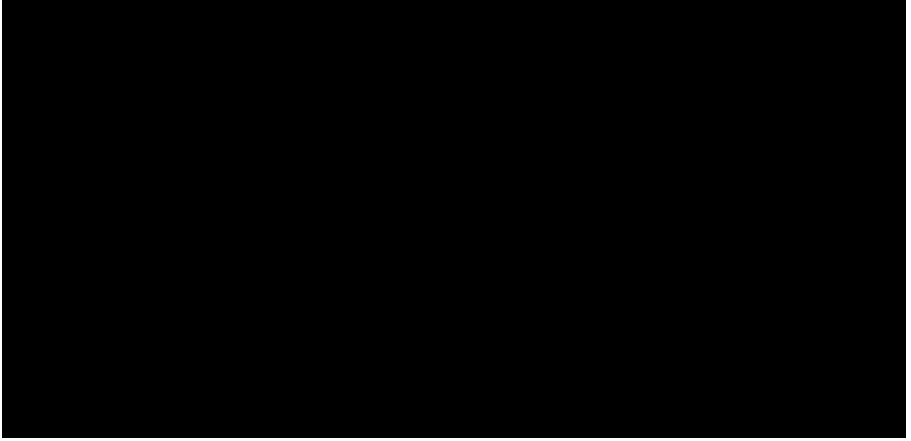
In 1930, the OGPU had some 33,000 operational workers to carry out dekulakization, aided by OGPU border militia and special forces; the latter, at last published account (January 1925), numbered 10,898, including 2,468 elite “special designation” troops.<sup>19</sup> Most operational workers were deployed in the twenty-three territorial administrations called PP OGPU. They will be discussed later in this chapter.

Under Yagoda, the OGPU expanded its control over the civil police, or the Worker-Peasant Militia, as it was called. The civil police had been officially subordinated to local soviets, but they were told “to conduct work under the direction of local OGPU organs.”<sup>20</sup> Under Yagoda, police hiring and staffing were controlled by an OGPU Inspectorate, following Yagoda’s plan to convert the militia into a national police force. Reorganizations of late 1929 and 1930 placed the Worker-Peasant Militia increasingly under the control of the OGPU. By 1932, the number of police was 98,000.<sup>21</sup> The Worker-Peasant Militia became an official Administration of the OGPU in 1933.<sup>22</sup>

Yagoda’s OGPU also gained effective control over prisons and special settlements as the Gulag began in the early 1930s to construct major infrastructure projects, the first being the White Sea–Baltic Canal. By 1931, the Gulag was also entrenched as a Main Administration within the OGPU.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the organization of the OGPU prior to its fold-





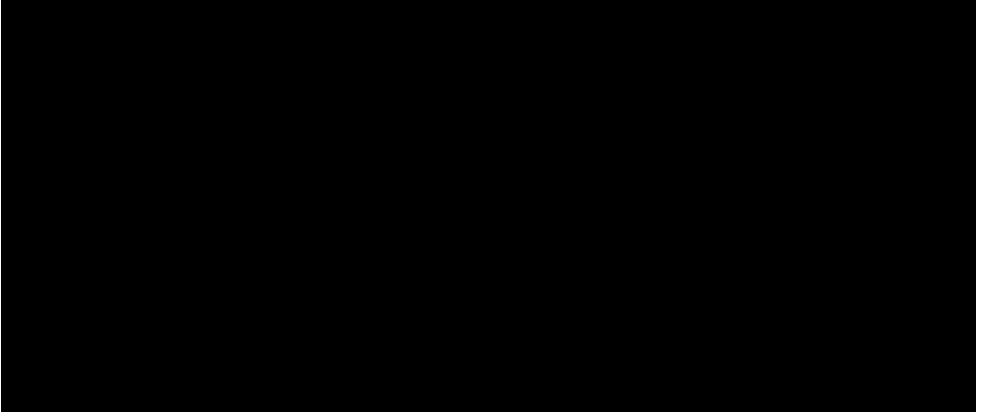
*Figure 3.1. The OGPU Organizational Model*

ing into the NKVD in 1934. It shows a core “operational administration” complemented by two “service” administrations (Gulag and militia). The territorial administrations (PP OGPU) are subordinated to the operational division.

### The NKVD Model

On February 20, 1934, Stalin appointed Yagoda and two Politburo members to design an all-Union NKVD, which would have its own republic and regional administrations. The “new” NKVD USSR was established by the Politburo on July 10, 1934 and Yagoda was named its first minister.<sup>23</sup> The OGPU was folded into the new NKVD as its State Security Administration (GUGB). Yagoda served as head of the NKVD for slightly over two years; he was replaced by Yezhov on November 24, 1936.

The new NKVD was a horizontally integrated undertaking which consolidated under one roof interior ministry (fire services, militia, border patrol, citizen records) and state security functions. The battle against political enemies was the responsibility of the GUGB (the NKVD’s Main Administration of State Security), whose departments included special operations, secret political operations, foreign espionage, and protection of the economy and transport from sabotage and



*Figure 3.2. The Organizational Model of Stalin's NKVD, 1934–1943*

wrecking (on NKVD administrations and GULAG departments in the 1930s, see Appendix 2, Table A.1). Other key main administrations were the GULAG, or Main Administration of Camps, which, as of 1935, guarded and managed one million prisoners<sup>24</sup> and main administrations for militia (GUPRKM) and internal and border guards (GUPVO).

The NKVD that Stalin created in 1934 and that three years later oversaw the Great Terror was a massive organization, whose central staff of almost 10,000 officials oversaw a huge state security empire, spearheaded by the feared GUGB. The NKVD's other main administrations provided indirect support in the battle against state enemies. The Gulag guarded and worked the prisoners arrested, processed, and tried by Chekist-operational forces. The Worker-Peasant Militia conducted investigations, kept order in the cities, and arrested less dangerous enemies. The Fire Administration protected the nation's factories and buildings from wreckers and saboteurs. Clerks in the Citizen Records Department kept track of citizens. Such activities are typical functions of an interior, not state security, ministry, but Stalin's conception was to place these forces under one command—initially that of Yagoda, then Yezhov, and then Beria.

Figure 3.2 depicts the organizational structure of the NKVD from its founding in 1934 to its reorganization in 1943. The figure shows the NKVD's four divisions: the “core” State Security Administration, the

militia, the Gulag, and interior ministry functions. The territorial (UNKVD) divisions are subordinated to the State security administration.

We do not have official figures for NKVD employment prior to 1945, but our indirect calculations suggest that the NKVD employed between 82,000 and 117,000 people in 1934 and between 325,000 and 466,000 people in 1940 (not counting special troops).<sup>25</sup> The NKVD USSR was a huge organization that likely more than tripled in size between 1934 and 1940.

Beria assumed command of the NKVD as Stalin shut down the Great Terror and arrested Yezhov in November 1938. Beria, as party secretary of Georgia, had caught Stalin's eye for his bloodthirsty campaigns there in 1937, arresting 12,000 class enemies.<sup>26</sup> Stalin named him Yezhov's first deputy in August 1938 and then head of GUGB at the end of September. Beria became, for all practical purposes, the head of the NKVD. Communications from the NKVD to Stalin were signed either jointly by Beria and Yezhov or by Beria alone as "deputy minister of the NKVD."<sup>27</sup>

The NKVD that Beria inherited from Yezhov had the same basic structure as in 1934, but the task changed to the deportation and arrest of hundreds of thousands of "national contingents" and to special military operations during World War II. Under Beria, the NKVD between 1939 and 1941 arrested 134,000 people; 200,000 were exiled, and Beria carried out some of the greatest atrocities of the war, such as mass executions of Polish officers, notably in the forest of Katyn.<sup>28</sup> Between 1941 and 1946, NKVD forces (including its counterespionage operations) arrested 700,00 people and executed 70,000.<sup>29</sup>

### Separating State Security and Internal Affairs

In February 1943, after an abortive attempt two years earlier, Stalin, with Beria's active support, transformed the NKVD's State Security Administration (GUGB) into a separate ministry, the Peoples' Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) under Beria's deputy, V. N. Merkulov. This action partially retuned state security to the OGPU model with separate ministries for state security and internal affairs.

According to its charter of April 1943, the NKGB was charged "with guaranteeing the state security of the USSR" by carrying out "foreign intelligence, combating the espionage, diversionary, and terrorist activ-

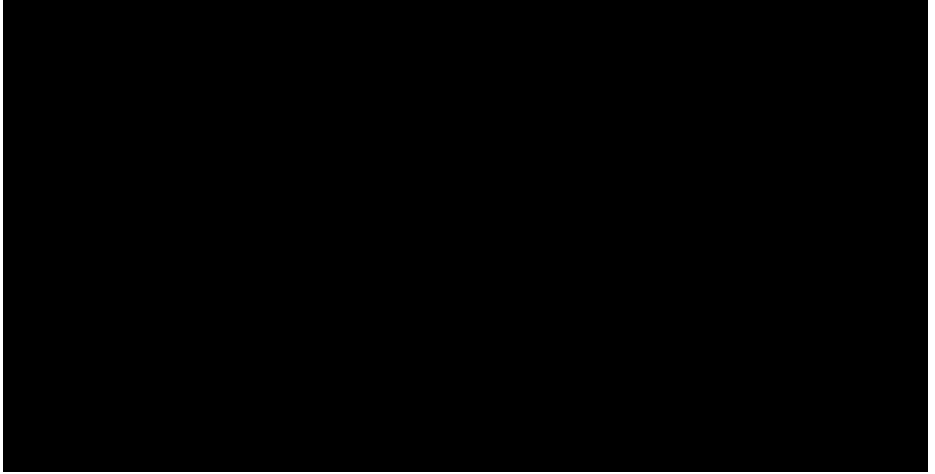
ity of foreign agents within the country, battling any and all kinds of anti-Soviet elements, and the protection of leading cadres of the party and state.”<sup>30</sup> Like the NKVD, the NKGB had republic and regional offices throughout the country. In March 1946, both the NKVD and the NKGB’s names were changed from “Peoples’ Commissariat” to “Ministry.” The NKVD became the MVD and the NKGB became the MGB.<sup>31</sup>

After the 1943 divorce of the NKGB from the NKVD, the current and future ministers of state security (V. N. Merkulov and V. S. Abakumov) continued to be listed as Beria’s deputies and a number of Chekist departments, such as intelligence, counterintelligence, secret political activity, and codes continued to be listed as NKVD administrations.<sup>32</sup> Starting in 1944, neither Merkulov nor Abakumov were listed among Beria’s deputies, but, notably, the archives of the state security departments were kept in the NKVD, and Beria retained control of the foreign intelligence organization, Smersh.<sup>33</sup> On January 1, 1945, Beria’s last year as NKVD minister, the NKVD employed 655,000 people and by year’s end it employed 846,000.<sup>34</sup> NKVD employees were distributed among almost fifty departments or administrations in a vast bureaucratic empire (on NKVD departments in 1938 and NKVD/MVD employment in 1945 and 1953, see Appendix 2, Tables A.2 and A.3).<sup>35</sup>

Figure 3.3 shows the separation of interministry and state security functions, each having their own territorial administrations.

At the end of 1945, Beria relinquished his position as NKVD minister to work as deputy head of state. Beria’s first deputy, S. N. Kruglov, a longtime security official but not a Beria insider, was appointed NKVD minister, a position he held until Stalin’s death in March 1953. Kruglov was reappointed MVD minister after Beria’s arrest in June 1953, a position in which he served until 1956. The Ministry of State Security, under V. N. Merkulov (1943–1946) and V. S. Abakumov (1946–1951), continued to operate as a separate entity. In 1946, the NKVD’s successor, the MVD, employed slightly over one million persons and had 900,000 troops.<sup>36</sup>

Under Kruglov, the MVD lost power and influence to the MGB. In July 1950, Stalin transferred the administration of special settlements to the MGB.<sup>37</sup> In August of the same year, the MGB established administrations within special camps of the Gulag.<sup>38</sup> Between 1949 and 1953, the militia was gradually transferred to the MGB.<sup>39</sup>



*Figure 3.3.* The NKVD (MVD) and NKGB (MGB) Organizational Model, 1944–1953

While Stalin consulted regularly with Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria when they headed the NKVD, Kruglov met only four times in person with Stalin during his seven-year tenure. Also, most of the correspondence on state security issues after Beria's departure was with Merkulov and Abakumov, not Kruglov. Stalin's lack of interest may explain Kruglov's longevity. He was one of the few leaders of internal affairs to die of natural causes. Although Kruglov escaped Stalinist repression, he did not escape the milder form of repression practiced under Khrushchev. He was fired and deprived of his pension.<sup>40</sup>

On the day of Stalin's death (March 5, 1953), Beria moved to consolidate power and to position himself as Stalin's successor. At the March 5 joint plenum, the MVD and MGB were again consolidated into one ministry—the MVD—under Beria. Beria was also named the first deputy of the chairman of the Council of Ministers (Georgy Malenkov). All the functions of state security (counterintelligence, political espionage, protection of state leaders, etc.) were again under Beria's direction.<sup>41</sup> The newly consolidated MVD employed 1,095,678 people with a central administration of some 20,000 people on May 15, 1953,<sup>42</sup> giving Beria a power base so unprecedented that it united other leaders against him, leading to his arrest in June 1953 and his execution in December 1953.

Beria's replacement after his arrest (the ubiquitous Kruglov) wasted no time in again separating the MGB from the MVD, claiming in February 1954 that "the current organizational structure of the MVD and its organs is too large and is not in a position to guarantee the necessary level of agent-operational work in light of the tasks that have been placed on it by the Central Committee and the Soviet government."<sup>43</sup> By 1955, the MGB had morphed into the KGB, the sinister state security agency that dominated Soviet life until the end of the Soviet Union.

## THE CHEKIST CORE

We have described the three state security organizational models used from the early 1920s through the end of Stalin's reign. Irrespective of the model, its core remained the Chekist-operational elite.

Repression of the Soviet citizenry was not carried out by the NKVD or MVD *per se*. True, the minister of the NKVD or MVD (Yagoda, Yezhov, or Beria until the separation of internal affairs and state security) was in charge of "Chekist-operational work,"<sup>44</sup> but the minister also managed a number of other large administrations. Actual repressions were carried out primarily by Chekist-operational workers of the Administration (later Ministry) of State Security. The State Security Administration made up only a small proportion of NKVD employment (about 6 percent in 1945) and in its various manifestations (GUGB, NKGB, and MGB), constituted the "Chekist core," which carried out espionage, secret political operations, protection of party and state leaders, and the defense of industry and agriculture from enemies of the Soviet state.

The leaders of the State Security Administration were less well known than Yagoda, Yezhov, or Beria. Under Yagoda, the GUGB was headed by Yagoda's first deputy Ia. S. Agranov. Under Yezhov, it had its own head (first Agranov, who was replaced by M. P. Frinovsky in 1938). In Beria's NKVD, the GUGB was headed by his first deputy V. N. Merkulov, who became its first minister when it shortly became the NKGB in February 1941. Merkulov served as NKGB/MGB minister from 1943 to 1946 and was replaced by V. S. Abakumov, who served from 1946 to 1951.<sup>45</sup> Like Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria, all four were executed—Agranov in 1938, Frinovsky in 1940, and Merkulov in 1953 along with Beria, while Abakumov was arrested in 1951 but executed only after Stalin's death, in 1954.<sup>46</sup>

Table 3.1. Chekist-Operational Workers and Civil Police, 1930–1952

<i>A. Operational Workers</i>						
	1930 OGPU	1933 OGPU	1934 GUGB	1939 GUGB	1945 NKVD operations	1952 Operations estimated
Central apparatus	1,927		1,410	11,560		
Republican and Regional Offices	17,476		23,618	20,633		
TOTAL	19,403	20,898	25,022	32,193	40,000	80,000
<i>B. Militia/Civil Police</i>						
	87,000	98,000	124,000	197,000	200,000	259,061

*Sources:* Figures for the central apparatus of the NKVD are from Appendix 2, Table A.1. Figures for total employment are from Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, p. 56; and from Petrov, *Karatel'naia sistema*, p. 173 (calculated from the information that the 7,372 persons removed from state security equaled 22.9 percent of the 1939 total). Due to such indirect calculations, there may be minor errors in these figures. The figures for the OGPU do not distinguish operational from office workers, although full-time staff of the OGPU in this period were largely operational. We adjust by removing prison administrators and those involved in various OGPU schools from operational workers. The 1930 data are from V. Petrov and K. V. Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD, 1934–1941* (Moscow: Zvenia, 1999), pp. 34–35. The civil police figures are from Shearer, “Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD During the 1930’s.” The 1952 figures are the 1946 figures doubled, given the doubling of the state security apparatus reported by Nikita Petrov, “Les transformations du personnel des organes de sécurité soviétiques, 1922–1953,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 42, nos. 2–4 (April–December 2001), p. 396.

Table 3.1 gives figures for approximate employment in core Chekist-operational branches in selected years from 1930 to 1952. The OGPU (1930 and 1933) employed primarily operational workers.<sup>47</sup> In 1934 and 1939, employment in the GUGB of the NKVD approximates the number of Chekist-operational workers. For 1945, we use the NKVD’s own report on the number of “operational workers.” For 1952, we double the 1946 figure as a crude approximation based upon the doubling of employment in the Ministry of State Security during this period.

According to Table 3.1, the hard-core operational workers who spearheaded dekulakization in 1930 and 1931 numbered some 20,000 “Chekists,” supported by OGPU special forces and by party activists from the cities. The Great Terror was conducted largely by GUGB state

security officers, who numbered between 25,000 and 32,000. These “deputized operationals” (“operupolnomochie”) spearheaded the execution, imprisonment, and exile of almost 2.5 million people during collectivization and executed nearly 700,000 victims in 1937 and 1938.

During periods of peak activity, such as the mass operations of 1937–1938, the distinction between operational and interior ministry workers often broke down. Due to manpower shortages, some militia officers headed operational groups. Party workers had to be called from the “Chekist reserves,” and militia and army officers served as executioners.<sup>48</sup>

Under Yagoda, the Moscow office of the OGPU accounted for 10 percent of the total, but Yezhov centralized operations during his three-year tenure as NKVD head, and when he was fired, GUGB’s Moscow office accounted for one-third of Chekist-operational workers. Even after Yezhov’s centralization, most operational employees were still located in the field.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, the level of centralization chosen by Yezhov was identical to that of Caesar Augustus, when he first established the Praetorian Guard. Of the nine cohorts of Praetorian Guards, three were stationed in Rome.

Chekist-operational workers were supported by special troops. As the Civil War wound down in 1921, special troops numbered 117,000, and in 1945, near the end of World War II, they numbered 653,000.<sup>50</sup> In between these two dates, the number of NKVD forces is not given in available official sources but still would have represented a significant number. The massive peasant uprisings in Ukraine in 1930 and 1931 were defeated by well-trained and equipped OGPU special forces.<sup>51</sup> The battle for the countryside in 1930 was largely decided by the use of special forces, 4,200 of whom were especially selected from the Red Army.<sup>52</sup>

## THE GULAG AND CIVIL POLICE

The Gulag administration dwarfed the Chekist-operations division in size. Its task was to isolate prisoners in remote camps and to exploit their labor in the interests of the state. Of the 1.1 million MVD employees (including special troops) on May 15, 1953, Gulag employees accounted for slightly less than half the total (445,693). Only after Stalin’s successors transferred Gulag operations to civilian ministries



was the Gulag cut back to the size of the militia (about a quarter-million in October 1953).<sup>53</sup> The heads of the Gulag administration were relatively faceless administrators, kept by their jobs from public view. The three Gulag heads who served under Yagoda and Yezhov (L. I. Kogan, M. S. Berman, and I. I. Pliner) were all executed in 1939. Their immediate successors who served under Beria and Kruglov (V. V. Chernyshev, and V. G. Nasedkin) escaped repression.

The civil police of the Worker-Peasant Militia, who since the days of Yagoda fell under the jurisdiction of either the minister of interior or state security, outnumbered Chekist-operational workers by an approximate factor of five to one from 1930 to 1945 (Table 3.1).

As the civil police were incorporated into the NKVD,<sup>54</sup> they were given increasing powers of investigation, arrest, and surveillance. Although formally the police were to protect state property and Chekist-operational workers to battle political enemies, their roles intermingled as Yagoda increasingly regarded organized crime as a political offense.<sup>55</sup> The first integrated joint campaign of the OGPU and worker-peasant militia was the passportization campaign of 1933 to cleanse the cities of hostile elements—a campaign that caused almost a half million people to flee the cities.<sup>56</sup>

Militia officers also assisted in arrests during the mass operations of the Great Terror, and some headed operational groups.<sup>57</sup> A head of a militia department recounts being ordered to a nearby city to arrest a political enemy, who happened to be one of his oldest friends. When he objected, he was told by the state security head: “No enemy of the people can be a friend.”<sup>58</sup>

## REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIONS

Whereas economic planning was done in Moscow, repression had to be conducted locally, where the enemies lived, worked, and had their families. Of the several million persons arrested by state security operations, only a minuscule fraction was arrested by the Moscow office.

How state security was regionally organized affected the length of the agency chain. If there were republic offices, to which were subordinated provincial offices, to which were subordinated regional offices, to which were subordinated district offices, the agency chain would not be short. The actual executor of repression in the city, town, or village would be a

number of steps removed from the dictator. Such “distance” could promote opportunism. Having a relatively small number of major regional administrations introduced yet another threat. Their heads might collude or even organize against the dictator. The larger the number of regional administrations, the lesser this threat.

From the OGPU through the MVD, the organizational principle for regional administrations was to have a large number of separate administrations, receiving their orders directly from Moscow rather than through regional superiors.

The OGPU (in 1931 during the peak of the dekulakization drive) was divided into twenty-three regional administrations or PP OGPUs. Collectivization and dekulakization primarily was conducted in agricultural regions and in remote regions that received deportees, so the majority of operations were handled by the Ukrainian, Moscow, Northern Caucasus, Trans-Caucasus, Central Asian, and Kazakhstan administrations.<sup>59</sup> Presumably, each administration distributed tasks to district and village offices, but the responsibility for fulfilling orders rested with each of these twenty three administrations.

The OGPU's twenty-three administrations grew into sixty-five NKVD regional administrations (called UNKVDs) by 1937. Instructions were sent directly from Yezhov to each of the sixty-five district offices. Notably, the agency chain was shortened in that both Ukraine and Kazakhstan were each broken up into eight separate regional administrations. Moscow and Leningrad provinces remained single regional administrations, administering multiple district administrations. Combined they received orders to repress almost 50,000 persons in July of 1937. Both Moscow and Leningrad were located close to the center of power and could be monitored more closely than outlying regional administrations.<sup>60</sup>

In 1946, after Chekist-operational work was transferred to the MGB), the latter was divided into eighty regional administrations (called UMGBs). (The annexation of new territories by the Soviet Union as a result of the war only partly explains the expansion.) Ukraine was returned to one administration, which in 1946 accounted for 43 percent of all arrests.<sup>61</sup> By 1951, the number of MGB regional administrations had fallen to seventy-one.<sup>62</sup>

The fact that Ukraine, Moscow, and Leningrad were huge administrations covering large populations meant that their heads had to be se-

lected and monitored with extreme care. From 1934 until his arrest in 1938, the Moscow province administration was headed by S. F. Redens, Stalin's brother-in-law. After his arrest, the position changed hands four times.<sup>63</sup> After repressing the head of the Ukrainian administration (I. M. Leplevsky), Yezhov replaced him with a close associate (A. I. Uspen-sky), who served until his arrest along with Yezhov.

The focus on regional and local organizations explains the ability of Chekists to bring arrest, intimidation, and execution to virtually any location in the vast Soviet Union. Chekist-operational workers worked in regional departments and in remote machine tractor stations that had direct contact with the public. The assistant political officer in machine tractor stations was, by designation, a Chekist officer. These regional officers provided immediate and direct information about the municipality or countryside where they served to their superiors.

The remarkable reach of Chekists into the most remote areas is illustrated by terror operations in the remote Siberian town of Bodiado near Irkutsk. A minor "deputized operational worker" wrote to his superiors the following account in 1937: "Upon my arrival, I established that the local administration was not prepared. Besides some lists, they had practically no other material. We had to operate on the basis of feel."<sup>64</sup> His solution was to arrest all but one of the local Chinese population within a radius of two hundred kilometers, and, within a few weeks, assisted only by a small armed troop, he had crowded one thousand prisoners into the local prison. The docility of his victims was remarkable. A poorly armed stranger rounded up a thousand locals into an antiquated prison (in which many died from the poor conditions) with no apparent resistance. This lowly Chekist submitted his execution requests to Irkutsk and had to wait their confirmation. Apparently, Irkutsk had to add up requests from its districts to make sure that it did not exceed its own limit.

## STALIN AND THE SHORTEST LEASH

The most direct link between a principal and an agent is personal meetings in which the superior gives orders and receives information directly. One-on-one meetings allow the dictator to look his security head in the eye, to hear his answers, and to judge his reliability and effectiveness. Stalin was a persistent and curious questioner in meetings. In his

stenographed meeting of November 15, 1934, Stalin addressed thirty direct questions to the visiting Mongolian party head, ranging from issues of irrigation and cattle holdings to dealing with state enemies.<sup>65</sup> Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria would also have been peppered with Stalin's inquires.

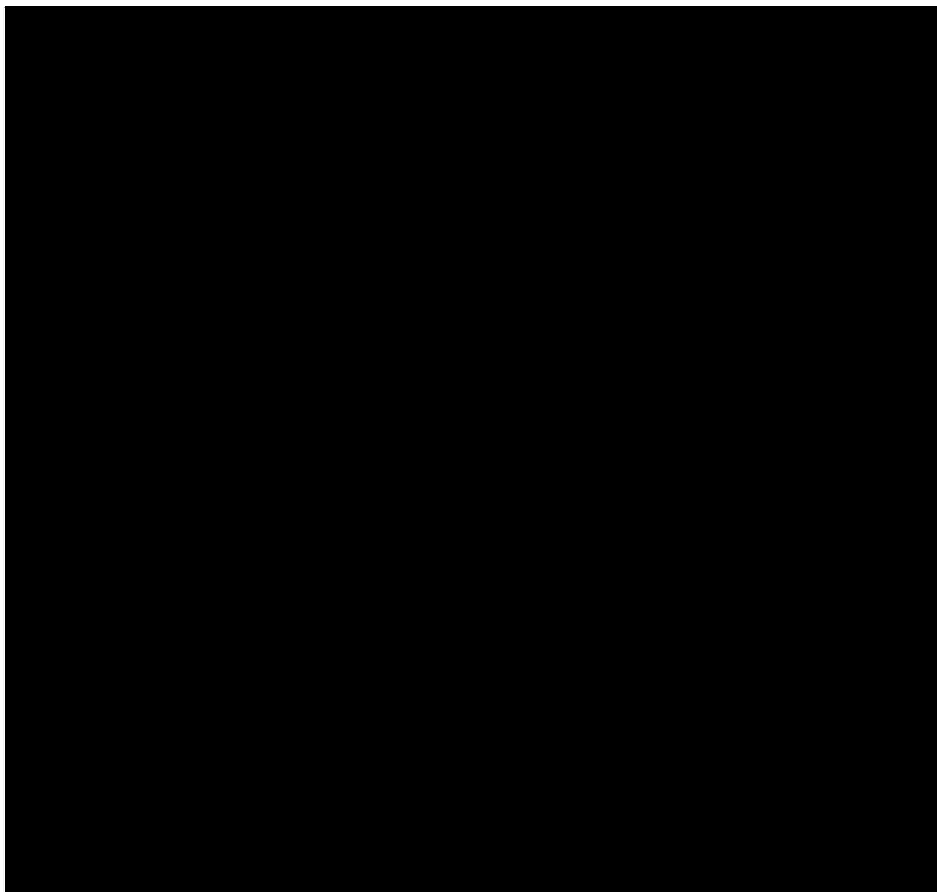
Detailed schedules were maintained of meetings with Stalin in his personal office (although they fail to capture the private meetings in his dacha that were common in the postwar period).<sup>66</sup> Frequent meetings suggest extremely short agency chains and characterize Stalin's (as well as Lenin's)<sup>67</sup> personal handling of state security, despite his massive operational duties as head of the party.

Figure 3.4 shows how Stalin allocated scarce time for meetings in his private office between party and state affairs (which he handled primarily through his first deputies, Molotov and Kaganovich) and state security (which he handled either singly or jointly with Yagoda, Yezhov, or Beria).

As Stalin consolidated his power in 1931 and 1932, he spent one-eighth the time with his state security heads as with his deputies. This ratio increased to one-third of his time in 1933 and 1934. As he began the attack on high-level rivals after Kirov's assassination in December 1934, Stalin spent half as much time with his state security heads as with his deputies. In the relatively tranquil year of 1936, he met with his deputies four times as often as with his state security heads. During the mass operations of 1937 and 1938, he again spent half as much of his time, or even more, with his state security heads as with his deputies.

During mass repression campaigns and purges of top party leaders, Stalin, who was responsible for a vast state and party bureaucracy, appointments, economic policy, and ideology, devoted one-third of his time or more to dealing with state enemies. In more "normal" years, he spent one-fifth to one-quarter of his time on state security as measured by this simple indicator.

We can imagine what was discussed behind closed doors from the written communications between Stalin and his security heads, which likely reflect the tone of private meetings. Stalin closely monitored Yagoda's and Yezhov's investigations and interrogations, as is evidenced by interrogation reports from Yagoda (or his first deputy Prokoviev) to Stalin between May 1935 and July 1936, and 115 "special communications" from Yezhov to Stalin between January 1937 and November



*Figure 3.4.* Stalin's Meetings with his First Deputies and with State Security Heads, 1931–1939. Source: Melbourne Gateway to Research in Soviet History <http://www.melgrosh.unimelb.edu.au>.

1938.<sup>68</sup> In Yezhov's case, there were flurries of special communications, such as eight sent in the ten-day period May 19–29, 1937 or eleven in the twelve-day period November 3–15, 1937.

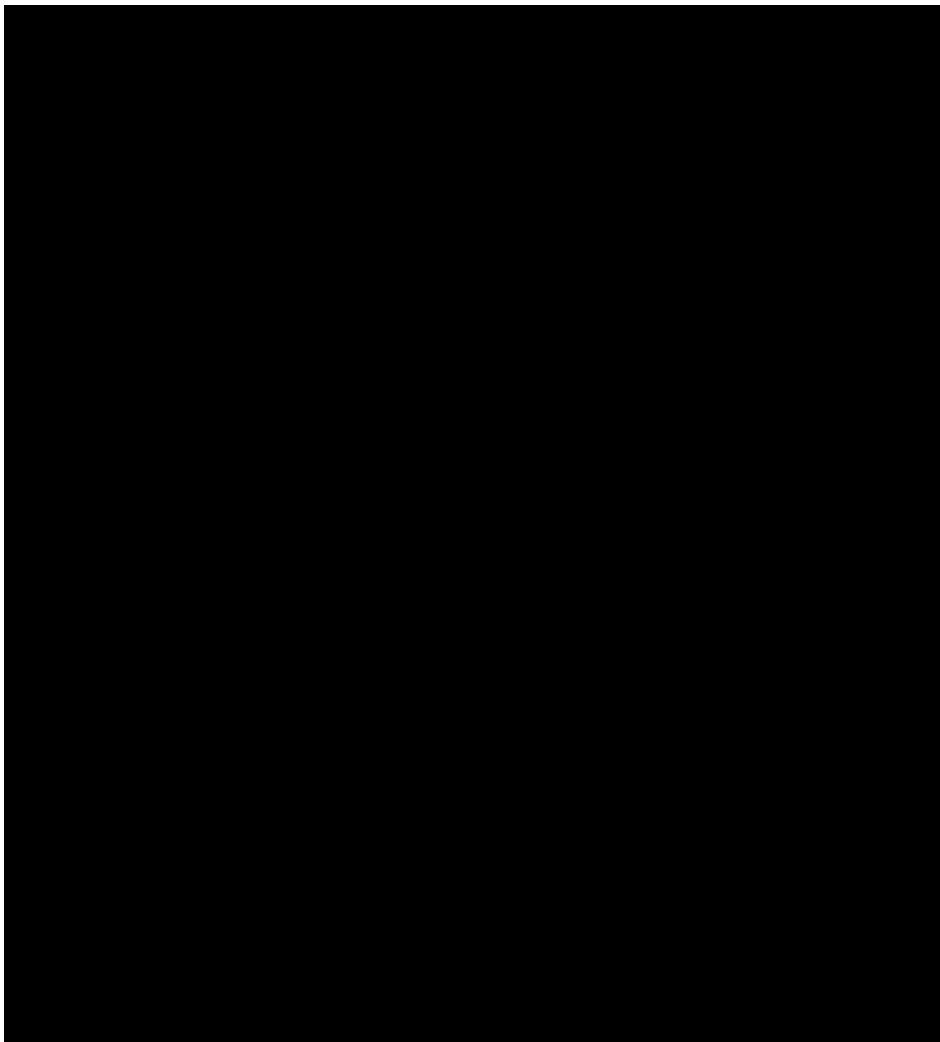
Stalin sometimes shared Yagoda's memos with Politburo colleagues: "To Molotov, Kaganovich, Orzhonikidze, Yezhov, Zhdanov. Get acquainted with this material and then discuss—we need to talk this over. I. Stalin." Each party would reply, such as Molotov "Read, need to dis-

cuss,” or Ordzhonikidze “It is necessary to shoot all these villains.”<sup>69</sup> Stalin offered advice freely, such as to Yagoda’s deputy (Prokoviev): “It is necessary to determine who gave Ivanov information about aviation, to whom he gave this information (Japanese, Poles, Finns, or someone else), when he joined the party, which organization accepted him and who recommended him?”<sup>70</sup> Stalin’s instructions to Yezhov were even more frequent and detailed: “Comrade Yezhov. I am for the removal of the book but, in addition, I insist that its authors be examined and arrested;” or: “Comrade Yezhov. It is necessary to arrest Nodel. Maybe he can tell us something about Uzbek nationalists and Trotsky”; or “Comrade Yezhov. Have the Chekists Salyn’ and Staiko been arrested? Report!”<sup>71</sup> Or: “Comrade Yezhov. Is. Yoffe arrested?”<sup>72</sup> Or: “Comrade. Yezhov. Which Mikhailov? They did not even ask for his full name. What good interrogators!”<sup>73</sup>

Private meetings were used to discuss highly confidential matters, but not to conceal arrest and execution orders, which were passed back and forth routinely as official documents. To save time, Stalin wrote his orders directly on the original document by hand. Stalin circled on interrogation protocols the names of persons to be arrested, and he, along with other Politburo members (such as Molotov and Kaganovich) approved execution lists. His note on Yezhov’s report “About the Physicians’ Plot” reads “For arrest. Stalin.” Stalin scribbled execution orders usually in pencil, such as on Yagoda’s memo “About Measures of Punishment for the Participants in the Counterrevolutionary Group (The Kremlin Case) of May 12, 1935: “Shoot all six members of the counter-revolutionary, terrorist, Trotskyite group of military workers.”<sup>74</sup>

Figure 3.5 shows meetings in Stalin’s private office with Beria and the heads of the new state security ministry from 1940 to the early 1950s. We must be careful in using these figures insofar as personal meetings with Stalin moved to his Moscow suburb dacha, where Beria was a regular visitor.

In the war years Stalin met about as regularly with Beria as he had with Yagoda and Yezhov during dekulakization and mass operations. During the war, Beria was Stalin’s point man on the front. Beria’s NKVD arrested and deported “anti-Soviet” Belorussians, Volga Germans, Kalmyks, Chechens, Tatars, Greeks, and Armenians. Beria’s NKVD conducted brutal actions in the rear, arresting hundreds of thousands of deserters, collaborators, and persons without proper papers. It



*Figure 3.5* Meetings in Stalin's Private Office With Beria and Heads of State Security, 1940–1952. Source: <http://www.melgrosh.unimelb.edu.au>.

punished the families of “traitors,” and it established “filtering points” for the hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens seeking to return to homes in newly regained territory. As the Red Army recaptured territory, Beria conducted purges, reporting to Stalin on January 8, 1944 that he had arrested 931,549 persons of whom 582,515 were soldiers and the rest civilians.<sup>75</sup> As the war ended, the NKVD and NKGB fought against armed elements in liberated areas and the newly annexed regions of the Baltic states, carrying out massive arrests and deportations of Ukrainians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. Stalin also met regularly with Beria in the early postwar years, but these meetings were likely devoted to Beria’s work with state and economic affairs (although we imagine that Beria always kept an eye on state security issues).

Stalin met infrequently with the heads of the state security ministry in his private office, never more than twenty-five meetings per year. We can speculate as to the causes of the low frequency of such meetings. The task of state security may have become less important to Stalin after the war. After all, the Great Terror was supposed to have taken care of enemies “once and for all time.” Stalin may not have developed the trust in Beria’s successors that he had in Beria. A third factor may be that Beria continued to be *de facto* state security czar behind the scenes.

Beria’s apparent transfer of power to the state security agency in 1943 seems out of character, but he, more than anyone, would have understood the advantages of separating state security from the NKVD. (Also Stalin may have wished to keep, not execute, such a trusted associate as Beria). In the aftermath of the Great Terror, it was primarily officials from the GUGB who were executed along with Yezhov. A separate state security ministry gave Beria a buffer and a possible scapegoat. This move (planned by Beria or not) paid off. Until Stalin’s death, prosecutions targeted primarily officers of the Ministry of State Security (NKGB/MGB). Less than one month after Stalin’s death in 1953, Beria professed shock at “learning” of the “crudest violations of Soviet laws [by the MGB],” including the harsh beating of arrestees, round-the-clock handcuffing of hands twisted behind the spine, in some cases lasting several months, lengthy deprivation of sleep, and incarcerating naked prisoners in cold cells.”<sup>76</sup>



## CONCLUSIONS

As Stalin geared up for the “once and for all time” extermination of political enemies, he created a massive state security empire (the NKVD USSR) headed by a loyal subordinate who either shared his ideals or would be removed for not doing so. The NKVD which executed the party purges and mass operations was a one-stop instrument of terror that could arrest and sentence, carry out normal policing, guard borders and inmates located in the Gulag, and process civil records. Dekulakization had been carried out by a less complex, albeit extremely powerful, organization, the OGPU. The OGPU started out as a relatively small number of Chekist-operational officers; other functions such as prisons and police were located under other administrations. Under Yagoda, it had expanded its scope to include the civil police and the prison system, principally the Gulag camps. By 1943, Stalin was again ready for a separation of interior ministry functions from those of state security, and the state security czar, Lavrenty Beria, voluntarily transferred out of state security into state and party work (but presumably kept informed about security). Thereafter, the state security ministry expanded its scope to capture control over the civil police and even extended into the inner reaches of the Gulag until it was again swallowed by Beria’s MVD shortly after Stalin’s death.

The state security system that began under Lenin and evolved under Stalin is what one would expect from a power-maximizing dictator who must ensure the system’s loyalty. There was an extremely short agency chain between Stalin and the actual executors of repression. There were extremely close contacts between the dictator and his security czars. There was no complex regional hierarchy to speak of, and the number of regional administrations expanded, thereby reducing any concentrations of power or collusions.

The degree to which Stalin micromanaged state security is evident in the vast amount of time he spent with his security chiefs and also the detailed manner in which he supervised their work. The amount of attention Stalin devoted to state security ebbed and flowed, but the peak activity occurred as Stalin liquidated the state and party elite in the period 1935–1938. After Yagoda’s and Yezhov’s imprisonment and execution and Beria’s departure as head of the MVD in 1945, Stalin dealt with less well known figures, now heading the state security administration. Al-

though he continued to micromanage them, it was at a much lower level of attention than under Yagoda and Yezhov.

Perhaps Stalin's reduced attention to state security after the war reflects the fact that his major potential enemies had been, to use the Chekist expression of the Civil War years, "transferred under the ground." Clearly the enemies being persecuted under the Lesser Terror—petty thieves, slackers, and drunks—could not compete for Stalin's attention as had the kulaks, Trotskyites, Right-wing Deviationists, and German spies a few years earlier.

## 4 Political Enemies

THIS CHAPTER IS ABOUT the dictator's enemies: how they are defined and how the dictator represents them to the public.

There are a number of potential feedbacks from repression to loyalty. Repression may frighten citizens into becoming more loyal and hence deter disloyalty. If, however, citizens conclude that they may themselves be the targets of repression irrespective of their loyalty, they may become disloyal. If they believe that real enemies are being targeted, their loyalty may increase. If they conclude that the dictator's victims are innocent, support for him may fall. At low levels of repression, there will be less fear of becoming a target and the easier it may be to convince citizens that the repressed are true enemies. At high levels of repression (when your next-door neighbor is arrested), citizens are more likely to conclude that they may be next and that innocents are being repressed.

### PROTECTING AGAINST ENEMIES OF THE WORKER-PEASANT STATE

The foundation of the Soviet system was the supreme authority of the Communist Party, as represented by its supreme leader, Lenin, Stalin, or the Politburo. Insofar as the party supposedly represents the working class, there should be no distinction between the party, its leaders, and

the state. The primary task of the law is to protect “society,” as represented by the party and its leaders. Although democracies vary in degree, the primary objective of law is to protect private persons; in most democratic societies, the law protects individuals from arbitrary actions by the state, such as unlawful search and seizure or confiscation of property without proper compensation.

The early Bolsheviks did not hide their preference for “society” over “individuals.” None other than the “moderate” Nikolai Bukharin spoke of “creating communist human material from capitalist human material.”<sup>1</sup> The old selfish, greedy, egocentric, and lazy “human material” of capitalism should be replaced by a “new socialist man,” who would place the interests of society above his own. Such a society of communist human material would, in theory, demand that the laws protect the state, not individuals, for the state was more important than they.

The early Bolsheviks took a dim view of the constituents—peasants and workers—they were supposed to represent. Peasants were ridiculed in their inner sanctum. Politburo member Mikhail Kalinin showed the Bolsheviks’ low regard for the peasantry in a December 24, 1924 Politburo meeting in a telling quip: “Yes, peasants will complain even about a saint if it is possible to take something from him” (laughter). I am convinced that if Saint Paul had seven desiatins of land, what do you think, would the peasants let him keep them? (Laughter).<sup>2</sup>

Workers were little better. They were characterized as lazy, drunk, slapdash, and aimlessly shifting from job to job.

In their 1930 *Lectures for Courses in Soviet Development*, two experts on Soviet criminal law (one a justice minister, who was later executed under that law’s provisions) confirmed the primacy of the state over the individual: “The goal of criminal law is the defense of the socialist government of workers and peasants.”<sup>3</sup> Crimes were divided into “crimes against the foundation of Soviet order established by the will of workers and peasants and therefore recognized as more dangerous” and a second category of “all other.”<sup>4</sup> Already in 1922, the stated goal of the Russian Republic’s criminal code was “the legal protection of the state from crimes and from socially dangerous elements and the application of punishment and other measures of social protection to offenders of the revolutionary legal order.” This goal was restated in the 1934 Code as “the protection of the socialist state” from “socially dangerous acts” by applying “measures of social protection” to those committing these acts.<sup>5</sup>

Marxist ideology was clear that a new socialist state would have many enemies. The socialist revolution itself would be a class struggle between the workers and the capitalists, which would leave behind capitalist remnants to be liquidated by the “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

The Bolsheviks gained power by force; they could not remain in power without it; and they had many opponents. As their power expanded, so did the definition of enemy of the state. Under Lenin, enemies of the state were those engaging in violence against the Bolshevik order and members of banned parties (often not so different in ideology from the Bolsheviks)—as well as what came to be called “former people”—those identified in one way or another with the old regime. In his final year, Lenin turned on “non-Soviet physicians” or “non-Soviet writers,” who desired to work independently of the state. As Stalin consolidated his power, he first focused on those he perceived as natural enemies of Bolshevism, such as kulaks, clergy, members of banned parties, and “non-Soviet” specialists. As time passed, Stalin’s list expanded to party members who did not support his policies “in their hearts” and to “marginal elements” who did not meet the standards of the “new socialist man.” After Leningrad boss Sergei Kirov’s assassination in December 1934, Stalin’s enemies became the communist elite who failed to meet his standards and needed to be replaced.

## DEFINING ENEMIES OF THE STATE

An enemy of the state in a dictatorship is anyone who the dictator decides is an enemy of the state. In the Leninist-Stalinist state, Lenin, Stalin, or the Politburo decided who was a political enemy and what to do about them. This decision could be rendered as a direct order, such as Stalin’s order to shoot participants in anti-Soviet acts on the Amur and Far East Railroad,<sup>6</sup> or through codified laws.

We could infer the definition of “enemy of the state” through the characteristics of those repressed by the dictator. In fact, in some cases the arrest or execution order gives an exact description of the enemy target. A 1924 OGPU circular gave an expansive list of enemies: “Members of banned parties and organizations, members of the Union of Independent Soil Tillers, titled people, members of nationalist youth organizations, workers in tsarist ministries and police, former border control officials, members of prerevolutionary judicial organizations,

former officials, all officers without exception, secret agents, amnestied persons who worked in responsible positions in regions occupied by White forces, leading persons in cults, merchants, store owners, Nepmen, landowners, large renters of land, successful peasants, those with relatives abroad serving with Whites, foreigners, members of sects, professors, persons earlier suspected of contraband, espionage and other criminal activity, and kulaks.”<sup>7</sup> Such lists do not, however, reveal the general philosophy behind the selection of enemies.

Enemies of the state can also be defined by criminal laws produced by the dictator’s justice officials. Insofar as the judiciary is also an instrument of the party, its laws mirror the views of the leaders of the party.

Deliberations on who constitutes an enemy of the state began in the first days of Bolshevik power and evolved as Stalin stretched the definition to its limit. Soviet justice officials created a distinctive new vocabulary.<sup>8</sup> Their replacement of “crimes” by “socially dangerous acts” and of “punishment” by “measures of social defense” was more than mere rewording.

The Guiding Principles of Criminal Law of 1919 declared that “Crime in a class society is dependent upon class relations.” “Socially dangerous acts” were defined as “any act directed against the Soviet system or infringing the legal order established by peasants and workers.”<sup>9</sup> Acts that endangered society, not the endangering of individuals, such as crimes of violence against persons or against their personal property, were the primary focus.

The replacement of “measures of social defense” for “punishment” reveals that punishment was not retribution or revenge but was for the protection of socialist society.<sup>10</sup> The “social danger” of the criminal and of his actions replaces guilt as a justification for punishment. The court must “consider the personality of the criminal and to what degree the act in the given time and place violates social safety.”<sup>11</sup> The appropriate “measure of social protection” should be determined by the danger posed not only by the action itself but also by the person.”<sup>12</sup>

“Social danger” and “measure of social defense” create an argument for arresting and convicting persons who pose a social danger without the actual commission of an illegal act. A person could be a “social danger” as a consequence of belonging to the wrong ethnicity, class, or party.<sup>13</sup> The 1918 Red Terror decree, for example, was directed against both active resisters and “socially dangerous” persons. It ordered the

Cheka to “arrest all prominent Mensheviks and Right Socialist Revolutionaries and confine them in prisons and to arrest as hostages prominent representatives of the bourgeoisie and confine them in concentration camps.”<sup>14</sup> It also ordered the Cheka to immediately execute all those engaged in armed activity against Soviet power. The Red Terror decree called for punishment of merchants, landowners, former tsarist officials and members of other political parties whether or not they had committed hostile acts.

One of Dzerzhinsky’s Cheka deputies (M. Latsis) summarized the view that it is the person not the crime that counts: “Do not look for evidence that the accused rose up against Soviet power with arms or with words. The first thing you should ask is to which class he belongs, his social origin, his education, and his profession. It is these questions that should decide his fate. This is the essence of Red Terror.”<sup>15</sup> The crime of being a Menshevik, a merchant, or a priest could not be remedied by good behavior.<sup>16</sup> When Perm local officials were briefed by a state security captain on the eve of mass operations, they were told that it was necessary to liquidate former kulaks not for past sins or current transgressions but because they represent a political danger as “a social base for the Rightists.”<sup>17</sup>

Early drafts of the 1922 Criminal Code raised the threat of social harm from future actions: “The danger posed by the individual is evidenced both by actions that do not lead to social harm but speak to the *possibility* [emphasis added] of causing harm.” The 1934 code of the Russian Republic called for the arrest of socially dangerous persons—such as those with responsible positions in the tsarist government, members of banned parties, or “active participants” against the working class—who themselves had not as yet committed a criminal act against the state.<sup>18</sup>

Stalin did not hesitate to put into the “social danger” category acts that might take place in the future. The campaigns against “national contingents” began with Stalin’s September 11, 1937 order to Khabarovsk party officials to deport Koreans residing in the Far East region to Kazakhstan as potential Japanese spies, with the warning “to arrest immediately those sabotaging this operation, whoever they are, and punish them as examples.”<sup>19</sup> This and later deportations of ethnic residents of border areas from the eve of World War II through its end were precautionary measures designed to prevent fifth column activities.

In practice, the Soviet regime, from 1918 onwards, did not hesitate to arrest, imprison, or execute “socially dangerous” persons for being who they were rather than for what they did. In other cases, the “measure of social protection” was for hostile acts. The dekulakization campaign of 1930–1932 imprisoned or executed active resisters but deported nonresisters of the wrong social class.

#### CODIFIED LAWS AND ARTICLE 58

A written criminal code offers the dictator some advantages. If citizens understand what actions constitute crimes, most will avoid them. Such a criminal code can be a powerful instrument of social engineering: It deters actions which society deems harmful.

A written code also offers guidance to the dictator’s repression agents, who might otherwise be confused as to what is or is not a crime. Lacking such guidance, subordinates might endlessly pester the dictator for permissions to arrest or execute, as with USSR Prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky’s incessant requests to shoot the numerous culprits responsible for rail accidents.<sup>20</sup> Stalin’s repressors would naturally err on the side of caution, not being sure whether the dictator’s personal approval was required, as would have been the case when Stalin approved the shooting of a Japanese spy in November 1936.<sup>21</sup>

Stalin’s agents could also not know when Stalin himself would wish to intervene, even in minor matters, such as his order of August 27, 1937 to the Krasnoyarsk party: “The fire at the mill must have been organized by enemies. Take all measures to discover the arsonists and try the guilty parties quickly. The sentence is death. Publish the news of the execution in the local press.”<sup>22</sup> They also had to worry that they could repress the wrong person. During the height of the Great Terror, the Moscow NKVD administration inquired whether it could prosecute a man who produced a letter from Stalin written in 1922.<sup>23</sup> There could never be too much caution.

A third advantage of codified laws is that they provide an aura of legality, both at home and abroad. As an outcast regime, the Bolshevik leaders were sensitive to bad publicity; their concerted public relations campaigns reveal their fear of Western public opinion. When the June 1927 summary execution of twenty White Guards (as a reprisal for the murder of the Soviet ambassador to Poland) set off a firestorm among



European social democrats, the Politburo ordered the prime minister (then Aleksei Rykov) to personally handle the fallout.<sup>24</sup> Justice official Nikolai Krylenko cynically proposed a cosmetic tribunal to satisfy foreign demands for a legal process.<sup>25</sup> Stalin's personal archives contain a March 1938 warning from a Hungarian advisor, Eugen Varga, that mass arrests of political emigrants were demoralizing foreign communists who would be needed abroad in time of war.<sup>26</sup>

Cases involving foreign citizens were stage-managed by the Politburo itself, such as the December 23, 1926 Politburo order for a show trial of Estonian citizens that dictated the punishment (death for the ringleader and prison for accomplices).<sup>27</sup> When a German student was arrested in 1925, the Politburo secretly ordered a reduction in his sentence and instructed justice officials to "enlighten the foreign press about the case through interviews with the judges."<sup>29</sup>

Enemies of the state are typically charged with treason or sedition. The United States Constitution (Article III, Section 3) parsimoniously declares that treason consists "only in levying war against [the United States], or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort." Espionage is prohibited by specific legislation, such as "gathering or delivering defense information to aid foreign governments" or supplying them nuclear technology. Under such treason laws, the number of persons prosecuted is usually small.

The Bolsheviks, both before and after Stalin, applied the charge of treason ("anti-Soviet activity") against an incredibly large number of people. Of the 4.8 million people arrested by the OGPU or NKVD between 1921 and 1938, 3.3 million were charged with counterrevolutionary crimes.<sup>29</sup> The overwhelming majority of these were charged under Article 58 of the Russian Federation Criminal Code "On Counterrevolution." Insofar as the Bolsheviks came to power by revolution, the primary form of treason was counterrevolution, abbreviated as "kr" in Soviet legal writings.

The criminal codes of the Russian Federation (which served as the model for other republics) periodically revised the definition of counterrevolution. When the 1922 code gave a narrow definition of counterrevolution as "actions aimed directly at the overthrow of Soviet power and of the worker-peasant state," a dissatisfied Lenin elicited an amendment that included "diversionary acts" and "active struggle against the working class and revolutionary movement under tsarism as evidenced

by employment in positions of authority or especially in the secret police.” Lenin’s “diversionary acts” became a permanent feature of Soviet criminal law as Article 58-13 of the 1934 code, under which hundreds of thousands were imprisoned in the Gulag.

An amendment of July 10, 1923 significantly broadened counterrevolution to include actions that “attack the basic *political and economic achievements* of the proletarian revolution.”<sup>30</sup> This change made some economic offenses counterrevolutionary crimes, such as the theft of socialist property, the conclusion of contracts unfavorable to the state, and the setting of low prices on state goods.<sup>31</sup> Economic delicts were also criminalized, such as “labor desertion” added in November of 1921 or Article 107 “Against Speculation” of the 1926 code.<sup>32</sup>

The 1934 RSFSR criminal code, which was in effect during the Great Terror, defined “counterrevolution” broadly as “any action directed toward the overthrow, subversion, or weakening of the power of national, republic, and regional worker-peasant governments and councils or toward the subversion or weakening of external security or of the fundamental economic, political, and national gains of the proletarian revolution.”<sup>33</sup>

The fourteen paragraphs of Article 58 list conventional counterrevolutionary crimes—such as espionage, treason or preparations for the overthrow of the government, armed uprisings with counterrevolutionary purposes, or adherence to a foreign state—as offenses punishable by death except under mitigating circumstances. The article also includes “propaganda or agitation, containing a call for the overthrow, subversion, or weakening of Soviet authority or for the carrying out of other counterrevolutionary crimes, and likewise the distribution or preparation or keeping of literature of this nature” (which also included religious or nationalistic material).

The less orthodox provisions of Article 58 count as counterrevolutionary activities those that “undermine state production, transport, trade, monetary relations, or the credit system, or likewise cooperative trade, done with counterrevolutionary purposes”; the “destruction or damage with a counterrevolutionary purpose by explosion, arson, or other means of railroad or other routes and means of transportation, means of public communication, water conduits, public depots and other structures, or state and community property”; and “the failure to perform defined duties or intentionally negligent fulfillment of them,

with the special purpose of weakening the authority of the government and functioning of the state apparatus.”

These provisions of Article 58 offer wide latitude to decide which criticism “weakens state authority” or whether “failure to perform defined duties” or “negligent fulfillment” were intentional.

## EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES

Article 58 was written to define counterrevolutionary crimes so broadly that virtually anyone could be a counterrevolutionary. Even with the cover of such vagueness, dictators dislike rules.<sup>34</sup> Rules weaken the dictator in the eyes of others by implying that the rule is more powerful than the dictator. If Stalin wished to indict Trotskyite leaders for the assassination of Kirov, as in his directive to Yezhov: “Find the assassins among the Zinovievites,” he could not allow rules requiring evidence to stand in his way. He could not allow legal niceties to slow down repression.

Most societies can suspend civil liberties during national emergencies. Martial law restricts the rights of those affected and often substitutes the military for local police. Countries with strong guarantees of civil liberties, such as the United States, can declare martial law during natural disasters or other emergencies. During World War II, citizens of Japanese or German descent were imprisoned without normal due process. In the aftermath of the invasion of Afghanistan, there has been heated debate over the rights of enemy combatants.

Stalin (and Lenin before him) dealt with the vast majority of political enemies through “extraordinary measures.”<sup>35</sup> Extraordinary measures suspended criminal procedures (such as for arrests) and charged state security to repress specific categories of enemies—such as Koreans, Poles, or “returning kulaks”—using simplified judicial proceedings. Extraordinary measures were Stalin’s and Lenin’s equivalent to martial law. Most of Lenin’s and Stalin’s victims were executed, jailed, or deported by extraordinary tribunals under extraordinary decrees.

The first extraordinary measure of the new Bolshevik regime was the October 27, 1917 decree which outlawed the “bourgeois” press and called for the creation of a “new press regime,” enforced by a revolutionary tribunal with extraordinary power to investigate “crimes against the people committed by the press.” It was followed on Septem-

ber 5, 1918 by the extraordinary decree “About Red Terror” which established “revolutionary tribunals vested with extraordinary powers including summary executions. They were, as one commentator explained, designed to “legitimize illegality.”<sup>36</sup>

These and other extraordinary measures were independent of and/or overrode existing criminal law. The October 21, 1919 decree “About the Cheka,” which legitimized extrajudicial repression, was not linked to any criminal laws that existed at the time.<sup>37</sup> As a Cheka officer declared: “For execution we don’t need proof, suspicion, or interrogation. We find the necessary people and that is all.”<sup>38</sup> The 1923 decree “About the Defense of the Revolutionary Order” allowed the declaration of a state of emergency for “serious threats of counterrevolution”—a decree applied to forcing grain from the peasantry.<sup>39</sup>

In some cases, Stalin (the Politburo) gave a general description of the enemy, leaving it to the state security agency to provide a more concise definition in its operational decree. Thus, Yagoda’s February 2, 1930 directive expanded Stalin’s January 30, 1930 list of enemies—“kulak activists, rich kulaks, quasi-landlords and remaining kulaks”<sup>40</sup> to more than twenty categories.<sup>41</sup> Yezhov’s infamous Decree of the NKVD No. 00447 of July 30, 1937, which initiated the mass operations of the Great Terror, expanded Stalin’s brief list of “returning kulaks and criminals” to fifty “contingents” for arrest.

Significantly, extraordinary decrees set aside trials by regular courts in favor of extrajudicial tribunals of the Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, or MVD. The cases of those arrested in the 1930–1933 dekulakization campaign, according to Yagoda’s OGPU Directive No. 44/21 of February 2, 1930, were to be “concluded expeditiously by troikas created by the OGPU according to an extrajudicial legal process.”<sup>42</sup> The OGPU’s August 13, 1933 operational order “About Extrajudicial Repression of Citizens Violating Passport Laws” gave “passport troikas” the authority to cleanse cities of undesirables,<sup>43</sup> and their work was praised by USSR Prosecutor, Andrei Vyshinsky, as “achieving the quickest clearing of cities of criminal and déclassé elements.”<sup>44</sup> The mass operations of the Great Terror were prepared by a July 1, 1937 Politburo (Stalin) telegram: “The Central Committee orders that the composition of the troikas be presented within five days along with the numbers to be shot or deported.”<sup>45</sup>

During the Red Terror (1918–1921), summary justice prevailed with

little effort to provide a façade of legality. The decision to execute captured prisoners was made by vote of the arresting Chekist officers.<sup>46</sup> During dekulakization, troikas sentenced the “most active” enemies of Soviet power, but hundreds of thousands of families were summarily deported in crowded rail cars to remote regions without troika action.<sup>47</sup> In other cases, extraordinary measures were combined with criminal codes. The extrajudicial troikas of the Great Terror usually listed the statute of the criminal code under which the defendant was convicted (mostly Article 58). In a number of cases, such as the September 1, 1937 death sentence of a Vasily Sinel’nikov by the Moscow troika, no criminal code was cited. Rather his crime was “hostility towards Soviet power.”<sup>48</sup>

In other cases, to provide a veneer of legality, court proceedings were followed. The 1928 Shakhty trials were organized in Moscow, prosecuted by the chief of the Revolutionary Tribunal (Nikolai Krylenko) and tried before the Supreme Court before a public audience, according to a script carefully orchestrated by the Politburo.<sup>49</sup> The Shakhty trials were highlighted by ritualistic confessions of guilt, elicited by the OGPU, involving participation in a Polish-German plot to destroy Soviet industry.<sup>50</sup> The trials were only the first salvo in the battle against wreckers. In October of 1929 five former generals working in war industry were sentenced to death for spying. Half of engineering and technical workers in the Donbas had been arrested by 1931.<sup>51</sup> The façade of courts and prosecutors made little difference. Sentences were decided in advance as part of the script.

During the purges that followed Kirov’s assassination, Stalin directed a number of cases to “courts” and to public prosecutions. In April 1936, the Politburo ordered that the trial of engineers associated with a mining accident be open to the public with instructions to execute the defendants including one German citizen and to publish the results in the press.<sup>52</sup> During the mass operations of 1937 and 1938, some defendants were assigned to courts and to public trials, at the initiative of Stalin: On August 31, 1937, Stalin ordered regional party secretaries to move from closed NKVD trials to open court trials to mobilize peasant sentiment. He also ordered that a case of wrecking in a coal mine in Stalino be tried by local prosecutors in the courts, that the defendants be executed and the results published in the local press.<sup>53</sup>

The injection of legal processes did not affect the outcome. When the

Politburo or Stalin directed cases to formal court proceedings, they also gave the preordained verdict!

## TYPES OF ENEMIES

A dictator may be expected to single out those whom he perceives to be threats to him and his regime. Gratuitous or random repression would create costs and could reduce loyalty. A rational dictator must therefore have a reason to place a person or group of persons on his enemies list.

In the new Marxist-Leninist state, brought into existence by a violent socialist revolution and civil war, supporters of the old regime were, of course, enemies, as were earlier rivals for political power, such as the Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik parties. In fact, it would be such enemies that would be taken care of first. It was not until the Bolsheviks themselves resolved the power struggle for succession and decided on the policies of Stalin's Great Breakthrough that they could clearly identify additional enemies, and consequently the list of enemies expanded along with Stalin's power. We enumerate below different categories of enemies that Stalin singled out.

### Kulaks

Kulaks were village leaders, and they had the most to lose from collectivization and the introduction of Soviet power into the countryside. From 1918 onwards, the Cheka and OGPU barraged the Politburo and Stalin with reports of kulak misdeeds and resistance.<sup>54</sup> Virtually every rural protest, demonstration, or catastrophe was blamed on the kulaks as Stalin received one alarming report after another from the OGPU's rural informants: "From Voronezh: Peasants are saying 'only war can improve our lot.'" From Tambovsk: A letter was received by authorities headed "Death to Soviet power and communism." From Riazan: Peasants are complaining: "The people in power don't know what to do and they love only their own pocketbooks."<sup>55</sup>

Soviet power in the countryside was notoriously weak, and the countryside accounted for 80 percent of the population. A dictator could not consolidate power without gaining a stranglehold over the countryside, which would not be possible, according to Stalin, without eliminating

hostile rural elements. As Stalin consolidated power and was ready to move forward with collectivization, the Politburo had to decide whether kulaks would be allowed to integrate into collective farms; whether they should continue private farming under onerous taxes and exactions; or should something else be done with them? Few anticipated Stalin's shocking answer of December 1929: the "liquidation of the kulaks as a class"!

A few years earlier, Stalin had publicly defended the kulaks together with his erstwhile allies, Nikolai Bukharin and Aleksei Rykov, in heated Politburo sessions.<sup>56</sup> Stalin's colleagues were now stunned to hear his proposal to "liquidate" an entire class of Soviet citizens, who according to the statistical agency numbered a half-million households in the mid-1920s.<sup>57</sup> Although it was clear that kulaks were not avid supporters of the Bolshevik regime, the two had coexisted for almost a decade. For the first time, Stalin confronted state security with the task of repressing hundreds of thousands or even millions of persons.

Dekulakization was announced in the extraordinary Politburo Decree of January 30, 1930, succinctly entitled the "About the Liquidation of Kulak Households."<sup>58</sup> Kulaks actively resisting collectivization were to be imprisoned or executed; other kulak households were to be deported or resettled. The legal framework for liquidating an entire class was already in place. Kulaks represented a "socially dangerous" group opposed to Soviet power. As "socially dangerous" elements they deserved "acts of social protection," such as execution, imprisonment, or deportation. They were opposed to collectivization, which was to be a "basic political and economic achievement of the proletarian revolution." The large numbers of kulaks and the extreme danger they posed required that their liquidation be carried out as an extraordinary measure and that their cases be handled by extrajudicial tribunals (*troikas*) and not by regular courts.

As the OGPU-directed dekulakization campaign of 1930–1932 unfolded, it was applied against any person or group opposed to Soviet power in the countryside, such as religious officials, former officials of the old regime, or persons engaged in commerce. The primary form of "social protection" was deportation to remote regions of Siberia or Kazakhstan to remove opponents from the "region of continuous collectivization," where they could do the most harm.

Dekulakization was only the start of kulak repression. Those who fled to the cities were later targets of campaigns to purge the cities of “unclean” elements. Nor were kulaks who had served out their terms of punishment immune from further repression. Stalin’s order that initiated the Great Terror in 1937 targeted “criminals and returning kulaks.”

### Independent Thinkers

Kulaks numbered in the tens of thousands. There were fewer “independent thinkers” but they were nonetheless regarded as dangerous. State security was tasked to protect the party’s “leading role,” its monopoly over social, political, and economic life. Any alternative source of power could draw loyalty away from the party and its leaders and coalesce into an organized opposition, even if it started from humble beginnings. Any independent thinker would have to be brutally repressed. From the very first days of power, the Bolsheviks clearly understood that “non-Soviet” physicians, writers, or philosophers represented a source of alternate power and influence. If the science of statistical analysis produced a result that contradicted the current party line, it had to be disregarded as “anti-Soviet.”<sup>59</sup> “Non-Soviet physicians,” who could not scientifically confirm the party line that Lenin was a genius, were enemies of the people.<sup>60</sup> Cooperative writers, such as Maxim Gorky or Mikhail Sholokhov, were handled with kid gloves. Sholokhov was even included in Politburo meetings and was able to complain directly to Stalin of NKVD slander, during the height of the Great Terror when other writers were being executed.<sup>61</sup> Intellectuals, writers, and scientists, however, were given privileges only as long as they did not stray from official ideology or show signs of independence. Otherwise, they were also candidates for repression.

Religious leaders were similarly “socially dangerous.” They offered a vision that contradicted the official party line that “religion is the opium of the masses.” Moreover, they had a strong base of potential followers that could coalesce around a charismatic leader. Even after two decades of antireligious propaganda, the majority of Russians declared themselves believers in 1937.

The first organized purge of “anti-Soviet” intellectuals was initiated



by Lenin himself; it provided a road map for the handling of intellectuals throughout the Soviet era. The purge was initiated by a May 23, 1922 complaint from the minister of health (N. A. Semashko) that an “anti-Soviet” congress of physicians had decided to elect their own officers and maintain their own publishing house.<sup>62</sup> The alarmed Lenin instructed Stalin “to show this to Dzerzhinsky with extreme secrecy (no copies) and to all members of the Politburo and to prepare a necessary directive (two-week deadline?).”<sup>63</sup>

Dzerzhinsky’s OGPU report attacked not only the “anti-Soviet” physicians, but a wide range of “anti-Soviet activities in professional organizations, universities, scientific societies, administrative conferences, and in trusts, cooperatives, and trade organizations.”<sup>64</sup> On June 8, 1922, the Politburo launched an attack on “anti-Soviet intelligentsia groupings” which “filtered” incoming university students by means of strict limits on nonproletarians and checks of political reliability, restricted meetings of students and of professors, and banned independent publishing activities. A special committee was empowered to banish intellectuals abroad or to remote areas of internal exile if a more stern punishment was not required.<sup>65</sup>

After the Politburo rejected the commission’s first enemies list as “unsatisfactory because of its brevity and insufficient substantiation,”<sup>66</sup> the OGPU submitted in early August a list of 186 anti-Soviet intellectuals for arrest and deportation. The list included writers (E. I. Zamiatin, “a concealed White Guardist”), philosophers (Nikolai Berdiaev, a “religious counterrevolutionist”), economists and agronomists (N. D. Kondratiev, “associated with an anti-Soviet journal”), and religious figures (V. V. Abrikosov, “close friend of Patriarch Tikhon”).<sup>67</sup> On August 22, the ever accurate OGPU sent a budget to Stalin for the projected cost of foreign exile.<sup>68</sup> When Ukrainian authorities hesitated to deliver a list of Ukrainian intellectuals, the OGPU complained: “Further indecision may create an impression of the lack of conviction of Soviet power.”<sup>69</sup> Getting rid of independent thinkers was a serious undertaking; hesitant officials were jeopardizing Soviet power. The intellectuals exiled abroad proved to be fortunate. Those who stayed behind, such as Kondratiev, were executed. Whereas Lenin’s lists were of hundreds of intellectuals, Stalin’s lists were of thousands, and the punishment was not the relative luxury of exile to London, Prague, or Paris, but the Gulag or death.

## Criminals

Common criminals are usually dealt with by the regular police, not by state security. Lenin's and Stalin's Russia was an exception. That common criminals were, at least in part, handled by state security was indeed an unusual feature of the Soviet system.

In the first days of Soviet power, Bolshevik authorities were hard pressed to distinguish bandit groups from White Guard forces. The Red Terror decree gave the Cheka broad powers of summary execution.<sup>70</sup> A Cheka decree of March 18, 1920 listed banditry among the crimes punishable by death.<sup>71</sup> With severe shortages of food and supplies, thieves and speculators were often punished severely by Cheka forces, including execution.

Article 58 itself spells out the relationship between ordinary crime and counterrevolution; criminals, especially if organized into groups, can threaten "economic achievements." Dzerzhinsky himself was ready to wash the Cheka's hands of common criminals in early 1921: "The working class knows how to deal with weak and insignificant comrades but prisons only know how to pervert them."<sup>72</sup> However, the OGPU's founding document stated as its purpose "to unite revolutionary forces of the republic in the battle against political and economic counterrevolution, espionage, and banditry"<sup>73</sup> A Politburo decree of April 27, 1922 "gave the OGPU the right of summary execution of armed robbers."<sup>74</sup> Yagoda increasingly regarded organized crime as political crime,<sup>75</sup> stating in April 1935, as NKVD head, that "any criminal act, by its nature, is nothing other than an expression of class struggle."<sup>76</sup> Although Yagoda was charged with paying too much attention to common crime at the expense of political intelligence,<sup>77</sup> his successor, Yezhov, found himself again in the struggle against criminal elements in July 1937. Notably, criminals were singled out as an "enemy" category in Stalin's telegram initiating the Great Terror.<sup>78</sup>

## Cadres

Article 58 includes activities that "undermine state production" or that "destroy or damage" transportation or communications facilities and state enterprises with the intent of counterrevolution. State production, transport, and communications are directed by managers and offi-

cials, who are the “cadres” of economic and state administration. It is the job of these cadres to avoid the undermining, destruction, or damage of the facilities they administer. Insofar as the Soviet economy was planned, its cadres were given plans to fulfill. The “plan was the law,” and it was the legal obligation of cadres to fulfill the plan, and the clause in Article 58 dealing with “failure to perform defined duties or intentionally negligent fulfillment of them” made violation of this obligation a counterrevolutionary offense.

Stalin, in a May 4, 1935 speech to graduates of the Red Army Academies, addressed the criminal liability of cadres with his famous slogan “cadres decide all.”<sup>79</sup> Although subject to various interpretations, Stalin’s slogan meant in the context of law that most failures, errors, and missteps are due to human causes, and that the party and state security must therefore establish whether such causes were deliberate. Few cadres would have wished to be placed in a situation where an external commission decided whether their error was committed with “counterrevolutionary” intent.

Under the “cadres decide all” principle, anti-Soviet acts did not even have to be deliberate. “Criminal actions are premeditated not only when the perpetrator desired the harmful result.” Rather the perpetrator acts “with criminal negligence when he could have foreseen the consequences and in that case he is required to have foreseen it.”<sup>80</sup> Individuals were held to extreme standards of foresight; if they did not anticipate the full results of their actions, they were counterrevolutionaries.<sup>81</sup>

The battle against “wreckers” began before Stalin’s consolidation of power. In 1926, more than half of the technical specialists and engineers in eastern Ukrainian mining operations and in Baku oil fields had to answer to wrecking charges.<sup>82</sup> From 1927 onwards, wrecking cases appeared regularly on the agenda of the Politburo, such as at its April 21, 1927 meeting, which ordered justice official Nikolai Krylenko to issue death sentences to those guilty of causing a factory fire. An unannounced 1928 OGPU inspection of the railroads found that reserve steam engines “were almost fully inoperative” and complained that “not one of these educated engineers communicated to the ministry that the situation was catastrophic,” prompting OGPU Minister Yagoda’s promise: “Give us time and we’ll come to the conclusion that wrecking in rail transport is part of a broader conspiracy.”<sup>83</sup> An August 2, 1928

Politburo decree “About Specialists” ordered the OGPU to arrest “only the truly evil counterrevolutionaries, wreckers, and spies” in the most important industrial and transport organizations.<sup>84</sup> By June of 1930, more than one and a half million specialists had been investigated.<sup>85</sup>

“Cadres decide all” placed managers and administrators in the impossible position of having to prove their intentions. In his 1937 interrogation, former heavy industry deputy minister and head of Central Committee publications B. M. Tal’ futilely attempted to draw the distinction between a crime and a mistake:

Q: You conducted battles against the party for many years. Stop denying it and give your confession.

TAL’: I did not lead a struggle against the party. I made some mistakes in my work for which I am prepared to accept responsibility.

Q: You are arrested for *crimes* not for *mistakes*.

TAL’: I admit that my *mistakes* caused harm, but I do not carry out *crimes* against the party. I allow that my missteps and mistakes could objectively lead to wrecking.

Q: Call things by their correct name. You will not be allowed to avoid a direct answer. When and how did you start your battle against the party?

Stalin had no difficulty in determining whether the unfortunate Tal’ had made a mistake or committed a crime. Upon reading this interrogation protocol, Stalin wrote to his deputy Georgy Malenkov: “Comrade Malenkov: Read this and have Yezhov arrest all the scoundrels mentioned in the confession of the traitor, Tal’.”<sup>86</sup>

This “confession” shows the fine line that cadres had to walk between mistakes and crimes. It was not up to the cadre to decide what was a mistake and what was a crime, but to the OGPU, the NKVD, or Stalin. The promising career of Stalin’s deputy, Georgy Malenkov, was almost ended in the early postwar period by crashes of military aircraft produced under his supervision. Punishment for industrial or transportation accidents remained standard fare up to the end of the Soviet system.

Punishment of cadres served the dictator’s purposes in more ways than simply by keeping managers and administrators on their toes. The party was in charge of directing state and economic activity. If the wisdom of its orders came under attack, the very foundation of the Soviet dictatorial system could be questioned. As noted by an eminent historian: “When something went wrong, Stalin demanded that the culprit be found and severely punished,” because “if there is no culprit for fail-

ures that occurred at lower levels, they might be attributed to those at the top.”<sup>87</sup>

“Cadres decide all,” however, imposed a number of costs. Yagoda’s OGPU deputy (Agranov) warned in 1935 that “given the massive numbers of accidents and wrecks, we cannot follow the line of mass arrests for every incident.”<sup>88</sup> Investigating charges of wrecking was extremely costly in terms of manpower. Almost 500 state security agents were charged with the battle against wrecking and diversions in industry and transport versus the 420 in counterintelligence and in the secret political department.<sup>89</sup> The Great Terror decimated the ranks of managers. Executed and imprisoned managers were replaced by newcomers welcomed at their new places of work by empty administrative offices.<sup>90</sup>

The extreme punishment of managerial mistakes took another toll. If honest mistakes were not to be distinguished from deliberate sabotage, managers were better off taking no risks at all. Trains or planes were not dispatched if the weather was threatening. Managers learned to build huge safety factors into plans. New technologies were avoided like the plague because they created risks of plan shortfalls.

### Family Members

Normal Western justice does not, as a matter of principle, punish family, friends, and relatives of criminals. Under Lenin and Stalin such punishments were routine and stemmed from Bolshevik fears that class enemies could infect others. In a symbolic use of language, Stalin described political enemies as “‘unclean’ as applied in the folk vernacular to those with whom food should not be shared.”<sup>91</sup> Those in closest contact with class enemies were likely to be infected themselves and, as such, must either be arrested or, at a minimum, isolated. OGPU Directive No. 44, which initiated dekulakization in February 1930, declared: “Family members of those arrested and sentenced to concentration camps or to the highest measure of punishment should be deported to northern regions, taking into consideration the presence of working age members and the degree of social danger they pose.” In the 1930–1933 deportations, the unit of repression was not the individual but the household. By September 1936, more than a quarter-million households containing a million persons were confined in special settlements in Siberia and Central Asia.<sup>92</sup>

Throughout World War II, families of “traitors to the motherland” were sentenced to three to five years in prison plus confiscation of property, a punishment applied to more than two thousand family members as of June 1942. The longest prison terms were reserved for the ten thousand families of servicemen charged with collaborating with German occupation forces.<sup>93</sup>

Article 58-12 made it a counterrevolutionary crime not to report an impending counterrevolutionary act, and it was common to punish spouses and children under this provision. The wife of an NKVD official was imprisoned, despite her protestations of innocence, because “According to the confession of Zaionchkovsky, she knew about the counterrevolutionary acts of her husband.”<sup>94</sup> Faced with the threat of repression, wives could only save themselves by informing against their husbands. Former agriculture minister Ia. A. Yakovlev, after denying charges that he had cooperated with the tsarist Okhrana, could only plead for “time to think this over” when his interrogator told him: “Your wife, who has lived with you for many years, also gave a declaration that, from your words, she knew about your cooperation with the Petrograd Department of the Okhrana. How can you answer this?”<sup>95</sup>

Yezhov’s August 1937 Decree No. 00486 “About the Repression of Wives and the Placement of Children of Those Convicted of Betrayal of the Motherland” sent the wives of those convicted of counterrevolution to the Gulag along with “socially dangerous children,” except for pregnant women and wives who turned in their husbands. Underage children were to be sent to NKVD orphanages.<sup>96</sup>

The punishment of family members was strictly applied in high-level cases. The wives and children of purged Politburo members were routinely executed, imprisoned, or exiled. The wife of Politburo member Aleksei Rykov was shot two days after him and Yagoda’s wife, children, and close relatives were executed.<sup>97</sup> Nikolai Bukharin’s wife was sent to the Gulag.

## Marginals

All societies have their “down-and-out” populations. Such “margin-als” do not have a job, they may be drunkards or addicts, they beg or hustle for a living, and they may belong to ethnic minorities, such as gypsies. Although marginals are unpopular in some societies and the

subject of pity in others, they are rarely considered as enemies of the state.

Both Stalin and Hitler repressed “marginals”—gypsies, homosexuals, beggars, drunks, vagabonds, and the mentally retarded. Hitler’s avowed rationale was racial purity but it could also have been an appeal to the baser sentiments of segments of his own population. Stalin’s attack on marginals may have had similar roots. Both Hitler and Stalin also feared that the “infection of the population” by marginal elements would sap the nation of its strength and, in Stalin’s case, threaten the “economic achievements” of Soviet power.

One of the most unusual features of Soviet treatment of marginals is that they were, at various times, handled by state security rather than by the police or public welfare officers. The OGPU arrested more than 160,000 marginals (labeled “socially dangerous” or “asocial and dangerous elements”) between 1926 and 1934.<sup>98</sup> Its successor, the NKVD, ceased publishing arrest statistics for marginals.

Marginals were unlike other categories of Stalin’s list of enemies to be dealt with by the OGPU or NKVD, where a case can be made that it was rational for a power-maximizing dictator to repress such people. Clearly, there were not enough marginals to constitute a threat to his power; nor could they pose an imminent threat to the “economic achievements of Soviet power.” Perhaps they were just an easy target for a dictator who did not condone human failure.

#### IMAGE VERSUS REALITY: WHO WERE STALIN’S ENEMIES?

The OGPU, NKVD, and MVD maintained secret statistics on enemies convicted, their demographic characteristics, and their offenses.<sup>99</sup> Some of these statistics could be fudged. In many cases, the charge was arbitrary and had little to do with the actual defendant. Carpenters and miners were charged with belonging to diversionary groups headed by persons they did not know. Villagers telling jokes about Stalin or complaining about their hard life were charged with anti-Soviet agitation. OGPU and NKVD statisticians could manipulate the social class of defendants. On other indicators, such as age, sex, and education, there was less room to obfuscate and perhaps less reason to do so.

Sentencing statistics for 1934 break down the 196,717 convictions by NKVD tribunals into thirty-four categories. Thirty percent were cadres

of one kind or another convicted of wrecking, accidents, and occupational crimes, and another 20 percent were convicted of theft of socialist property and speculation. Five percent were “socially harmful elements,” “marginals,” or “former persons.” Thus the majority of those convicted in the relatively “normal” year of 1934 by NKVD tribunals were not political criminals. Only 17 percent were convicted of “political crimes” (terror, espionage, counterrevolutionary uprisings, treason, diversions, anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, and belonging to banned parties).

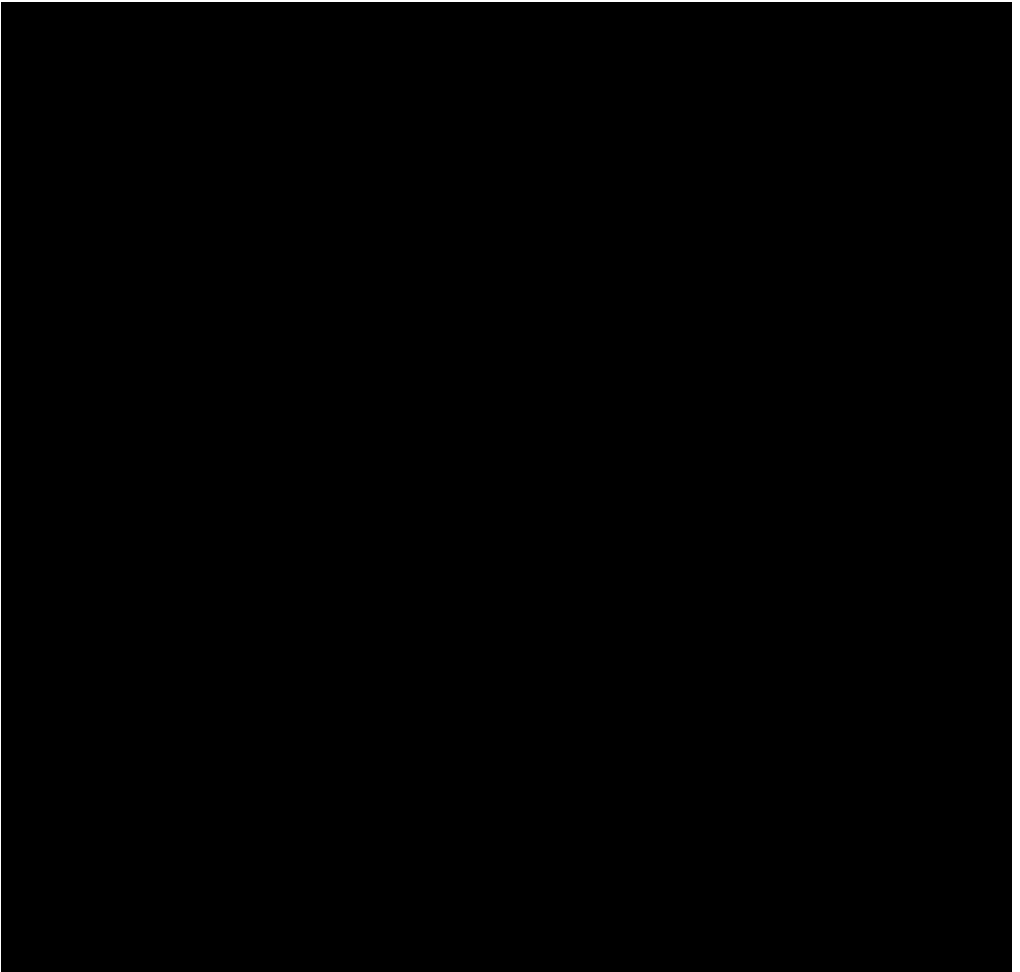
Figure 4.1 shows that the proportion of political to economic crimes varied considerably. During the mass operations of 1937–1938, most convictions were for political crimes under Article 58. Political crimes also dominated during dekulakization. However, the surprising message is that, other than in years of mass repressions, state security tribunals sentenced more people for wrecking and occupational crimes and theft than for political crimes.

Although the sentencing categories in Figure 4.1 depended on the whims and political instructions of OGPU and NKVD tribunals, other characteristics, such as age, sex, and gender were not subject to interpretation. This fact may explain why the NKVD ceased publishing information on the characteristics of those convicted after 1930, for they paint a picture of enemies of the people much different from that of Soviet propaganda.

Figure 4.2 reveals that Stalin’s enemies had little education. In fact, between 1923 and 1930, the percentage of those ranging from illiterate to having primary education ranged from 73 to 91. Given that the Soviet Union was primarily populated by relatively poorly educated people, these percentages are perhaps not surprising. The educational characteristics of victims convicted by Lenin, the Politburo, and then Stalin reflect what a random drawing would have produced except for the fact that women made up 10 percent or less of the victims.

The image of the crafty and devious “enemy of the people” is belied by the fact that relatively few had education beyond primary schooling. In this regard, the OGPU’s and NKVD’s victims were not unlike those who arrested and tried them. In most cases, Chekist officers with only an elementary education arrested, interrogated and sentenced defendants no better educated than they. The characterization by the son of a former high NKVD official confirms that most of the victims of the

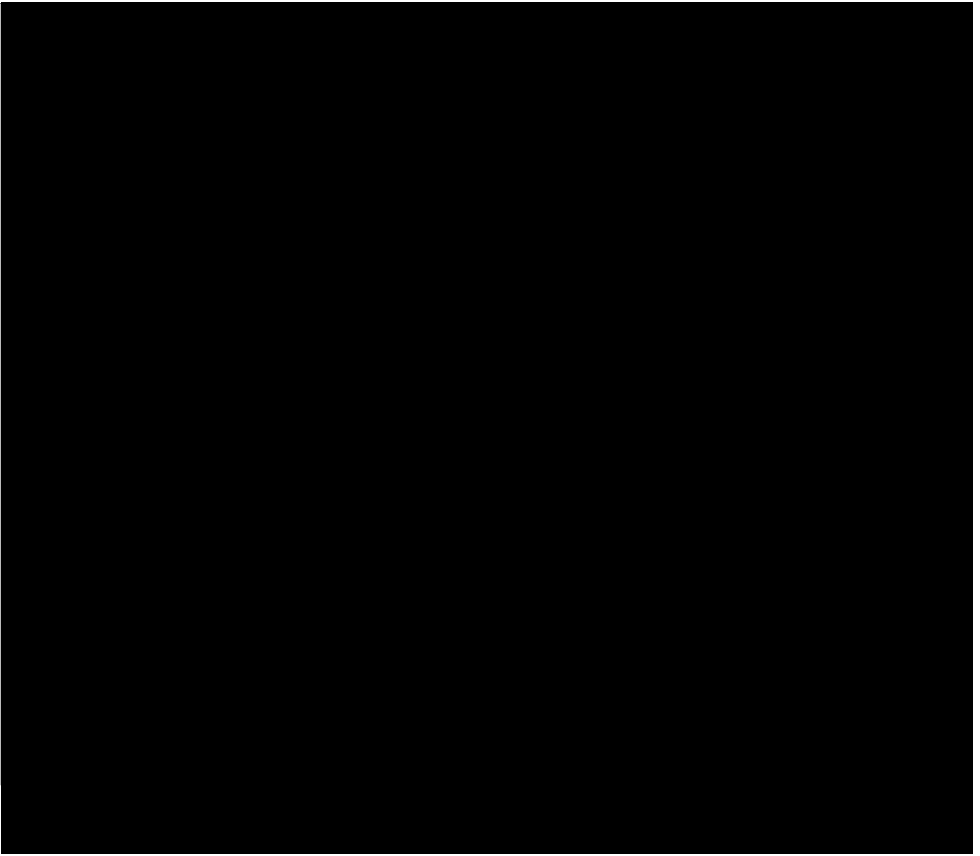




*Figure 4.1.* Sentencing Categories, OGPU/NKVD Tribunals, 1923–1939. Source: Mozokhin, [www.fsb.ru](http://www.fsb.ru), February 22, 2005.

Great Terror were simple people—collective farmers heard to say “collectives do not give positive results,” villagers singing anti-Soviet ditties, and ordinary gossips—who had no idea that their actions would lead to prison or worse.<sup>100</sup> Appendix 3 gives a list of names of victims of repression from a small town, notable only for their ordinariness.

We suspect that the NKVD/MVD continued throughout its existence to arrest and sentence poorly educated citizens from the main pool of potential enemies and for this reason ceased publishing statistics. Even

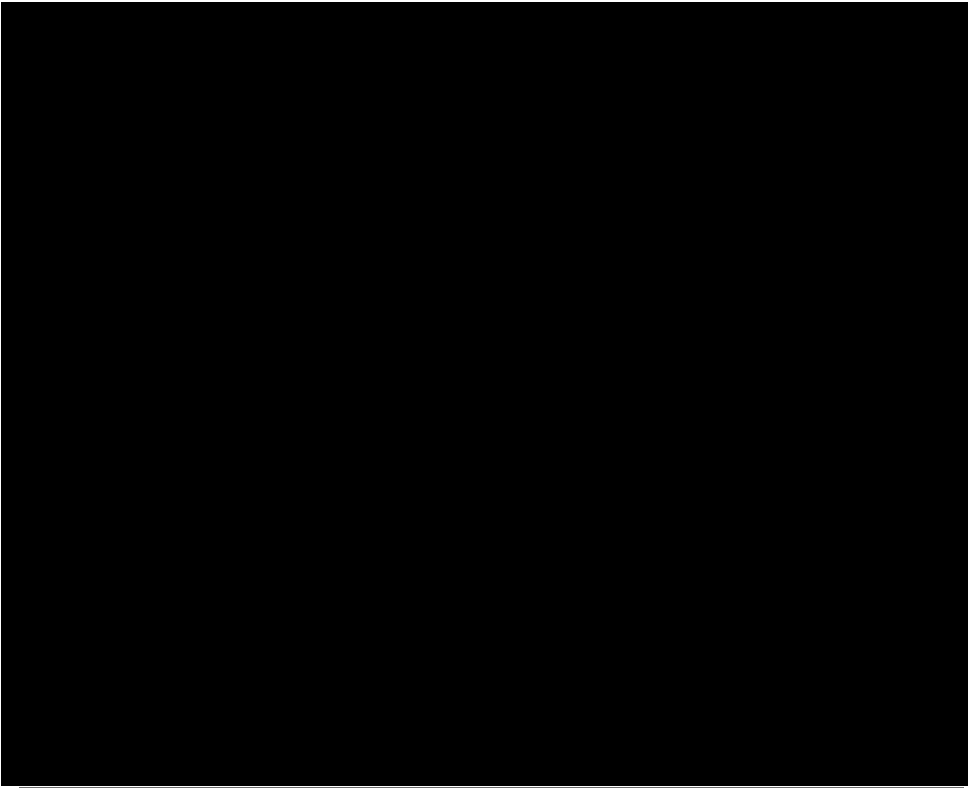


*Figure 4.2.* Education of Persons Sentenced by OGPU/NKVD Tribunals, 1923–1930. Source: Mozokhin, [www.fsb.ru](http://www.fsb.ru), February 22, 2005.

though it was unlikely that such information would see the light of day, it was better for it not to be gathered at all.

Stalin publicly placed great hope in the “new” generation of Soviet men. They would be untainted by the past and would be the primary beneficiaries of his generous education and training programs. Indeed, this would make sense for a dictator concerned about the loyalty of those who had worked under the old regime. We would thus expect this dictator to select his victims from older generations.

Figure 4.3 shows that, for the years in which data are available (1926–1930), the OGPU did not spare those least infected by the ideas

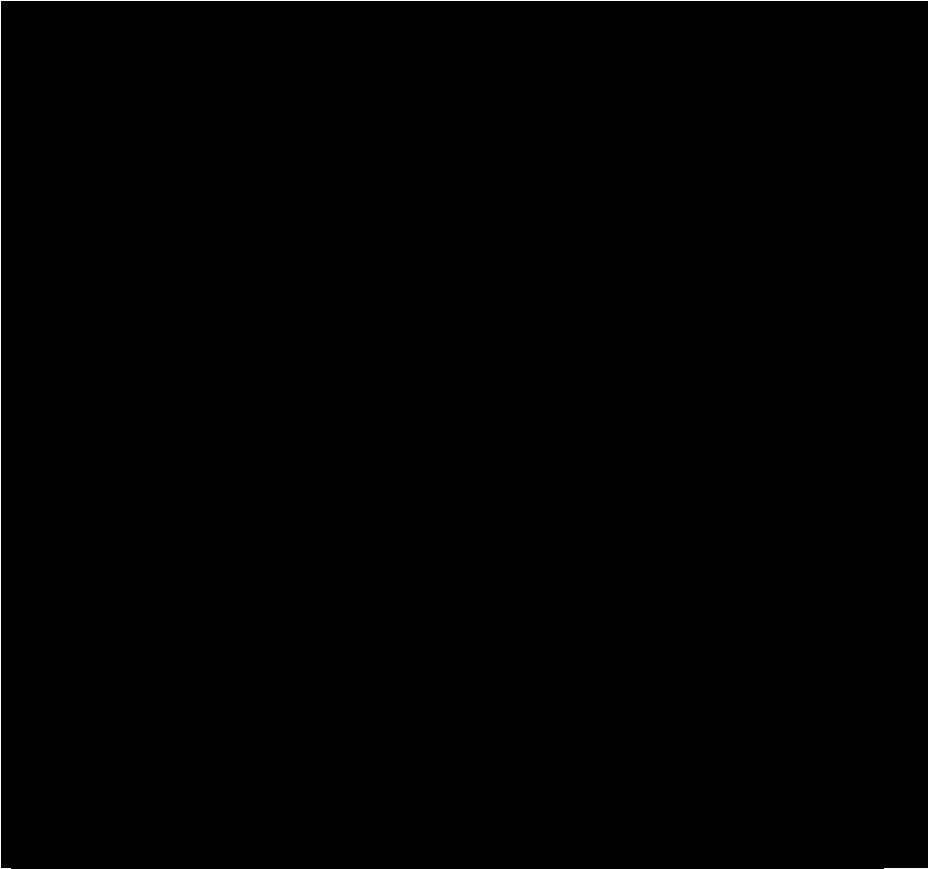


*Figure 4.3.* Ages of Those Convicted by OGPU/NKVD Tribunals, 1926–1930.  
Source: Mozokhin, [www.fsb.ru](http://www.fsb.ru), February 22, 2005.

of the past—those thirty years old and younger. From 1925 to 1928, an average of half of those convicted by OGPU tribunals were in this age group. It was only with mass dekulakization that the majority of Stalin's victims came to be over the age of thirty.

The Politburo and Stalin claimed that they ruled on behalf of workers and peasants. We would therefore expect that their state security would convict the enemies of workers and peasants, not the very workers and peasants in whose name they ruled.

Figure 4.4 shows the social class of those convicted by OGPU/NKVD tribunals between 1923 and 1934. We imagine that OGPU/NKVD statisticians would have wanted to keep the numbers of workers and peasants convicted as low as possible, and there was considerable room to



*Figure 4.4.* Class Origins of Persons Convicted by OGPU/NKVD Tribunals.

Source: Mozokhin, [www.fsb.ru](http://www.fsb.ru), February 22, 2005. For peasants, we use those persons classified as middle or poor peasants and collective farmers. For workers, we take only those persons listed as workers.

maneuver. Peasants, for example, could be easily placed in the kulak class or otherwise characterized as having hostile class origins.

The remarkable story of Figure 4.4 is that, despite the expectation of low numbers of worker-peasant victims, the figures are not low. From 1923 to 1926, the majority of those convicted were workers and peasants. Even in 1930 and 1932 when extra care was supposedly taken not to convict middle and poor peasants, workers and peasants accounted for the majority of those convicted.

## FRAMING ENEMIES TO MAINTAIN LOYALTY

The theory of the power-maximizing dictator (Appendix 1) suggested that the dictator's power could be limited by a popular backlash against repression. As repression increases, loyalty will eventually diminish, particularly as more and more citizens feel that they could be targets. One of the main messages of this chapter is that under Stalin's rule political crimes were so broadly defined that virtually any citizen could be accused. In such a situation, even if citizens are not themselves at risk, their loyalty may be shaken by the fact that "innocent" people are being repressed.

The dictator controls the press and hence can frame his enemies to awaken disgust rather than sympathy. The dictator also controls the flow of information about repression. If he wishes to minimize the backlash, he might want to keep it secret; however, in cases where he wants to use repression to set an example, he would want it publicized. In actuality, Stalin's enemies were better-off peasants, resisters of collectivization, intellectuals and religious persons, members of banned parties, slackers, drunks, homeless persons, family members of "traitors," and "careless" cadres. Presented as such, these persons would scarcely evoke reactions of fright or loathing among the citizenry. A more likely reaction would be to wonder why they were being arrested. What had they done that was so wrong? Soviet propaganda, from Lenin through Stalin, showed speculators, priests, and kulaks as odious creatures. Perhaps this propaganda was successful in the abstract, but average people meeting better-off peasants or petty merchants in markets could scarcely associate them with the rabid dogs of propaganda posters. Nor would the "treachery" of Stalin's political enemies—disagreeing with his party line or saying bad things behind his back—evoke much public wrath.

Appendix 4 describes the dictator's strategy with respect to the public framing of repression and enemies of the people. Through his use of confessions, show trials, desensitization techniques, and selective use of secrecy, his goal is to be able to increase repression without the loss of loyalty.

## Confessions and Show Trials

Stalin's political "enemies" were rarely convicted for their actual crimes. Yagoda was actually executed because he was not ruthless enough for Stalin, but he was sentenced as a German spy. Yezhov, who was executed because he overreached and a scapegoat was needed, was also convicted of spying for Germany "since 1932." Stalin's Georgian ally, A. S. Yenukidze, who failed to embrace Stalin's story of a vast Kremlin conspiracy, was convicted of plotting to assassinate Stalin and other Politburo members. The chairman of a village Soviet located at a strategic rail crossing was accused of an improbable plot to assassinate Stalin as he passed by. Rather than face judgment, he committed suicide.<sup>101</sup> Simple churchgoers in Perm became part of a mythical "society of working clergy."<sup>102</sup>

Stalin personally decided how high- and mid-level cases would be handled, such as public trials in Moscow for Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Rykov and Yagoda, secret trials for Soviet generals, and again a closed trial for Yezhov. On September 9, the Politburo gave Kiev permission to conduct an open trial against grain officials.<sup>103</sup> After consultation with Molotov,<sup>104</sup> Stalin ordered regional trials of defendants accused of mass poisoning of livestock "with the inclusion of peasant masses and wide distribution in the press. Execute them all and publish in press."<sup>105</sup> On December 15, the Politburo approved an open trial of seven persons involved in "diversion" in an Ivanovsk bakery "with participation of prosecutor and defense, and sentence all to death and publish the results in the press."<sup>106</sup> Whether Stalin's enemies were presented to the public in show trials or were condemned behind closed doors was decided by Stalin himself.

Show trials could be risky. They were attended by the general public and sometimes in the presence of the foreign press. If a defendant failed to follow the script or shouted out the truth in the courtroom, the whole undertaking could backfire. Stalin reserved the Moscow show trials of 1936, 1937, and 1938 for his most prominent victims (Lev Kamenev, Grigory Zinoviev, Nikolai Bukharin, Genrykh Yagoda, and Aleksei Rykov). The trials were attended by a gullible international press, including William Duranty, the *New York Times* reporter, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his Russian reporting. Ordinary citizens packed the

courtroom, curious to see those “mad dogs” (to use USSR Prosecutor Vyshinsky’s words), who, but for Stalin’s and Yezhov’s vigilance, would have destroyed the Soviet Union. We do not know how many malfunctions there were in regional and local show trials, but the three Moscow trials were pulled off with scarcely a hitch. Show trials were not only for top regime opponents. Thousands of workers were invited to carefully orchestrated show trials of wreckers in Moscow in 1928 in which “evil saboteurs” and “enemy agents” dutifully confessed to the most heinous (and bizarre) plots to destroy Soviet power.<sup>107</sup>

Confessions were the “deal clinchers” in show trials. Most spectators would have believed, like the naïve NKVD officer who found himself confessing to improbable crimes a year later, that confessions must be real; otherwise, why would an innocent person confess?<sup>108</sup>

Although show trials, confessions, and guilty verdicts were ordered directly by Stalin, he went to great lengths to pretend his actions were dictated by the “party” or the “people.” Although the trials of top Soviet generals (Mikhail Tukhachevsky, Ion Iakir, Ieronym Uborevich, and others) were held in secret, Stalin needed to make it appear that workers and peasants were demanding their execution. He ordered regional party secretaries on June 6, 1937 to organize meetings including peasants to “demand” the death penalty for the generals, whose sentences were to be announced the following day.<sup>109</sup> Such frenzy was also applied to minor victims. Stalin ordered regional party secretaries in August of 1937 to organize press campaigns to stir up peasant sentiment.<sup>110</sup> Demonstrations like these likely strained the credulity of even the most naïve true believers, but they gave Stalin data to show that he was simply following the will of the people. He must have been willing to pay the price in incredulity for this opportunity.

Show trials also diverted blame. When there were shortages of currency, Stalin ordered show trials and executions of bank cashiers; when there were shortages of meat, trials of livestock poisoners were held. Enemies offered a convenient explanation for the many things that were going wrong, as is evidenced by a letter of a Perm resident to Yezhov, which concluded that long lines and lack of electricity cannot be “random events” but must be due to the “many enemies of the people who remain in charge.”<sup>111</sup>

## Desensitization

Bolshevik propaganda depicted enemies as superhuman sorcerers, who could somehow poison the water supply, sabotage the entire national plan, or cause hordes of common people to betray the communist cause. Lenin used terms such as “insects,” “bacteria,” or “human garbage” to describe enemies.<sup>112</sup> Stalin’s vocabulary was even coarser. “Mad dogs” was Prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky’s characterization of the defendants at the Moscow show trials. Ukrainian NKVD officers referred to those condemned in troika proceedings not as defendants but as “troika material.”<sup>113</sup> Likewise, the term “former people,” which was already in use under Lenin, also emphasized the subhumanity of enemies of the Soviet state.<sup>114</sup> Many fled, but those who stayed behind were deported and most were deprived of their rights of citizenship, which included access to jobs, housing and residence permits. The head of the Leningrad NKVD in a report to Yagoda entitled “About Former People” concluded: “It is absolutely necessary to transport 5,000 families of former people to remote areas for the purpose of *cleansing* Leningrad.”<sup>115</sup>

Stalin and Yagoda were particularly anxious to suppress any feeling of sympathy towards the victims of dekulakization. Despite a massive propaganda campaign to blame all rural problems on kulaks, there were outpourings of sympathy, particularly from women, as kulak families were thrown out on the street with no possessions and no livelihood.<sup>116</sup> There was a particular concern that the Red Army, which was itself comprised largely of villagers, would sympathize with the kulak. The decree initiating peasant deportations of January 18, 1930 ordered: “By no means involve elements of the Red Army in this operation. Their use is allowed only in extraordinary circumstances and only in extreme cases, such as uprisings.”<sup>117</sup>

Another desensitizing device was to use delicate terms to mask horrific acts. Stalin’s repressors did not speak of death sentences; rather they used “the highest measure of social defense.” Peasant families were not forcibly uprooted and deported under terrible conditions to remote regions of the USSR; they were instead “impounded” (*iziatie*). Arrestees were not tortured; rather they were subject to “physical influence” (*fizicheskoe vozdeistvie*).



## Secrecy?

The dictator could also try to keep the repression of enemies secret. During dekulakization and mass operations, there were indeed heroic efforts to keep what was going on from the public—a serious challenge when hundreds of thousands of victims were being persecuted.

As preparations for mass arrests and deportations began in the countryside, the Politburo on March 1, 1929 reversed course and prohibited the publication of information about the execution of “kulak elements” in the press without special permission of the Central Committee in every case.<sup>118</sup> An embargo was placed on mail into the regions of collectivization. The mass operations beginning in July 1937 were planned and coordinated under the strictest conditions of secrecy. According to Yezhov’s decree, troika sentences were to be issued and carried out “under complete secrecy.” Yezhov’s instructions required that death sentences be placed in separate files so that it would be extremely difficult to reconstruct the fate of those executed.<sup>119</sup>

Maintaining secrecy about operations that deported more than a million people from central Russia to Siberia and Kazakhstan or that executed almost three-quarters of a million victims in two years is akin to expecting eyewitnesses of a major air disaster to walk by without noticing. However, the constant drumbeat of propaganda and the pervasive secrecy must have fooled some. Khrushchev’s secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress of February 1956 on Stalin’s crimes was met with disbelief by the party faithful, a number of whom committed suicide. As copies of the secret speech were read out loud at regional party meetings, there were demands to stop the reading immediately.<sup>120</sup> According to Khrushchev, the delegates were “thunderstruck” by the “atrocities committed against worthy people, against Old Bolsheviks and Young Communists.”<sup>121</sup>

Insofar as the mass operations of 1937–1938 affected at least one and a half million people directly via execution or prison terms in a country of one hundred million adults, they could scarcely have been hidden. There would have been a huge multiplier effect through relatives, neighbors, and fellow workers. It may be that some people working in anonymous jobs in remote locations scarcely noticed, but it is more likely that the vast majority knew that something dramatic was going on but that one should not speak of it.

Consider the story of the arrest of Alexander Gaevsky, a school teacher in Krasnoiarsk, as told in his own words:

On November 13, 1937, I came home late and sat down for dinner. A car stopped, steps and voices were heard, followed by knocks at the door. Two unknown persons came in and politely told me: 'Finish your meal first; we will wait.' *Everything was clear.* Every single piece of food stuck in my throat. They showed me the arrest warrant and searched my house for a few minutes. . . . They merely took away a group graduation photo and instructed: 'Take along your underwear, soap, toothbrush and toothpaste. Leave your wristwatch at home—you won't need it.' This is how I took leave of my wife of one and a half years. We were to see each other again only ten years later.<sup>122</sup>

This schoolteacher working in a remote provincial city, far from the gossip of Moscow and Leningrad, did not consider it at all unusual when two unidentified men entered his apartment at dinnertime. He simply followed their instructions, packed his belongings without asking questions. Those who knew that they could be victims understood.

## CONCLUSIONS

Stalin, in a blood-curdling toast delivered in 1937, candidly explained how to handle enemies: "We will kill every enemy. If he is an Old Bolshevik, we will destroy his relatives, his family. We will destroy anyone without mercy who with his deeds or *thoughts* strikes a blow against the unity of the socialist state."<sup>123</sup>

Stalin's declaration reveals a number of facts that probably sent chills down the spines of his attentive audience: First, you can be an enemy not only through your deeds, which are observable, but through your thoughts, which only you know. It will, of course, be left to others to determine what you are thinking now or have thought in the past. In fact, under torture, you might even admit to unfavorable thoughts about Stalin and his regime. Second, as an enemy of the state, deliberate or unwitting, you jeopardize your entire family, raising the stakes considerably. There is no hope of mercy or decency. The threat to your family will offer a powerful incentive to confess to sins, real or imagined. Third, no matter how significant, your past achievements cannot save you if you come into the crosshairs of Stalin or the NKVD. A high party official with an unblemished record of achievement and service can still

be an enemy due to impure thoughts or failure to work hard enough. As declared by Stalin's alter ego, Lazar Kaganovich, "enemies are those who do not work with their entire souls."<sup>124</sup>

The definition of enemy that Stalin adopted was based upon the simplest of principles: The enemy is anyone the dictator declares to be an enemy. If the dictator declares left-handed persons to be enemies of the state, they are enemies of the state, no matter how arbitrary the decision. As stated by an expert on Soviet law: "the functioning principle was that of an 'illegal state' in which everything that is not forbidden is allowed but everything that is allowed should be forbidden. This was the principle used to control every aspect of life especially in the 1930s."<sup>125</sup>

Such an arbitrary approach cannot be applied under codified criminal law because then the code not the dictator determines who is a criminal and what is criminal behavior. If the code states that only active opponents are enemies, a dictator who wishes to abide by the law cannot suddenly decide to make class, background, or hidden thoughts crimes. Stalin had his codified rules of law, which served a number of purposes, but when it came time for serious repressions, these codes were set aside by extraordinary decrees that picked enemies and their punishment according to the dictator's wishes.

Lenin, the early Bolshevik leaders, and Stalin all shared a belief that enemies of the state could do their harm through the economy. The inclusion of acts that harmed economic achievements and the failure to perform duties represented a huge expansion in the definition of enemies of the state. Insofar as criminals could also do economic damage to the state, it was only one additional step to make common criminal actions a matter for state security. Another significant broadening of the definition was the inclusion of "socially dangerous" persons, who had committed no hostile acts but by their very nature were enemies of the state. The notion of "social danger" underlay Stalin's first mass repression. Dekulakization actually targeted a class, not active resisters.

In a market economy, there is little concern about managers sabotaging production, though disgruntled workers may perhaps do so. In a socialist dictatorship with complete state ownership, there was less confidence in "cadres," especially specialists who worked for the old regime. Stalin's "cadres decide all" approach assumed that accidents, mishaps, and failures were all potentially intentional. Let the burden of proof fall on the cadres.

In a democracy, there is competition of ideas. The foundation of the Bolshevik system was lack of competition of ideas as expressed by the leading role of the party. Whatever the party said was indeed true to all “Communist” physicians, scientists, and writers. The idea that independent thinkers were enemies was one of the great continuities of the Soviet system. An independent thinker could set in motion an independent movement which could eventually challenge the monopoly of the party. Subsequent history in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere showed the validity of this fear. For both Stalin and Lenin, the notion of any autonomous or independent grouping was anathema.

Stalin had to face a specific problem. According to his calculation, he had a large number of enemies, committing crimes in thought, word, and deed, and they deserved stern punishment. If the citizenry, however, disagreed with his definition and treatment of enemies, he risked their disenchantment or worse. The theory of the power-maximizing dictator warns that periods of mass repressions challenge the loyalty of the citizenry and even of the Praetorian Guard. Stalin’s two “innovations” were his creation of a system where he and he alone determined who was the enemy and his handling of mass repressions to minimize the effects on loyalty. He used show trials and confessions to convince a skeptical public that there were indeed vicious and dangerous enemies who could cause not only the regime but also the citizenry harm. Yet his own statistics showed that his victims were largely uneducated, young, and drawn from the very proletariat in whose name he acted. He used secrecy to cast a shadow of silence over calamitous events that were hard to overlook, such as the execution of almost three quarters of a million people in less than two years. The system of secrecy Stalin put in place was so pervasive that it remains difficult to the present day to trace his victims.

It is sometimes argued that one reason for Stalin’s liquidation of all but the most loyal and useful Old Bolsheviks was that they knew him from an earlier day and were aware of his many mistakes, such as during the Civil War. In a system run by a prophet, it was not good to have around those who knew the prophet before he became one.

## 5 Deadly Kremlin Politics

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER defined enemies of the state as anyone the dictator declares to be an enemy of the state. A dictator can have high-level enemies within the political elite; they have their own following and can offer rival programs. A dictator can also have low-level enemies, drawn from the citizenry, who may become allies of political rivals or of foreign enemies or who may organize on their own. In this chapter, we are concerned with the succession struggles following Lenin's and Stalin's deaths and the role of state security in each.

Stalin had won the succession struggle by the late 1920s. His potential rivals were removed to the sidelines of politics, but he still lacked the power to physically eliminate high-level enemies. Stalin's 1930 demand for a death sentence for M. I. Riutin (who called for his ouster) was rejected by a Politburo wary of political executions.<sup>1</sup> The assassination of Leningrad boss Sergei Kirov on December 1, 1934 gave Stalin his opportunity to rid himself of rivals once and for all time.

In the struggle over Lenin's succession, state security's role was limited to the supportive one of investigation and interrogation—a tribute to Stalin's iron control over his Chekist leaders. Just a hint of disloyalty was sufficient to destroy Stalin's confidence: when an émigré journal published rumors that Yagoda had ties with Right Deviationists, his relations with Stalin were poisoned.<sup>2</sup> Stalin used this report years later to al-

lege that his enemies were claiming: “We have the OGPU in our pockets. Yagoda is with us. The Moscow party is with us. Everyone is with us.”<sup>3</sup>

What could have been a pivotal role for the OGPU or NKVD was reduced to that of willing executioner in the party purges. The repression of the party elite was, formally, “above the pay scale” of the OGPU or NKVD. It was initiated at the grander level of the Politburo and the Central Committee, whose main investigative arm was not the OGPU or NKVD but the party’s Central Control Commission.

State security played a pivotal but perverse role in the succession struggle after Stalin’s death. The head of state security (Lavrenty Beria), reappointed as such upon Stalin’s death, seemed the likely winner. However, the threat of a party leader who combined control of state security with key party and state positions was sufficient to elicit an effective coalition of resistance from party leaders accustomed to following, not leading.

The Bolsheviks had come to power after the October Revolution with an undisputed leader, V. I. Lenin. They lacked any rules of succession, and Lenin’s deathbed “political testament” had little effect on the outcome. Lenin chose to head the highest state body (the Council of Peoples’ Commissars), but he exercised leadership through the Politburo. From the first days of Bolshevik power, the Politburo of the Central Committee was the highest political authority, with Lenin clearly the first among equals within it. Stalin would not attain this status until the late 1920s. Between Lenin’s incapacitation and his own accession to absolute power, Stalin had to maneuver within the confines of a collective leadership.

There were no discussions of succession during Stalin’s lifetime. Anyone rumored to be his successor was slapped down or worse by Stalin. It was dangerous business to be known as a potential contender for his position. He played off one deputy against another, humiliating, demoting, and then rehabilitating them. As long as there was no heir in sight, Stalin felt his own position secure.

Stalin’s death, like Lenin’s, left the Soviet Union with no designated heir and no procedure for selection. There were a number of contenders from within Stalin’s inner circle. Like the power struggle of the mid-1920s, Stalin’s succession was not decided overnight but in stages. We consider in this chapter only the first stage which ended with the arrest and execution of Lavrenty Beria.

## SELECTORATE THEORY AND POWER STRUGGLE

This chapter focuses on how a totalitarian leader achieves power and then stays in power as an incumbent. It uses the “selectorate theory” of Bueno de Mesquita and his co-authors. They describe a process by which rivals (an incumbent and a contender) vie to build a winning coalition from the selectorate, defined as “the set of people whose endowments include the qualities or characteristics required to choose the government’s leadership.”<sup>4</sup> The political rivals offer alternative programs of taxation, expenditures, foreign policy, and private rewards to attract a winning coalition. Once in power, the incumbent must keep the loyalty of the winning coalition, while the challenger seeks enough defections from it to assume power.

Selectorate theory offers an empirical prediction about regime stability: in political systems that have small selectorates and hence small winning coalitions, the incumbent leader has considerable advantages over the challenger. Having control of state resources, he can offer his relatively small number of supporters generous private goods and benefits to keep them on his side. Incumbents with large coalitions can offer each of their many supporters only small private rewards and must use programs of public expenditures and state policies to keep them on his side. With a small selectorate, the challenger must convince potential defectors from the winning coalition that they would be better off with him as leader—a claim that is likely to be met with skepticism.

We apply selectorate theory to the power struggles that followed Lenin’s and Stalin’s deaths. Selectorate theory is related to the power-maximizing dictator model of earlier chapters, but focuses on the dictator’s need to win the loyalty only of the selectorate (which may be a tiny percentage of the population), rather than that of the population at large. The goal of the incumbent dictator is to keep a majority of the selectorate in his winning coalition, and his policies for doing so may include repression and intimidation.

We make two additions to adapt selectorate theory to Lenin’s and Stalin’s Russia. We first add a novel feature of the Stalin variant, namely, that the incumbent dictator can *alter the selectorate* itself by purging opponents. Stalin removed rivals first from the selectorate (the Politburo or the Central Committee), and then from the party, and then he “transferred them under the ground” as the Chekist expression put it. In the

extreme form of selectorate alteration, the incumbent dictator can purge any and all dissenters from the selectorate, leaving him free to choose any policy he wishes. At this point, he no longer has to worry about majorities for there are absolutely no opponents. He has become an absolute dictator.

A second Stalinist feature is the presence of a pervasive state security apparatus, whose loyalty may be up for grabs, but once it is on the incumbent's side it makes the organization of a rival winning coalition difficult if not impossible.

In the Soviet Union, we clearly have the case of a small selectorate, a small winning coalition, a pervasive state security apparatus, and rivals operating at a distinct disadvantage. Selectorate theory can be applied to explain the durability of the Stalin regime, but it can also be used to analyze his moves to free himself from the constraints of the selectorate. A more formal explanation of this application of the selectorate model is provided in Appendix 5.

Selectorate theory suggests a number of moves by the incumbent. The dictator should make it as difficult as possible for a rival to reach potential defectors with an alternate program or to solicit defectors. The dictator should cultivate supporters with private material benefits and use the threat of repression to discourage thoughts of defection. In this endeavor, state security will play a vital role. If Stalin's and Beria's Chekists saw all and knew all, challengers would be afraid even to enter the scene of political battle.

## THE POLITBURO AS THE SOVIET SELECTORATE

If we apply selectorate theory to the Bolshevik state immediately after Lenin's death, we have a maximum selectorate of all party members. Although there were appeals for "democratic centralism," in which party members could have a voice in major party decisions, in fact, democratic centralism meant decision making only within the party's highest governing body, the Politburo, or, at best, within the Central Committee.

The Politburo's preeminence was taken as a matter of fact. In the February 25, 1926 meeting "About Necessary Economic Measures" the chair (Aleksei Rykov) cut off another member's (Mikhail Kalinin's) defense of agriculture by reminding him that agriculture had not met the



Politburo's target: "And what about the requirement to fulfill a Politburo decree?"<sup>5</sup> In the January 3, 1927 meeting, Stalin berated trade commissar Anastas Mikoyan for not fulfilling a decree (which originated with the Politburo): "I have in my hands the decree and I must say that this decree is a high-level directive to the trade commissariat and to other agencies to lower the prices of industrial goods. I underline this because in actual fact Mikoyan has carried out a policy that has reversed this decree."<sup>6</sup>

Control of the Politburo's proceedings gave Stalin a marked advantage over other Politburo members. As general secretary of the Central Committee, he set Politburo agendas, a practice that went back at least to 1922, as is evidenced by Lenin's handwritten letter to Stalin to inform Politburo members about "anti-Soviet physicians" and to prepare a directive for Dzerzhinsky.<sup>7</sup> In the 1920s, Stalin's Secret Department of the Central Committee set the meeting date, invited guests, and prepared materials.<sup>8</sup> Thereafter Stalin's secretariat, headed by his personal secretaries, prepared Politburo meetings.

If the Politburo was the selectorate, what was its size and composition? In August 1923, the Politburo had seven full members: Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, the largely incapacitated Vladimir Lenin, Aleksei Rykov, Stalin, Mikhail Tomskey, and Leon Trotsky. It had six candidate members.<sup>9</sup> It was dominated by the troika of Stalin, Kamenev, and Zinoviev, who had temporarily combined to block Trotsky.

This initial Politburo had been held together by Lenin. It worked collegially on the basis of "party discipline," which meant that members could disagree in discussion but had to support the majority decision. Discussion was open and businesslike. Conflicts among members were usually resolved by appointing a type of arbitration commission, in which Politburo members having different points of view would try to draft a consensus opinion.<sup>10</sup> As of 1923, it remained to be seen whether a collective Politburo working on the basis of party discipline could work.

We do not know Stalin's inner thoughts as he embarked upon his power struggle against other members of the Politburo. We know that he eventually came down in favor of forced superindustrialization, dekulakization, and mass repression, but we do not know what he favored in January 1924 when Lenin died. We do know that other Politburo members had staked out positions that would make the continu-

ation of Politburo consensus building based on party discipline difficult.

Trotsky, later to be joined by Kamenev and Zinoviev, favored a “leftist” program. Tomskey and Rykov, soon to be joined on the Politburo by Bukharin, favored a “rightist” program.<sup>11</sup> Where Stalin stood was and remains a mystery.

Stalin’s opponents did not know then that the succession was literally a matter of life or death. Of the thirteen full and candidate members of 1923, only three in addition to Stalin remained in the Politburo in 1930 (Molotov, Kalinin, and Rudzutak). Of the twenty persons whose names are listed above, two committed suicide (Ordzhonikidze and Tomskey), ten were executed, one may have been killed (Frunze), and the rest died of natural causes. Bukharin portended his own fate in an emotional letter to Stalin dated October 14, 1930 (seven years before his eventual execution): “Koba [Stalin’s nickname to his immediate associates]: After our telephone conversation I am in a condition of dismay. Not because you frightened me—you cannot frighten me and do not frighten me. But because your bizarre accusations [that Bukharin was plotting his assassination] clearly show a diabolical, vile, and low provocation in which you believe, which will lead to no good, as if you are destroying me politically as well as physically.”<sup>12</sup>

## ELIMINATING THE UNITED OPPOSITION

The repression of the party elite was conducted within the Politburo (and its disciplinary arm, the Central Control Commission). It was the OGPU’s and NKVD’s job to interrogate, gather evidence, and find or fabricate compromising material. It remained the Politburo’s prerogative to make the final decision. Notably, the OGPU’s formal role in the succession battle of the mid-1920s was muted. During much of this period, it was headed by Dzerzhinsky who could not be counted as a loyalist of any particular side.

In the mid-1920s, the Politburo was split between two visions of the future. The “United Opposition” of Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev offered a “leftist” program that advocated support for rank-and-file union members in the British General Strike,<sup>13</sup> an antikulak position in agriculture, and strong support for communist parties abroad (especially for the Chinese Communist Party versus the Nationalists).

Bukharin, Tomskey, and Rykov offered a “rightist” platform of support for NEP agriculture, concessions to foreign businesses, and more gradual industrialization.<sup>14</sup>

Each side had its power bases. Zinoviev headed the Leningrad Soviet and the Soviet Comintern delegation. Kamenev had a power base in the Moscow party organization. Trotsky had no independent power base, only his heroic image as leader of the Red Army during the Civil War. He gave up his position as war commissar without much of a fight and had little patience for bureaucratic infighting. Rykov had replaced Lenin as head of state and controlled the levers of government. Bukharin was viewed as the chief “theoretician” and served as editor of the government’s official newspaper. Tomskey had strong backing from the trade unions. Stalin had control of the party machinery (including appointments).

We cannot know Stalin’s inner thoughts. Was he truly undecided on which policies were preferable? Or was his decision to join with the “rightists” simply a marriage of political convenience? What we do know is that Stalin joined forces with Bukharin, Tomskey, and Rykov and that his calculation that this would be a winning move was correct.

The battle between Stalin’s winning coalition and the United Opposition was fought over the definition of the selectorate. Insofar as Stalin controlled party appointments and Rykov controlled the levers of government, they were in a position to whittle away at the opposition’s power base. When the March 18, 1926 proposal to the Politburo to replace Zinoviev as head of the Leningrad Soviet was protested by his supporters as “against the will of the Leningrad party,” Stalin’s side cited official calls from the Leningrad party calling for Zinoviev’s replacement. Zinoviev was removed as head of the Leningrad Soviet and shortly thereafter as head of the Comintern delegation. The United Opposition had no remaining power base from which to recruit allies for their platform. Given their lack of high-level official positions, Stalin could dismiss their proposals with disdain: “In the name of what organization do you have the audacity to speak so insolently with the party?” By “the party” Stalin meant himself and his allies of the moment.<sup>15</sup>

The United Opposition, deprived of a power base, argued that the party was the selectorate, not any organization of the party such as the Politburo or the Central Committee. The United Opposition demanded

to present its alternate platform to the forthcoming Party Congress—in their view the true selectorate. The grass roots of the party might have represented a wild card for Stalin. Many old Bolsheviks were upset with the concessions that had been made during the NEP period and wished a bolder move towards a communist future as promised by the United Opposition.

In contentious Politburo meetings on October 8 and 11, 1926 and September 26, 1927, the United Opposition argued that they should be allowed to express their own views directly to the party. Lenin, after all, had allowed different views within the Politburo when he was alive. Stalin, in his rebuttal, characterized the opposition as “turncoats of the party” and asked pointedly: “Comrade Trotsky demands equality between the Central Committee, which carries out the decisions of the party, and the opposition, which undermines these decisions. A strange business!” Zinoviev’s weak response: “Each member of the party has the right to speak before the Party Congress, and not only organizations” was met with derision. Stalin dismissed the demand to publish the opposition platform out of hand: “And people such as you demand that we publish their antiparty, scandalous and false denunciations for the benefit of capitalism. The opposition platform is the platform of complete intellectual and political bankruptcy of petty bourgeois intellectuals gone mad.”<sup>16</sup>

The United Oppositionists received the highest penalty then available to Stalin’s Politburo—expulsion from the Politburo, expulsion from the Central Committee, then expulsion from the party, and, in Trotsky’s case, banishment. Ten years later Zinoviev and Kamenev met their fates as the defendants in the first Moscow show trial, and Trotsky eventually fell to assassination in Mexico.

Stalin’s struggle with the United Opposition focused on the selectorate. The United Opposition, recognizing that their opponents controlled the Politburo and Central Committee, favored a broadening of the selectorate to the entire party. Stalin, confident of his control of the Central Committee and of the Politburo, favored as narrow a selectorate as possible. Stalin’s strategy of a small selectorate is consistent with selectorate theory which says that the smaller the selectorate the more stable the dictatorship. By keeping the selectorate small, Stalin created the foundation for a stable dictatorship after he dealt with all his opponents.

## ELIMINATING THE RIGHT OPPOSITION

With the defeat of the United Opposition, the Politburo expanded to nine full members. Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Trotsky were replaced by new members: N. I. Bukharin, V. V. Kuibyshev, V. M. Molotov, K. E. Voroshilov, M. I. Kalinin, and Ya. E. Rudzutak. The 1927 Politburo was dominated by the coalition of Stalin with Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsy. Three years later (December 1930), the Politburo had ten members. The “Right Deviationists” Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsy had been expelled and replaced by Stalin loyalists, L. M. Kaganovich, Caucasian Party leader G. K (Sergo) Ordzhonikidze, and two regional Party bosses—S. M. Kirov from Leningrad and S. V. Kosior of Ukraine.

This dramatic change between 1927 and December 1930 formed the Politburo that approved collectivization, dekulakization, and forced industrialization. This Politburo was also collectively responsible for the success or failure of these policies.

Stalin’s victory was evident in the composition of the December 1930 Politburo. Of the nine other Politburo members, there was none who, if not supporting his views entirely, would vote against him on substantive matters. There were none with the ability or passion to advance an alternate agenda or to draw defectors to their side. Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich were unabashed Stalin loyalists. Kirov and Kosior spent most of their time out of Moscow dealing with their fiefdoms. Kalinin and Chubar were nonentities. Only Stalin’s long-time colleague from Georgia, industry czar Ordzhonikidze, had an independent streak that would eventually lead to his suicide.

Although Stalin was recognized by 1927 as a master of detail, a cunning intriguer, and a controller of appointments—far from the nonentity depicted in earlier literature—at that time the odds seemed to favor better-known rivals.<sup>17</sup> Stalin faced a tough challenge in winning the support of other Politburo members against Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsy. Politburo members were on cordial terms; their families lived together in the Kremlin; it was not easy to gain support for harsh measures against them. Earlier, it had been easy to recruit support against the arrogant Trotsky whom the other Politburo members despised. Such was not the case with Stalin’s new rivals, who were generally well liked.

The defeat of the United Opposition eliminated Stalin’s most dangerous rivals, but it left him as only one member of the ruling majority, and

it probably left him supporting a policy he did not favor.<sup>18</sup> He was also faced with the danger of other Politburo members (such as Rykov, Bukharin, and Tomsy) forming a winning coalition against him. The defeat of the United Opposition had resolved the selectorate issue. The selectorate was the Politburo, and, if broader support were needed, the Central Control Commission or even the Central Committee could be brought in for reinforcements.

Stalin had to eliminate his erstwhile allies from positions of power by keeping his loyalists in line (Kaganovich, Molotov, Voroshilov) and attracting unaligned Politburo members (Kalinin, Kosior, Kirov, and Chubar) to his side to form a winning coalition.

Selectorate theory predicts that a Stalin, in this situation, will put together a program of public policies and private benefits that attracts a selectorate majority. The theory also implies that a Stalin, in this situation, will make it as difficult as possible for his challengers to attract followers. Stalin's tactics indeed followed these predictions.

First, Stalin's Great Breakthrough program, mostly borrowed from the domestic programs of the United Opposition, drew a clear distinction from that of his opposition. Bukharin's, Rykov's and Tomsy's support of kulaks, private agriculture, and modest industrialization goals were not playing well among the regional party elite. Modest industrialization goals meant moderate investment targets and the rejection of the favorite investment projects of regional party leaders.<sup>19</sup> As a supporter of superindustrialization and growth without limits, Stalin could magnanimously agree to any hair-brained infrastructure project, while his opponents, responsible for actual government, had to argue for sanity and "balance."

Second, Stalin had, from his first days as general secretary, gathered compromising material on political allies and opponents alike, using his personal secretaries as a small "dirty tricks" shop.<sup>20</sup> With the death of Dzerzhinsky in 1926, and the day-to-day operation of the OGPU in the hands of a Stalin loyalist, Yagoda, Stalin could now expand his use of compromising material, as when he intimidated Voroshilov with a fabricated plot to create a military dictatorship together with Soviet marshals.<sup>21</sup>

Stalin also gathered unfavorable comments by party leaders against one another: "Is it not possible to send Tomsy's letter against Kuibyshev?"<sup>22</sup> Stalin used a casual meeting between Kalinin and the discred-

ited economist N. D. Kondratiev to keep his pliable colleague in line.<sup>23</sup> He parsed innocuous articles by the easily intimidated Bukharin (that had been approved in advance) to uncover ideological “mistakes.” Stalin branded out-of-favor Party members as “weak,” “rotting,” “not one of us,” or “bureaucrats with high opinions of themselves, totally lacking in modesty.”<sup>24</sup>

Stalin used his position as general secretary to prevent informal meetings of Politburo members outside of the official meetings whose agenda Stalin controlled. He responded with outrage to such informal meetings even though he had arranged earlier for the Politburo to meet without Trotsky and Zinoviev.<sup>25</sup> He privately lobbied Politburo members and encouraged his allies to do the same. He wrote to Molotov in August 1928: “I was with Sergo [Ordzhonikidze]. His mood is good. He stands firmly behind the party line of the Central Committee, against those who are wavering. . . . [Andrei] Andreev [a candidate member of the Politburo] visited Sergo and talked with him. According to Sergo, Andreev firmly supports the party line. Tomsy it appears tried to turn him [during the plenum], but did not succeed. Under no circumstances can we allow Tomsy or any one else to turn Kuibyshev or Mikoyan.”<sup>26</sup> Stalin characterized informal discussions as “weakening party discipline” and “turning the party into a discussion club.”<sup>27</sup> Stalin kept foes and allies in line by the force of threat. Any remark, article, or conversation could be interpreted by Stalin as “factionalism”—an attempt to split the Politburo against the unified party line (which Stalin was increasingly dictating).

Stalin’s conclusive victory over Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsy came in a special plenum of the Central Committee in April 1929 which levied charges against them of “splitting the party.”<sup>28</sup> Stalin was the principal prosecutor; he brushed off his past friendships, especially Bukharin (“friendship is friendship, service is service”) and accused his former allies of “factionalism” (“Do we have one or two general party lines?”).<sup>29</sup> Bukharin was expelled from the Politburo in November 1929, for the offense of (in the words of the Politburo resolution of July 22, 1929) “making indirect sorties against decisions of the Central Committee [in conversations with Comrades Kamenev and Platonov] and making masked attacks against the party line in speeches and articles.”<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, Tomsy was ousted from the Politburo by means of a list of nominations by the head of the Ural party committee (a Comrade

Kabakov) that did not include his name. The protocol of the plenum of the Central Committee held on July 13, 1930 records the prearranged nonreelection of Tomsy:

KALININ: The election of the executive organs of the Central Committee is the first order of business. Are there any proposals?

KABAKOV: I propose ten persons for the Politburo.

KALININ: Is there a desire to discuss the number of members of the Politburo? (*Voices: Accept.*) No? Those in favor of a ten-person Politburo raise their hands. Opposed? Measure passes.

KABAKOV: For Politburo members: Stalin, Kalinin, Rudzutak, Kuibyshev, Voroshilov, Rykov, Kaganovich, Kosior, Kirov [no mention of Tomsy].

KALININ: How do we propose to vote, separately or all at once? (*Voices: At once.*) We'll vote en bloc. (*Laughter.*) (*Voroshilov:* Explain what this means?) Because Comrade Voroshilov asks for an explanation, I take it that not everyone understands what en bloc means. It means together, as a whole. Those who are for the proposal raise their hands. Against? The proposal is upheld. Accepted unanimously.

Seconds later, Kalinin asks Kabakov for his nomination for the post of general secretary:

KABAKOV: General secretary, Comrade Stalin. (*Voices: Of course.*)<sup>31</sup>

Rykov was reelected to the Politburo in July 1930, but was expelled in December 1930.<sup>32</sup> The Right Deviationist purge was not limited to its three leaders. Between 1929 and 1931, 250,000 party members were expelled for Right Deviationist associations.<sup>33</sup>

The punishment of Stalin's high-level enemies at that time was demotion. They were removed from the Politburo or from the Central Committee but not the party. They were moved to lesser jobs, but some were allowed to hold significant positions. Bukharin, for example, became the editor of *Izvestia*, and Rykov became the minister of communications before their final repression in the third Moscow show trial of 1938.

## FROM SELECTORATE TO ABSOLUTE DICTATORSHIP

After Stalin's defeat of the Right Deviationists" in 1929 and 1930, he now had all the advantages of incumbency. In late 1930, Stalin was "first among equals" in the Politburo. He was not yet "master of the house," as his Politburo colleagues were to call him shortly. He was still



occasionally outvoted on the Politburo. At this juncture, he could have continued to work over his coalition members with threats or bribes to maintain a winning coalition. Remaining within the confines of a winning coalition meant, however, that Stalin would have to adapt his policies and strategies to other Politburo members. It meant the ignominy of having to pander to weaklings such as Voroshilov or Kalinin—not an attractive option for a Stalin.

Moreover, the position of Stalin's Politburo was tenuous. As Stalin pushed through his Great Breakthrough, his Politburo bore collective responsibility for collectivization, dekulakization, and forced industrialization, which were not going well. The first years of the Great Breakthrough were perilous for the leadership as the countryside erupted into civil war, crop failures and distribution problems led to millions of deaths from starvation, and forced industrialization faced numerous setbacks. Resentment and dissatisfaction merged into calls for Stalin's replacement or removal. Some party members advocated the return of Rykov and Bukharin, under whom life had been much better. Ominous discontent was brewing among Stalin's natural allies, who favored his policies but were dissatisfied with his leadership and his autocratic management of the Politburo.

Stalin could not rest. He had to free himself of all constraints, which meant zero tolerance towards anyone questioning his policies or his personal authority. Any leader engaging in such "anti-Soviet acts" would have to be removed immediately from the selectorate. If Stalin could automatically remove anyone with doubts, he was automatically assured unanimous support. All nonsupporters were automatically not part of the selectorate.

When a rising party star, S. I. Syrtsov, candidate member of the Politburo and chair of the Council of Peoples' Commissars of the Russian Republic, was denounced by Stalin informants, the Politburo stripped him of all his positions, despite his sincere support of Stalin's Great Breakthrough policies.<sup>34</sup> Stalin's ally, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, summarized Syrtsov's sins in an emergency Politburo session of November 4, 1930 "On the Factional work of Syrtsov, Lominadze, and Others:"

What is the main and most disturbing point in this matter? Of course, there can be vacillation and disagreement in such a large party, especially in such a period when it is necessary to carry out the colossal work

of building socialism. But every member of the party must come to his party if he has doubts. The party should help such a comrade resolve his own doubts, to save him, and set him on the right course. If he does this, no one will call him to his party responsibility. But when he does these things in secret, this becomes an antiparty matter. Can we have such people in our leadership who try to tear it down?

STALIN: It is impossible.

The lesson of Syrtsov was that anyone who wished to criticize Stalin had to do so to his face with predictable consequences—demotion, expulsion, or worse.

Stalin also made sure that potential critics were denied a platform from which to express their views. He redefined disloyalty as failure to support the party line with sufficient zeal and vigor, while denying party members suspected of wavering a platform to express their support. When the demoted Rykov was attacked for insufficient zeal at the November 27, 1932 Politburo meeting, he frustratedly responded: “I asked for the floor to answer the charge addressed against me about my lack of public speeches outside the boundaries of my ministry. I wanted to speak publicly two times. Once I wanted to hold a lecture at the Union House . . . in defense of the general party line, but in the end this did not happen because the party organization did not want this. . . . I concluded from these facts that it has been decided that my public appearances have become inappropriate, consequently, it is best for me to stay out of sight.”<sup>36</sup>

In the end, Stalin turned even against those who remained quiet but were suspected of having views opposed to his. “Thought crimes” became offenses subject to serious punishment. Those purported to have expressed doubts about Stalin’s policies even in private conversations were repressed. Old Bolshevik and Central Committee member A. P. Smirnov was accused of calling for Stalin’s replacement at a private party where most of those present were drunk. Despite his denials, Smirnov was placed in a position of having to disprove “gossip and defamation.”<sup>37</sup> Even private grumbling had become a sin of political deviation. By 1932, any informal meeting in which unfavorable mention of Stalin’s policies was made was a crime. Party leaders had to censor their own private conversations. Who knew whether the person they were talking to was a secret informant?

## THE NKVD AND THE PURGE OF THE PARTY ELITE

It was only a step from removing suspected selectorate members to a general purge of the party. From Stalin's perspective, it was better to strike preemptively before potentially disloyal party members made it to the top rungs of party power. The 1934 Seventeenth Party Congress—the so-called Congress of Victors—was attended by 1,966 delegates, representing the party from top to bottom. Within five short years, 1,108 of them had been arrested (56 percent) and 848 (43 percent) had been shot.<sup>38</sup> Of the 325 top party leaders of the 1930s for whom biographies are available, 201 (62 percent) were arrested, and the vast majority of these were executed.<sup>39</sup> Of the 30 Politburo and Central Committee members attending the November 13, 1934 Politburo meeting—eighteen days before the start of the purge of the party elite—twenty (two thirds) were executed.<sup>40</sup>

Stalin and his own staff could handle the removal of a few top party leaders. They could not handle alone the large number of victims of a general purge of the party. For this, they needed the help of the NKVD. Although Stalin and the Politburo directed the purging of the party elite, the NKVD played an essential supportive role without which the purges would have had to be handled differently. Unlike smaller fry—wreckers, factory managers, technicians—prominent state and party leaders had to be accused, put on trial, and sentenced in a convincing manner. The execution of party and state leaders, many Old Bolsheviks well known to the public, simply could not be swept under the rug. They had to confess to dastardly deeds from which the public would recoil in disgust, and there could be no hitches in the stage management of their trials, especially of those held in public under the glare of world publicity. It was the job of Stalin's Chekists, this time including his state prosecutors and judges, to ensure the seamless conduct of these proceedings. It was the task of Stalin to make the final decisions. In all cases of high-level executions or imprisonments, Stalin's approval was necessary, such as his instruction on a list of 138 major figures including the former minister of agriculture (Yakovlev), the former head of heavy industry and Gosplan (Mezhlauk), and the minister of defense industry (Rukhimovich): "For the execution of all. J. Stalin."<sup>41</sup>

The purge of the top leadership began on December 1, 1934 after the assassination of Kirov. Stalin personally interrogated the assassin and

quickly moved to blame (although many suspected Stalin himself) former Trotskyites, Right Deviationists, and military leaders. Stalin single-handedly pushed the “Law of December 1” through the Politburo, which canceled a number of legal protections. Now, “terrorist” cases could be tried without the accused present, objections and requests for mercy were not allowed, and executions were to be carried out immediately.<sup>42</sup> New legal theories, advanced by Stalin’s crony, USSR Prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky, downgraded objective evidence and gave special weight to confessions.<sup>43</sup> Henceforth, a confession (to even bizarre and unbelievable plots) substituted for objective proof.

The Law of December 1 burst open the dam for executions. Within two weeks of Kirov’s assassination, Kamenev and Zinoviev, were arrested for complicity in the assassination of Kirov. On December 28 and 29, fourteen alleged conspirators in the assassination were executed on the basis of fabricated evidence. A number of “antiparty” groups were linked to the assassination through association, fabricated evidence, and false testimony. Supposed terrorist plots were uncovered, including the “Kremlin Case” in which Politburo members, including Stalin, had supposedly been targeted for murder by a cabal of top party officials. A campaign initiated by Stalin in the spring of 1935 and executed by Yezhov arrested over fifteen thousand “enemies” and uncovered over one hundred “enemy organizations and groups” before the end of the year. According to the ascendant Yezhov, Stalin’s personal monitor of Yagoda, a large number of enemies remained hidden within the ranks of the party despite these successes.<sup>44</sup>

Stalin orchestrated the purges of high party members using a sequenced script—demotion, assignment to a low-level job in a remote location, expulsion from the party, turning the accused over the NKVD, and then execution. In all cases, the NKVD gathered the evidence, made the necessary fabrications, and extracted confessions using any means necessary.

The case of P. P. Postyshev, candidate member of the Politburo and party secretary of Kiev, was typical. After arrests of his Kiev party subordinates, Postyshev was demoted to a minor position in the provinces. In an apparent positive turn, he was summoned by Stalin, who cynically offered him high government office (which was never forthcoming). The temporarily heartened Postyshev’s fate was sealed at the January 1938 Central Committee plenum, which condemned him as “bankrupt” and

“making crude mistakes for which the party must judge him.” These orchestrated condemnations required Stalin to “reluctantly” conclude that it was “necessary to take some measures with respect to Comrade Postyshev. I presume the opinion has formed that he should be removed as candidate member of the Politburo but can continue as a member of the Central Committee.” Within a month, the Politburo turned Postyshev over to the Party Control Commission, stating that “at a minimum he knew about the presence of counterrevolutionary organizations and was informed about the participation in such organizations of his closest associates.”<sup>45</sup> On February 17, the Politburo excluded Postyshev from the party; shortly thereafter he was arrested and executed.

Once high-level party officials had confessed, new victims needed only to be linked with them—such as Politburo member and deputy prime minister V. Ia. Chubar’, whose Politburo condemnation of June 16, 1938 reads: “In light of the fact that the confessions of [lists four prominent party members already purged] cast a shadow on Comrade V. Ia. Chubar’, the Politburo concludes that it is not possible to leave him as a member of the Politburo or as deputy chair of the Council of Peoples’ Commissars.” Chubar’ was placed in charge of a cellulose factory in the provinces, then arrested and shot.<sup>46</sup>

## THE MOSCOW SHOW TRIALS

The Moscow show trials illustrate the efficiency of the NKVD’s “operational servicing.” Of the fifty-four defendants, forty-seven were executed. The “show” consisted of twenty-three days of public proceedings—plenty of time for glitches and mishaps before an international press corps. All the Moscow show trial defendants dutifully confessed, and many in the international press and probably the Soviet citizenry concluded that those convicted were indeed fanatical “mad dogs” intent on overthrowing legitimate Soviet power.

It was the NKVD’s job to prepare the ground work for the show trials; namely, the interrogations and all-important confessions. The transcripts of interrogations, most conducted under the direction of Yezhov, show the top interrogators of the NKVD at work at their craft. Interrogators followed a common pattern that combined facts with half-truths and fabrications to make the confession, no matter how bizarre or implausible, more credible.

The first show trial was of Kamenev, Zinoviev, and their “Trotskyite gang” on August 19–24, 1936.<sup>47</sup> The second trial, of industrial officials, was held on January 23–30, 1937. The third trial, of Bukharin, Rykov and Yagoda, was held on March 2–13, 1938. The Moscow show trials were carefully orchestrated spectacles, the first lasting five days, the second a week and the third eleven days. Guilty verdicts were predetermined, but the defendants had to go through the ritual of accusation, evidence, confession, and sentencing.

The defendants dutifully confessed under the stress of torture and threats to their families. Stalin’s political rival, Grigory Zinoviev, admitted: “I am fully and completely guilty of having been an organizer of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Bloc second only to Trotsky, which set the aim of assassinating Stalin, Voroshilov and a number of other leaders of the Party and the government. I plead guilty to having been the principal organizer of the assassination of Kirov.” Bukharin admitted general guilt without confessing to any specific criminal act: “I plead guilty to being one of the outstanding leaders of this ‘Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyites.’ Consequently, I plead guilty to the sum total of crimes committed by this counterrevolutionary organization, irrespective of whether or not I knew of, whether or not I took direct part, in any particular act.”<sup>48</sup>

There was an occasional slip. One defendant (former deputy justice minister Nikolai Krestinsky) decided at the last minute not to confess. After being worked over, he returned the next day: “In the face of world public opinion, I had not the strength to admit the truth that I had been conducting a Trotskyite struggle all along. I request the Court to register my statement that I fully and completely admit that I am guilty of all the gravest charges brought against me personally, and that I admit my complete responsibility for the treason and treachery I have committed.”<sup>49</sup>

Interrogations began by establishing past links with “proven” enemies of the people, thereby using the time-worn method of guilt by association. Kremlin security chief and deputy head of the Central Executive Council, A. S. Yenukidze, could readily recount his past associations with enemies of the state: “In this period (1930–1932), I often met with Tomsy and Rykov. Tomsy was my neighbor and I had to meet with Rykov in his capacity as head of state on any number of business matters.” The fact that Yenukidze met privately with Rykov in his apartment was taken as a sure sign of sinister intentions. From association with enemies to acknowledgment of guilt for some crime was the next

step. Yenukidze: "I remember that Rykov, after he was removed from his post, expressed his sharp disagreement with the policy of the Central Committee."<sup>50</sup> Listening to such disagreement without reporting it was clearly a crime. Similarly, Yagoda, under interrogation in April 1938, admitted to meeting regularly with Bukharin and Rykov.

The interrogator's next move was to establish that the accused had actually assisted a conspiracy. Yenukidze, whose job included material support of Kremlin residents, admitted to "giving in many cases exceptions to representatives of a class-hostile milieu in their petitions concerning foreign travel, assigning them privileges, and freeing them from arrest, etc. I also gave material support to specific persons belonging to parties hostile to the party and the Soviet state."

It was also necessary to explain how a loyal party member had become an enemy of the people. Interrogators had to establish that the accused had been recruited by hostile forces. Yenukidze confessed that he had been recruited by Tomsky at the end of 1930.<sup>51</sup> Yagoda characterized himself as an opportunistic observer: "I did not share the views and programs of Trotskyites, but I closely watched the course of the power struggle, decided in advance that I would join that side that would win the battle."

The groundwork for interrogations of top leaders was extensive. Their subordinates and colleagues were interrogated for incriminating evidence. By the time the high-level accused was interrogated, there were an ample number of incriminating statements in the interrogator's hands. As former NKVD head, Yagoda knew that his interrogators had denunciations of him, but he did not know exactly what they were. His former OGPU subordinate, S. V. Puznitsky, had already testified to an unlikely conversation with his boss:

In one of our last conversations, Yagoda told me that it was necessary to form a group of terrorists, devoted to him and ready to carry out terrorist acts, to achieve the objectives.

Q: What did you do to accomplish this goal?

A: I got close to workers of the Third Department [names two] and gradually worked on them for the purpose of using them in the conspiracy. I reported about this to Yagoda in a personal conversation in the spring of 1936.<sup>52</sup>

A common tactic was to confront the suspect with information gathered from others. Puznitsky was attempting to limit his denunciation to

two co-workers, but his interrogators wanted more names: “You are not speaking the truth. Answer directly the question, whom did you recruit to carry out the task which you received from Yagoda? . . . Our investigation shows that you not only worked on these two but you personally directed them in the conspiracy and created together with them in Dmitrovsky Camp a group to carry out Yagoda’s terrorist acts. I warn you that a number of these people are known to us and your further lack of cooperation will not get you anywhere.”

The culmination of the interrogation was a confession to dramatic plots involving assassinations, coups, or cooperation with foreign enemies. Yenukidze confessed to participation in a revolt with intent to assassinate almost the entire Kremlin leadership:

Q: How many persons did you need to carry out the revolt within the Kremlin?

A: 20–25 persons.

Q: How many did you have?

A: 15.

Q: Who? (Yenukidze lists their names.)

Q: Why didn’t you carry it out?

A: We had agreed with Tomskey that I would await his order.

Q: If you had received this order would you have carried it out?

A: Yes.

Likewise, Yagoda confessed to using his NKVD position to assist the Kirov assassination:

Q: You admit that the Center of Rightist, Trotskyite, and Zinovievite Organizations could have been liquidated if not for your and Molchanov’s role in the OGPU-NKVD?

A: Yes, there is no doubt.

Q: This means that the assassination of Comrade Kirov could have been prevented.

A: Without a doubt.

Q: And you did nothing.

A: No (I did nothing).

Q: This means you are a co-conspirator in this evil assassination.

Not everyone could confess to spectacular assassination or coup plots. Economic officials confessed to wrecking or to sabotage of industrial operations. The confessions of planning and ministry officials—the targets of the second Moscow show trial—must have rung rather hol-



low to the audience of journalists and viewers. M. L. Rukhimovich, a former minister of defense industry, confessed to a vague plan to overthrow the government using a mobilization plan “that existed only on paper,” and to seeking to weaken the national economy by means of unfinished construction, improper materials, and flawed budgets.<sup>53</sup>

Stalin played an active role in interrogations. When Yezhov sent him the confession of a former Russian Republic NKVD head (Beloborodov), Stalin was irate: “Stalin to Yezhov: You can consider that prison is for Beloborodov, a tribunal is for delivering speeches—his declarations are about the activities of others but nothing about himself. Is it not time to press on this person and force him to admit to his dirty business? Where is he sitting? In a hotel or in prison?”<sup>54</sup>

The remarkable string of confessions to improbable crimes is explained by mental and physical torture and by false promises of leniency. The reluctant Krestinsky, having recanted his confession at the Moscow show trial, was badly tortured. According to one account: “Krestinsky was delivered to us after interrogation to the hospital (ward) in a state of unconsciousness. He had been badly beaten. His whole spine was a continuous wound. He lay in the ward for three days in a very bad condition.”<sup>55</sup> A Comrade Pletnev, in a letter to Beria of December 1940 retracting an earlier confession, described his interrogation: “By force and deceit, I was forced to ‘confess.’ Interrogations lasted 15–18 hours uninterrupted, there was forced lack of sleep, strangulation, and threat of beatings.”<sup>56</sup> Defendants were promised that they or their family members would be spared if they confessed. Yezhov apparently convinced Bukharin and Rykov that if they confessed, they would not be executed.<sup>57</sup> Kamenev confessed when Yagoda falsely promised that his sons would be spared.<sup>58</sup>

## THE SECOND SUCCESSION: BERIA VERSUS THE POLITBURO

After Stalin’s death as after Lenin’s, the succession was a problem with no clear-cut solution. The Old Bolsheviks who had survived the purges—V. M. Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich, and Anastas Mikoyan—had done so through their unwavering loyalty; the younger party elite who replaced those who did not survive knew only how to say yes to Stalin. Any innovative or ambitious party leader, such a chief planner

Andrei Voznesensky, was removed from office or executed. The newcomers who had survived the Great Terror—Andrei Zhdanov, Georgy Malenkov, Nikita Khrushchev—were also good organizers. They knew how to get things done. They became part of Stalin's inner circle and were required to dine with Stalin and visit him in his vacation home. Khrushchev had worked as party head in Ukraine and Moscow. Beria was deputy prime minister. Molotov was foreign minister. Mikoyan continued to handle trade.

When Stalin died in March 1953, these survivors had to pick Stalin's successor. There were no hard and fast rules, except that the matter should be resolved in the Politburo and, if not there, in the Central Committee. Unlike Stalin, these party leaders had not played a major role in appointments. They each had their followers, but no single clique was dominant.

Already at Stalin's deathbed, Malenkov and Beria agreed that Beria would be appointed head of a reunified MVD and that Malenkov would become the head of state (chairman of the Council of Ministers) with Beria as his deputy. Other party leaders were allocated other positions of responsibility.<sup>59</sup> The post-Stalin leadership began with this uneasy constellation of forces. Almost all had had narrow escapes under Stalin. Of all, only Beria was a clear contender with a deadly combination of power as a Politburo member, deputy prime minister, and head of the all-powerful MVD.

In March 1953, the Soviet selectorate was the Politburo. There was no formal procedure for putting a platform before the Politburo; rather it had to be done through signals that were to be interpreted by others. Beria, in the days immediately following Stalin's death, pushed through an amnesty which released more than a million prisoners from the Gulag. He also limited the use of MVD special tribunals. Beria used these signals to dampen fears of the MVD and thereby attract selectorate members to his coalition. Other moves, however, were more ominous. His MVD continued to wiretap party leaders, a fact of which they must have been aware.<sup>60</sup> Beria also submitted his appointments for pro forma approval by the party, such as his imperious memorandum of March 16, 1953: "To Central Committee. To Comrade Khrushchev, N. S. In connection with the consolidation of the organs of the former MGB and MVD, I ask approval of the following as ministers of internal affairs of the republics, heads of regional administrations [lists 82

names and positions]. In the near future, it may be necessary to make several changes in this staff; nevertheless it is necessary to approve these comrades. Signed Beria [no title].”<sup>61</sup>

Kremlin veterans were able to read the tea leaves. Other party leaders were not in a position to stake out public positions to attract a winning coalition for fear that this would alert Beria. But already at Stalin’s deathbed, Nikita Khrushchev had begun to sow the seeds of doubt about Beria. Khrushchev warned another Politburo member (Nikolai Bulganin) that Beria would grab control of the MVD and will use this power “to spy on members of the Politburo, to eavesdrop, to fabricate cases, to engage in intrigue.”<sup>62</sup>

According to Nikita Khrushchev’s likely self-serving account, he visited a number of Politburo members on the pretext of other business to sound them out. After their perfunctory praise of Beria, Khrushchev was able to determine that his fear of Beria was shared by others. It was agreed that Beria was to be lured to a Politburo meeting; top army generals were to be invited and told to smuggle in their service revolvers. This meeting took place on June 26, 1953. Beria, the intelligence chief, was the victim of a coup he did not see coming. He was arrested by a special military force headed by war hero Marshall Zhukov, and was imprisoned in an underground military bunker until his trial and execution.<sup>63</sup> His closest MVD associates were arrested shortly thereafter. Beria was replaced by Kruglov, the man he had replaced in March.

Khrushchev’s success in forming a winning coalition against Beria is both understandable and puzzling. In theory, it should have been virtually impossible to organize a coup against a Politburo member who also was in charge of state security. The fear of discovery would be too great. The answer to this puzzle may be the fact that Beria had resumed leadership of the MVD only after Stalin’s death. He had not formally headed state security for a decade. In the meantime, it had been run by others, some of whom were not particularly fond of Beria. Although Beria had formal control of the MVD, he could not have been its master after only a short time as its head. It would be hard to imagine a 1940s vintage Beria allowing a conspiracy to take place under his nose.

A second point is that Khrushchev had a winning argument. Each member of the Politburo had to calculate the odds of survival if Beria replaced Stalin with the same powers as Stalin had had. A dictatorial Beria, like Stalin, would still need well-organized deputies. Under Stalin,

roughly 60 percent of his closest associates survived; maybe under Beria survival rates would have been similar. If they could successfully form an anti-Beria coalition (and remove him from the scene), they would have a virtual certainty of survival, but if Beria found them out and used the power of his MVD against them, they would be eliminated immediately. With such odds, members of the selectorate would join an anti-Beria coalition if the odds that their conspiracy would be discovered were less than 60 percent. Moreover, timing was important. Presumably, as time passed, Beria would consolidate control over his expanding MVD empire, increasing the probability of detecting a conspiracy.<sup>64</sup>

At least according to Khrushchev's account, Khrushchev's conspiratorial discussions took place in the offices of various Politburo members. We would imagine they would have been conducted in hushed tones, but if Beria's informant network had been good, the conspiracy would have been detected.

The plenum of the Central Committee of July 2–7, 1953 officially decided Beria's fate. In fact, his fate was determined in the Politburo. Nikita Khrushchev and twenty-four other top party leaders spoke against Beria at the plenum in an overwhelming display of solidarity.<sup>65</sup> Khrushchev's indictment of Beria included charges that he was a "dangerous provocateur" and a "careerist," but the main charge was that Beria attempted "to place the MVD above the state and party . . . so that he would have the real power in his own hands."<sup>66</sup>

Beria had to go through the same ritual of confession as his many victims before him. He denied his power grab: "I did not have Bonapartist intentions." But he did admit: "My great antiparty mistake was that I gave orders to gather information about the activities of party organizations and to create reports concerning such organizations in Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Baltics. But even in doing this I was not pursuing counterrevolutionary goals."<sup>67</sup> Beria must have understood that he was playing out a role in a ritual, but he hoped that his plea to be sent to a quiet provincial post would be granted by his Politburo colleagues, who were much less bloodthirsty than either he or his former boss.

Beria's case was turned over to the Supreme Court with the charges of "betrayal of the Fatherland, the organization of anti-Soviet plots, the carrying out of terrorist acts, active struggle against the working class and the revolutionary movement of the working class, as evidenced by his secret-agent position in espionage organs . . . in the period of the

Civil War.”<sup>68</sup> Beria along with six other MVD colleagues were condemned to the “highest measure of punishment.”<sup>69</sup> Beria was executed on December 23, 1953,<sup>70</sup> and his closest relatives were sent into exile.

Kruglov went about removing all vestiges of Beria’s influence in the MVD. He again split off state security from internal affairs; there were more than a hundred personnel moves within the MVD from the central apparatus to regional departments as Beria loyalists were fired.<sup>71</sup>

Beria’s removal was only the first salvo in a long power struggle. Khrushchev gained ascendancy in the mid-1950s after his removal of Stalin’s old guard (Molotov, Mikoyan, and Malenkov), but he notably did this without bloodshed. Those removed from the highest positions were sent out to pasture in minor provincial jobs away from the center of power. Khrushchev himself was overthrown in October 1964 by a Central Committee tired of his harebrained schemes and erratic behavior, and sent into enforced retirement far from the spotlight. Thereafter, the leadership changed hand only at the death of a general secretary.

## CONCLUSIONS

The story of Lenin’s succession has been told before, but we recount it using a model in which the Politburo, as the selectorate, makes the decision. We tell the less well-known story of the succession to Stalin in terms of the puzzle of why Beria failed. In both successions, the first step towards absolute dictatorship was to put together a winning coalition. The advantages of incumbency could be then exploited by the successful organizer of the winning coalition to move on to eliminate from the selectorate anyone who disagreed openly or even in secret. Once such power of elimination was achieved, the dictator would have freed himself from the selectorate and be able to introduce any policy he wished. Anyone who then disagreed would simply disappear. Stalin’s first victims were his true political rivals (Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev). His next victims were his erstwhile allies, who were now on the wrong side of policy. Next, Stalin attacked those who supported his policies but were dissatisfied with his leadership, even if this dissatisfaction was expressed privately or was kept to oneself.

Beria’s attempt to duplicate Stalin’s earlier winning strategy failed because his selectorate (his Politburo colleagues) did not want to undergo again the risks of the Stalin years, and Beria’s control of information and

compromising information had not reached the point where he could detect conspiracies organized in his own circle.

Although the OGPU/NKVD, in theory, could have played a major role in the Lenin succession by choosing sides, it was kept to the supportive role of investigation and interrogation as Stalin eliminated his final enemies. Stalin's selections of Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria were strokes of genius. In no case was there any doubt about whose side they stood on.

Although the OGPU/NKVD played a supportive role, its input to Stalin's success was substantial. High-level enemies could not be swept under the rug. They needed to confess to fictionalized deeds, and they needed to do so publicly. Whereas Stalin was the ultimate architect of the repression of the party elite, the OGPU/NKVD was his workhorse.

## 6 Planning Terror

IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS, we examined how a power-maximizing dictator aka Stalin selected and organized his Chekists and identified political enemies. In the last chapter, we used the selectorate model to frame Stalin's purge of the party and state elite. We studied how Stalin eliminated potential rivals from the bodies charged with selecting the nation's leadership—the Politburo and the Central Committee. In this chapter, we study how Stalin “eliminated” large numbers of citizens, presumably to solidify his power.

This chapter examines the planning and execution of three major terror campaigns: dekulakization (1930–1932), mass operations (1937–1938), and national operations that also began in 1937. We focus on the periods 1930 to 1932 and 1937 to 1938. According to official state security statistics, 715,272 persons were executed and 928,892 persons were imprisoned in camps by extrajudicial tribunals in the years 1930–1932 and 1937–1938.<sup>1</sup> These astonishing figures cumulate to 1.5 per cent of the adult population.

### A DICTATORIAL ELIMINATIONS MODEL

Although Soviet economic planning gave the impression of chaos and arbitrariness,<sup>2</sup> Stalin and his economic planners used a “rational

choice" planning model. He and his Politburo consistently sought to maximize investment subject to the constraint of supplying enough consumer goods to preserve worker morale.<sup>3</sup>

We began this book with the proposition that the Soviet dictator combined repression and loyalty to enact his policies and remain in power. Stalin's degree of control over repression was much greater than over goods and services. "For Stalin, terror was the simplest and readiest instrument with which to govern the country," and there is no doubt that "plans of repression were of his personal design and under his personal control."<sup>4</sup>

Stalin's repression of high-level rivals was not extraordinary by historical standards. Any number of monarchs, dictators, and assorted despots have waged bloody battles to survive and prevent palace coups, some taken to extremes. It is more unusual for a monarch or a dictator to repress large numbers of his own people, who are scarcely distinguishable from other citizens.

At first glance, Stalin's mass repressions appear chaotic and irrational. They were too large; too many ordinary citizens were affected. Specialists with essential skills were executed. Death penalties were issued in haste with little or no deliberation. The NKVD's mass operations "conveyor" spit out more than a million and a half victims in fifteen months of 1937 and 1938, few if any posing an immediate threat to Stalin or to the nation. There is no question of excesses and irrationalities, but we are interested in Stalin's overall design. Were Stalin's mass operations "rational" in the sense that they were designed to further in a systematic and deliberate way his overriding objective of securing his person and regime?

Stalin's mass operations offer the strongest challenge to the rationality assumption. Even though his high-level victims may have seemed impotent at the time of their repression, they would have willingly overthrown Stalin if they had the chance. Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev, who hated Stalin, would have not hesitated; after witnessing the United Opposition's defeat, Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsy must have understood the consequences of a total Stalin victory. The fact that his victims put up so little resistance and that his inner circle did not produce a challenger constitutes a tribute to Stalin's maneuvers. His tactics worked; maybe he overdid brutality, but perhaps one should not be circumspect in such circumstances. Stalin's imprisonment and deportation of hun-



dreds of thousands of peasants (yes, some were better off than others) in 1930–1932 and then his slaughter and imprisonment of more than a million “ordinary” people (yes, some did have suspect pasts) represent a stronger challenge to the rationality assumption. Perhaps he was just crazy or too much the product of a brutal upbringing.

The rationality assumption, as applied to mass repressions, requires that we be able to “model” the behavior of a Stalin-like dictator confronted with what he perceives to be disloyalty from his own population. Unlike democratic politicians, who adjust policies to the median voter in order to be elected, brutal dictators can adjust their constituents by eliminating their “enemies” (by execution or jailing, or, to a lesser extent, by deportation). Would a dictator, whose goals were that of a Stalin, engage in eliminations of large numbers of his population? What would he gain from such eliminations? How would he decide how many to eliminate and of what type?

To explore such issues, we use a model in which the dictator’s choice variable is the number of enemies to eliminate from the population. This model seeks to explain the circumstances under which a dictator would choose eliminations, and why the numbers of eliminations would change over time—the exceptionally high rate of eliminations (through execution and long Gulag terms) of 1937–1938, the substantial but lower rate of eliminations (largely through imprisonment and deportation) during dekulakization, and the “national operations” beginning in the late 1930s and stretching through the early postwar period, which relocated entire nationalities with extreme brutality. These spikes of mass repression took place against a backdrop of “normal” rates of repression, which were themselves exceptionally high by international standards.

Our eliminations model shifts from a power-maximizing dictator (who accumulates power levels more than sufficient to remain in office) to one whose objective is to accumulate enough power to secure his regime, but with resources left over for other activities. This dictator’s goal is to remain below a *revolution constraint*, defined as the maximum threat that the dictator can tolerate without risk of loss of power. The actual threat depends on the *number of enemies* and their *potency*. Defining the threat level in this fashion allows trade-offs between more but less potent enemies and fewer but more potent enemies. A formal (simplified) eliminations model is given in Appendix 6.<sup>5</sup>

The dictator is the one to assess the threat level. Of course, there are strong subjective elements in this calculation. Remember that the dictator's enemy is anyone the dictator determines to be an enemy. An enemy can be an enemy due to the "social danger" he presents, his background, or his present or future actions.

Stalin made constant assessments of the threat level. He read intelligence reports, discussed the situation with his state security or with private informants, or evaluated alarms raised by regional party secretaries. He assessed the potency of his enemies by gauging the international situation, by measuring the intent of perceived enemies, and by classifying different enemies by the "social danger" they posed. An enemy working alone would be less potent than one working in a group. An enemy bent on assassination would be more potent than one that distributed anti-party literature. How the dictator assesses the threat cannot be known; rather we infer his assessment from his actions.

We do know that Stalin was obsessed with enemies and on public occasions revealed how he calculated their numbers. Consider his musings recorded verbatim at the March 5, 1937 Central Committee plenum:

If you remember the last discussion was in 1927; the discussion was open; this was a real referendum. Seven hundred and thirty thousand members of the party (out of 854,000) participated, meaning 123,000 did not vote. Maybe they were on leave, on vacation, or had other reasons. Out of 854,000 party members 730,800 voted. Of these 724,000 voted for the Bolsheviks against the Trotskyites. This means 4,000 votes for the Trotskyites. This is half a percent. There were 2,600 abstentions. I think you would have to add the abstentions to the votes for the Trotskyites, which gives them a little over 6,000. I think from those who were not able to participate in the referendum, namely 121,000, it is possible to give 10 percent to the Trotskyites . . . this would add up to 11,000. If we add this 11,000 we get 18,000 Trotskyites. We can add another 10,000 for Zinoviev, giving us 28,000. Yes, let's reckon more than we need for objectivity—28,000. If we add rightists and others, let's raise the figure to 30,000. . . . We now have 1.5 million party members, 2 million with candidate members. From these cadres we have already arrested 18,000. If we take 30,000, this means there are 18,000 left.<sup>6</sup>

Thus Stalin did calculate the number of enemies. If we initially hold the potency factor constant, changes in the threat level will be due exclusively to changes in the number of enemies. If the number of enemies

is below the revolution constraint, the dictator needs no new repressive action. If the number of enemies rises above the revolution constraint, the dictator must eliminate a sufficient number to return to the revolution constraint.

We can illustrate the eliminations model with a simple numerical example in which we hold the potency factor constant at a “normal” level of 1. The initial number of enemies is 20 (each representing a potency level of 1), so that the threat level equals 20. If the total population is 100, 80 are “nonenemies” and 20 are enemies. If the revolution constraint is also 20, the dictator need not engage in eliminations.

If 10 previous nonenemies defect from the 80 to become enemies, the dictator now has 30 enemies (70 nonenemies) at a potency rate of 1, which places the actual threat level (30) above the revolution constraint (20). If he does nothing, he will be overthrown. But, the simple solution—eliminating the 10 new enemies—is not simple after all, because his enemies try to conceal themselves. He must be sure to eliminate the 10 defectors, but his ability to identify them depends on their skill in concealing themselves and upon the quality of intelligence. His agents can only identify enemies correctly with a certain probability. In our example, we use a two-thirds probability, which means that to eliminate 10 enemies, he must repress 15 citizens, only 10 of whom will be his enemies. The dictator must eliminate a certain number of nonenemies along with enemies to keep the threat level below the revolution constraint.

The eliminations model also suggests that repressions will increase if the potency factor increases (enemies become more dangerous) or if the ability to distinguish enemy from nonenemy diminishes. If, for example, the number of enemies is constant at 20, but the potency factor increases from 1 to 1.5, and the probability of detecting an enemy falls from two-thirds to one-half, the dictator must now eliminate an additional 20, only 10 of which will be enemies.<sup>7</sup> The sacrifice of nonenemies is a necessary evil of repression, but not without costs. In a labor-short economy, the loss of “loyal” or at least “neutral” able-bodied adults is a cost a rational dictator would wish to avoid.

This eliminations model is a rational choice model. The dictator “rationally” chooses to keep his enemies below the revolution constraint, and the model has two parameters: the potency of enemies and the probability of correct labeling of enemies. Despite its extreme simplic-

ity, it predicts certain regularities. First, the dictator will eliminate fewer citizens, the higher the probability of correct labeling. Second, he will eliminate more if he considers his enemies to be potent. Third, he will accept the repression of nonenemies as a matter of course. Fourth, the dictator will order a “normal” amount of repression when at the revolution constraint.

Were Stalin’s mass repressions of the 1930s consistent with this eliminations model? First, we need to examine some institutional background.

### PLANNING MASS REPRESSIONS: PROCEDURES

If the dictator perceives the threat to exceed the revolution constraint, he must order eliminations. In this case, the most important orders were issued by the Politburo. Under Stalin, the Politburo often did not meet in person; many issues were decided perfunctorily by written or telephone votes. Many proposals were prepared by subcommittees. Politburo members were required to sign. If things went wrong, all Politburo members would be held “collectively” responsible. This procedure protected Stalin after his death; to renounce Stalin meant explaining one’s own complicity.

Procedurally, Politburo decisions were made in response to “questions” of agencies (such as the NKVD, the foreign ministry, or the trade ministry), of individuals, or of committees or commissions. Each question would have a sponsor (such as “Question of Menzhinsky and Yagoda,” or more frequently “Question of the NKVD”). The Politburo would accept, reject, or delay the proposal in the name of the Central Committee. Decisions were signed by Stalin or a deputy such as Molotov, or were unsigned but on Central Committee letterhead. Classified decisions were placed in “special files.” The decision would also contain a distribution list of persons who would receive all or part of the decision.<sup>8</sup> The number of questions depended on the frequency of Politburo meetings. In the early and mid-1920s, the Politburo met frequently. The January 28, 1925 meeting addressed 28 questions directly, 44 questions were handled by written or telephone vote (*opros*), and eight were placed in special files.<sup>9</sup> The January 5, 1930 meeting addressed 40 questions directly, and 24 were handled by *opros*, of which nine went into special files.<sup>10</sup> By the late 1930s, the Politburo met infrequently. Ques-

tions were accumulated and dealt with in large numbers in single sessions. The accumulated questions for the period September 23 to October 25 came to 139 questions handled directly, and 749 by opros of which 64 were for special files.<sup>11</sup>

The orders for the three mass operations campaigns, like other major decisions, were issued by the Politburo according to these procedures, starting with dekulakization.

## DEKULAKIZATION: LIQUIDATION OF A CLASS

Dekulakization was the first mass repression. Prior to collectivization, there had been campaigns to repress thousands. For the first time, the Politburo and Yagoda's OGPU had to repress hundreds of thousands.

As collectivization began in late 1929, there was discussion within the party of what to do with the kulaks, who according to official statistics numbered over a half-million households containing two and a half million persons in the mid-1920s.<sup>12</sup> Stalin's order of December 1929 to "liquidate the kulaks as a class" confronted state security with a formidable task.

Collectivization and dekulakization set off a civil war in the countryside—a second Bolshevik Revolution. Peasants protested: "We don't need collectivization," "You are drinking our blood and are trampling on our spines and destroying the revolution," and "Away with the communists who are leading the country to ruin."<sup>13</sup> OGPU statistics counted 13,754 mass demonstrations in 1930 alone and 14,000 "acts of terror."<sup>14</sup> The OGPU's response was brutal. In 1930 alone, OGPU troikas executed 19,000. Once in the hands of troikas, chances of escaping a severe sentence were remote.<sup>15</sup>

The Bolsheviks won the battle for the countryside due to the lack of coordinated opposition and by mobilizing OGPU special forces and activist reinforcements. The OGPU shifted around more than 7,000 troops, supplemented by 4,200 troops formed from Red Army units.<sup>16</sup> The OGPU rounded up and transported deportees from collection points.<sup>17</sup> As the cowed peasantry succumbed to superior force, confusion prevailed as resisters were executed, jailed, or deported. More than 72,000 deportees attempted to escape upon arrival.<sup>18</sup> Almost 20 percent of Ukrainian kulaks escaped dekulakization by fleeing their vil-

lages.<sup>19</sup> Although the Politburo and OGPU decrees expressly exempted families of Red Army soldiers, hundreds or thousands of people belonging to these families found themselves exiled to Siberia or Kazakhstan, along with poor peasant families, who offered tax documents to prove their lowly status.

### Planning Dekulakization

The dekulakization campaign, which started all this, was announced in the Politburo Decree “About Measures for the Liquidation of Kulak Households in the Regions of Continuous Collectivization” dated January 30, 1930.<sup>20</sup> The decree initiated “the policy of liquidation of kulaks as a class . . . and of decisive suppression of counterrevolutionary resistance of kulaks to the collective farm movement.” It gave the order (in point 3) to “quickly liquidate a first category of counterrevolutionary kulak activists by confining them in concentration camps, not hesitating to carry out the highest measure of repression for organizers of terror acts, counterrevolutionary statements, and insurgent organizations”; and to “deport to remote regions or to remote districts within the confines of the territory a second category of kulak activists, especially from the richest kulaks and the quasi-landlords.” A third category of prosperous but less dangerous kulaks was to be resettled within the region but outside their home districts.

The Politburo decree targeted 3–5 percent of peasant households to “concentrate the blow against actual kulak households and to prevent the application of these measures to middle peasant households.” Regional minimum and maximum targets were set. Between 49,000 and 60,000 first-category offenders were to be sent to concentration camps (or executed) and 129,000 to 154,000 kulak households were to be deported to remote regions *within four months* (February through May).<sup>21</sup>

The decree stated that “lists of second-category offenders [for deportation] are to be drawn up by the local soviets on the basis of decisions made by poor and middle peasants.” Twenty-five hundred party activists were assigned to the countryside and were to report by February 15, one thousand extra troops were assigned to the OGPU, and the district OGPU offices were authorized to dispense extrajudicial justice through troikas. Menzhinsky, Yagoda’s official boss, instructed the troi-

kas “to examine these cases and pass sentences quickly.” They should investigate only when it promised to yield something of substance.<sup>22</sup>

With Stalin as its guiding force, the Politburo’s January 30, 1930 decree had been worked out by a Politburo commission headed by V. M. Molotov. A subcommittee that included Yagoda planned operations, extrajudicial troikas, and OGPU troop movements.<sup>23</sup> The number of kulaks had been heatedly debated within the Politburo in the mid-1920s.<sup>24</sup> Molotov argued that kulak households accounted for 5 percent of the rural population for a total of 1.2 million households, versus the statistical administration’s lower figure.<sup>25</sup> The number of kulaks scheduled for repression changed in the course of drafting until the Politburo settled on the final range of 3–5 percent.<sup>26</sup> Regions were also asked how many kulaks they had, or how many they could receive, if resettled in remote districts.<sup>27</sup>

The Politburo approved the Molotov commission report on January 30, 1930 under the question “About Measures Related to Kulaks,” and ordered Rykov, Molotov, and justice official Krylenko to prepare the necessary state decrees. An amendment was added (by Voroshilov) to “exempt Red Army soldiers and partisans from dekulakization except those who actively resist.”<sup>28</sup> On February 15, 1930, the Politburo increased the secrecy of the operations by forbidding “the publication of executions of kulak elements in the local and central press without special permission of the Central Committee in every case.”<sup>29</sup>

As would become typical of mass operations, Stalin’s Politburo decree was put into effect by an operational decree of the OGPU, Yagoda’s OGPU Operational Directive No. 44/21 “About the Liquidation of the Kulaks as a Class” of February 2, 1930. Most of Yagoda’s decree repeats the Politburo decree verbatim. Politburo decrees were top secret and could not be widely distributed; the operational decree provided the information that operational administrators on the ground needed to know.

Yagoda expanded the definition of kulaks to include just about anyone opposed to Soviet power<sup>30</sup> and ordered “the OGPU to take necessary measures concerning the first and second categories within four months” (February–May) and added: “Most of those arrested are to be confined in concentration camps; the most evil and fanatic activists . . . must be handled by the most decisive measures of punishment including VMN [the highest measured of punishment].”

Yagoda's decree focused on operational matters. He ordered "the expeditious creation of troikas in the regional departments of the OGPU [PP OGPUs]," which included a regional party and prosecutorial representative as well, to process first-category defendants in an extrajudicial format "without the slightest delay." Collection points were to be organized to dispatch deportees. OGPU reserves were to be formed, especially in the most sensitive regions. Each regional office was to submit its "final designation of the location of collection points and the numbers of deportees to be moved through these points no later than ten A.M., February 4." Yagoda ordered that "under no circumstances are units of the Red Army to be used, except in extreme circumstances" and ordered a "100 percent examination of letters going to the Red Army, and abroad."

Regional party committees had already approved dekulakization decrees between January 20 and 29.<sup>31</sup> District OGPU offices were also informed of the impending campaign through meetings in Moscow. Demands from regions, such as the Urals District OGPU office, for higher limits ("The 5,000 households given for the Urals in no way corresponds to the real needs to purge the province of kulak and counterrevolutionary White Guard—bandit elements")<sup>32</sup> were immediately denied: "The Central Committee directs attention to the fact that in some provinces there is an effort to raise the number of deported kulaks and thus violate the decree of the Central Committee. The Central Committee categorically demands the exact execution of its decision of January 30."<sup>33</sup> Warnings against excessive dekulakization continued: A March 10 Politburo order condemned high dekulakization rates in some regions as a "gross distortion" of party policy.<sup>34</sup>

As dekulakization proceeded, the Politburo issued orders to regulate its course. As Siberian regions objected to "accepting" deportees, the OGPU was directed "to reject telegrams of the Siberian committee and take measures to receive deportees." In the same meeting, a question "About Kulaks" raised by Stalin, Menzhinsky, and Yagoda, directed the OGPU "to coordinate settlements in Kazakhstan with the deputy head of state (Andreev) or in his absence, Molotov."<sup>35</sup> In a February 1930 meeting, Stalin's question "About Chechnya and Uzbekistan" ordered a slower pace of collectivization in economically backward regions and declared "unacceptable" certain methods practiced in various parts of Uzbekistan, such as water deprivation or use of military troops.<sup>36</sup>

Stalin's primary goal was the success of collectivization. He warned



on January 30, 1930 not to let dekulakization harm collectivization.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, dekulakization proceeded in spurts as concern about violence and destruction in the countryside grew and waned. On March 2, 1930, Stalin published an article entitled “Dizzy with Success” which blamed local officials for excesses and called for voluntary entry into collectives. The pace of collectivization and dekulakization slowed until relative quiet was restored and another push could be undertaken. Similarly, there were cutbacks of deportations in late 1931 as receiving regions complained about lack of food and supplies for newcomers as the mortality of “special settlers” soared.<sup>38</sup>

### Dekulakization: Plan Fulfillment

The January 30 Politburo decree assigned the OGPU a “plan” to imprison or execute 49,000 to 60,000 first-category offenders and to deport 129,000 to 154,000 second-category households to remote regions. Half of this task was to be completed by April 15 and in full by the end of May. The long-run plan called for the deportation of between 720,000 and 1.2 million households (3–5 percent of the rural population) either to remote regions or resettled within their home region.<sup>39</sup> No date certain was given for completion of this plan. Table 6.1 summarizes the fulfillment of the four-month plan (49,000 to 60,000 first-category executions and imprisonments) and 129,000 to 154,000 deportations of second-category households. These figures are approximations that adjust for punishments handed down prior to the dekulakization decree and for defendants processed by regular courts.<sup>40</sup>

Some 65,000 first-category offenders were executed or imprisoned between January and May 1930. The 49,000 to 60,000 limit was met within the four-month deadline with the caveat that only 44 percent were kulaks—a fact not inconsistent with the Yagoda decree which lists sectarians, merchants, speculators, and a wide variety of other enemies.

The target of 129,000 to 154,000 families for deportation and resettlement of second-category kulak households was not met. Second-category households could be either deported to a remote region, such as from Ukraine or the Black Earth region to the Northern Region, or resettled within an already remote region (such as within Siberia or Kazakhstan) but to an unpopulated area. By late May, the number of deported households approached 100,000. It rose to 135,000 (and met

Table 6.1. Dekulakization: Four-Month Plan, Arrests, and Fulfillment

	Category 1 (Camps or Death)	Category 2 (Deportation)	Total
<i>A. Plan (targets for May 1930)</i>			
Middle Volga	3–4,000	8–10,000	
Northern Caucasus and Dagestan	6–8,000	20,000	
Ukraine	15,000	30–35,000	
Central Black Earth	3–5,000	10–15,000	
Lower Volga	4–6,000	10–12,000	
Belorussia	4–5,000	6–7,000	
Urals	4–5,000	10–15,000	
Siberia	5–6,000	25,000	
Kazakhstan	5–6,000	10–15,000	
Total original plan	49–60,000	129–154,000	
Revised plan (May 6)		115,000	
<i>B. Arrests (no plan targets)</i>			
By April 15, 1930			140,000
By October 1, 1930			283,000
<i>C. Plan Fulfillment (May 1930)</i>			
Camp sentences and executions <sup>a</sup>	65,000		
Deportations (families) (May 23, 1930)		99,515	
Deportations (families) Dec. 10, 1930		135,147	

*Sources:* Decree of OGPU No. 44/21 “About the Liquidation of the Kulaks as a Class,” cited in N. Vert and S. V. Mironenko, eds., *Massovye Repressii v SSSR, Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 1 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), pp. 94–104. Arrests and plan fulfillment are from A. Berelovich and V. Danilov, eds., *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChk-OGPU-NKVD, 1918–1939: Dokumenty i materialy v 4 tomakh*, vol. 1: 1930–1931 (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998), pp. 373, 484, 533–534 (which includes both exiled households and those resettled within the territory).

<sup>a</sup>Camp sentences and executions are calculated by multiplying the number of 134,644 1930 executions and Gulag sentences (from Colonel Pavlov, “Report about the Numbers of Those Sentenced According to Cases of Organs of the NKVD,” cited in N. Vert and S. V. Mironenko, eds., *Massovye repressii v SSSR, Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 1 [Moscow: Rosspen, 2004], pp. 608–609), by the approximate percentage of category 1 arrests taking place between January and May 15, 1930 from Berelovich and Danilov, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChk-OGPU-NKVD*, 1:484.

the lower target) only by December. The deportation plan was under-fulfilled because of shortfalls in both deportations and resettlements, but shortfalls were higher (around 50 percent) for resettlements.<sup>41</sup> As it became evident that the short-run deportation plan would not be met, the Politburo and OGPU engaged in a common planning practice: they lowered the plan target to allow the reporting of fulfillment. On May 6, the deportation plan was lowered from 160,000 to 115,000 families.

The long-term dekulakization of 3 to 5 percent of the 24.2 million rural households<sup>42</sup> ended officially May 8, 1933 with a joint decree of the Central Committee and the Council of People's Commissars "About the Cessation of Mass Deportations of Peasants, the Regulation of Arrests, and the Relief of Places of Confinement." This decree declared the "full victory of collectivization in the village" and that "we no longer need mass repression" applied under the rule that amounted to "first arrest and then try to figure it out." The decree ordered the OGPU and militia to "expeditiously cease any mass resettlement of peasants. Deportations are to be allowed only on individual and specific orders and only for those households whose head is carrying on an active battle against collective farms."<sup>43</sup> At the time of cessation, there were 1,142,084 special settlers in remote regions, not counting those who died or escaped.<sup>44</sup>

In economic planning, operational plans were the quarterly and monthly plans. Annual plans were frequently "corrected," and five year plans were "visions of the future" of no operational significance. By analogy, we would expect the 3–5 percent long-run plan to lose operational significance as dekulakization was overshadowed by other things, such as the Law of August 7, 1932 against the theft of socialist property or the passportization campaign announced December 27, 1932 to rid the major cities of "marginal elements."<sup>45</sup>

That dekulakization was one of three major repressions by the end of 1932 complicates the calculation of fulfillment of the 3–5 percent target. OGPU execution, imprisonment, and deportation statistics include not only victims of dekulakization but also those of the antitheft law and passportization decree, both enforced, at least in part, by OGPU tribunals. From August 1932 to June 1933, almost a quarter of a million persons were sentenced to ten-year terms under the antitheft law, following instructions from Stalin and Molotov: "Arrest anyone; don't be lazy." Some 800,000 persons flooded into prisons built to hold

Table 6.2. Fulfilling the 3–5 Percent Dekulakization Targets<sup>a</sup>

	<i>Execution</i>	<i>Camps</i>	<i>Deported</i>	<i>Resettled</i>	<i>Total<sup>b</sup></i>
OGPU tribunals, 1930 and 1931	30,852	220,126	241,000 <sup>c</sup>	140,000	
OGPU tribunals, 1932 <sup>d</sup>	2,728	51,569	36,067	21,000	
OGPU tribunals 1933 <sup>d</sup>	2,154	35,515	54,262	32,000	
Totals (fulfillment)	35,736	287,210	331,329	93,000	847,275
Plan (Jan. 30, 1930) <sup>d</sup>					724,000–1,200,000
Percent fulfillment (relative to lower limit)					71–117

*Sources:* See Table 6.1 above and Pavlov. Sentences under the August 7, 1932 law are from Yoram Gorlizki, “Theft under Stalin: A Property Rights Analysis,” PERSA Working Paper no. 10, 28 June, 2001. The figures for OGPU tribunal sentences (minus sentences under the August 7, 1932 law) and for those deported (both outside and inside their home regions) for 1930 and 1931 are from R. W. Davies and Stephen Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 46, 192. Their numbers are consistent with those cited by N. A. Ivnitskii, *Sud’ba raskulachennykh v SSSR* (Moscow: Sobranie, 2004), p. 43.

<sup>a</sup>We do not include self-dekulakization (fleeing to the city or selling property and blending into collective farms) in these figures. We include no dekulakizations for 1933, the year in which OGPU attention turned to ridding the cities of undesirables, including many kulak-refugees.

<sup>b</sup>See note to Table 6.1.

<sup>c</sup>We use the minimum targeted number of deportations/resettlements from the February 1931 plan.

<sup>d</sup>For 1932 and 1933, we deduct collective farmers sentenced under the August 7, 1932 law from the total sentenced to camps by OGPU tribunals. The 1932 and 1933 deportation figures are from Pavlov, “Report about the Numbers of Those Sentenced According to Cases of Organs of the NKVD,” p. 609. We have no data on resettlements for 1932 and 1933, so we apply the 1930–1931 ratio of resettlements to deportations (.58) to the deportation figures to approximate the resettlement figures.

200,000.<sup>46</sup> The passportization campaign caused a half-million people to flee cities to escape imprisonment.

Table 6.2 provides a very rough approximation of the fulfillment of the long-term dekulakization plan. Many deportations took place without the target being brought before an OGPU tribunal, and the figures we cite after 1930–1931 include only those sentenced by OGPU tribunals. Moreover, we must simply make guesses about households resettled within their home region for 1932 and 1933. We speculate that there was no official effort to check fulfillment of the 3–5 percent limit.

In fact, there is no clear definition of what constituted a “dekulakization.” It could vary from an expropriation of property to an execution. In Table 6.2, we count persons executed or imprisoned as dekulakized along with households deported or resettled. The total figures are somewhat like adding together apples and oranges, but any calculation of this sort must be regarded as illustrative. Our exercise may be pointless insofar as no one in power was interested in this accounting exercise. In any case, our approximations suggest that the lower limit (dekulakization of 3 percent of the agricultural population) was reached, but the upper limit was not.

Our overall conclusion is that the dekulakization plan was approximately fulfilled both in its four-month and in its long-term variant. It was better fulfilled than the economic plans of this period.<sup>47</sup> It was clearly not grossly overfulfilled (relative to the initial intent), and it appears that Stalin and the Politburo went to extra lengths to prevent local “enthusiasm” from pushing dekulakization beyond its intended limits.

#### MASS OPERATIONS, 1937–1938

At the January–February 1934 Party Congress, called the “Congress of Victors,” Stalin claimed the success of collectivization and dekulakization of the countryside and industrialization of the cities. Stalin’s battle against his enemies, however, was just starting. The purge of the party elite began in December 1934. By the spring of 1937, most of the high-level officials had already been arrested, although their trials lay ahead.

Stalin, in a speech to the military council on June 2, 1937, after the first two Moscow show trials, summed up what had been accomplished and what remained to be done. Stalin told his attentive audience that ten high party officials had been uncovered as spies of the Germans and Japanese. Bukharin and Rykov (whose trial still lay ahead) were “very close to the spies” and included the highest officials of the General Staff—Tukhachevsky, Iakir, and Uborevich—among the spies.

STALIN: Yes, even Tukhachevsky. You read his confession?

VOICES FROM THE AUDIENCE: Yes we read.

STALIN: He gave our operational plan—the operational plan, the holiest of

holies, to German intelligence. He had meetings with representatives of German intelligence.

VOICES FROM THE AUDIENCE: Spies?

STALIN: Yes, spies.<sup>48</sup>

Stalin characterized these conspiracies as a widespread failure of intelligence, which could not be tolerated further: "It is necessary to check our own people and others who come to us. It is necessary to have a widespread intelligence network, which checks every party member and every nonparty Bolshevik, especially the organs of the OGPU, along with the organs of intelligence, so that they widen their own network and are vigilantly examined." There were no longer any safe havens free from infiltrators. Yagoda's recent treachery (he was one of the supposed ten German spies) showed that even the NKVD was not immune.

The stage was being set for the mass operations that penetrated virtually every aspect of Soviet life starting in the summer of 1937. There may have been an organic link between the purge of the party elite and the impending mass operations. Arrested national and regional leaders were accused of massive conspiracies, but conspiracies must have foot soldiers. If a regional party leader was arrested, he must have had a gang of followers. Common people do not organize themselves against Soviet power. Someone must be responsible. After reading an alarmist June report "About the Discovery in Western Siberia of Counterrevolutionary Rebellious Groups among Deported Kulaks," Stalin appointed a Western Siberian troika "to apply the highest measure of punishment to all activists of rebellious organizations among deported kulaks."<sup>49</sup>

At the time of Stalin's June speech, ominous signs were coming in from the provinces. Deported kulaks were returning from the special settlements, as were those sentenced to the Gulag during dekulakization. Western Siberia NKVD boss Mironov reported: "In Naryn and Kuzbas, there are 208,400 exiled kulaks; another 3,500 live under administrative exile and include White officers, active bandits and convicts, and former police officers . . . this is a *broad base* for an insurgent rebellion."<sup>50</sup> Regional party secretaries complained about large influxes of "alien elements" and about wrecking in collective farms.<sup>51</sup> It is unclear whether these alarmist regional officials were expressing their own views or simply telling Stalin what he wanted to hear. The head of the Perm city administration, in charge of preparations for the opera-

tion, was himself arrested and executed a week before its beginning. Ordinary citizens arrested in the course of mass operations were accused of belonging to the gangs of arrested regional party leaders.<sup>52</sup>

Even before the announcement of mass operations, Stalin took precautionary steps. The Politburo removed expelled party members from the military in its March 19–September 9, 1937 session.<sup>53</sup> The June 10, 1937 session sent expelled party members from cities to nonindustrial regions, and ordered active observation of those left behind.<sup>54</sup> Stalin's appointment of the ambitious Yezhov to replace Yagoda in late 1936 gave him the right lieutenant to annihilate his enemies "once and for all time."

### Planning Mass Operations

Stalin set mass operations in motion with a top secret telegram of July 2, 1937 to regional party secretaries. The undated draft of the telegram "About Anti-Soviet Elements," written in Lazar Kaganovich's hand, was signed by eight Politburo members. Its key passage read: "It is noted that a large part of former kulaks and criminals, deported at one time to northern and Siberian regions and then, after serving their terms and returning to their home provinces, are the main source of all anti-Soviet and diversionary crimes in collective and state farms and in transport and industry. The Central Committee proposes to all regional secretaries and regional representatives of the NKVD to investigate all returnees so that the most hostile are immediately arrested and shot according to administrative measures via troikas, and the less active of them are to be reregistered and deported according to instructions of the NKVD. The Central Committee requires that the composition of the troikas be presented to it within 5 days along with the numbers to be shot and the numbers to be deported."<sup>55</sup>

The Politburo had days earlier sent orders to the regions to form troikas and to compile lists of enemies within a five-day period.<sup>56</sup> Shortly thereafter, more than one hundred troikas were staffed and ready for operations.<sup>57</sup> On July 8, for example, the NKVD head of Western Siberia (Mironov) gave lists of names of those to be arrested to the regional party boss (Eikhe). Such lists were thrown together hastily from existing catalogs of suspicious persons with no investigatory work.<sup>58</sup>

Stalin's July 2, 1937 directive, unlike the detailed January 30, 1930 dekulakization decree, gave only the basic outline: enemies should be divided into two categories, one for execution, the other to be sent to remote areas; enemies were labeled with the catch-all phrase "returning kulaks and criminals." Remarkably, the July 2 directive speaks of "reregistration and deportation" and leaves out prison as a punishment.

Subsequent operational decrees issued by the NKVD filled in the key blanks. Yezhov's July 30, 1937 operational decree was drafted by Yezhov's deputy M. P. Frinovsky, and Yezhov met fifteen times with Stalin (often with Molotov in attendance) between July 4 and July 29, 1937, sometimes in meetings lasting more than three hours.<sup>59</sup> Stalin more than likely dictated the scale and terms of operations to Yezhov during these meetings.

We do not know whether the initial regional "limits" came from the bottom up or top-down from Yezhov and Stalin. It was likely a combination. Yezhov's NKVD had extensive card catalogs of citizens (internal passport records, criminal records, expulsions from the party, and records of disenfranchised persons) from which victims could be drawn. The regional party and NKVD departments also had extensive records from surveillance, factory lists, and prosecutors.

The head of the Perm District NKVD (G. F. Cherniakov) received the order at a July meeting of district chiefs "to prepare in the shortest possible time a list of people from the kulaks and submit it to the NKVD office in Kudymkar." Lists were prepared on special forms, which were inspected by a militia officer who approved them for submission. In the beginning of August 1937, the Prikam'e regional NKVD boss (Revinov) examined lists prepared by assembled district NKVD leaders that had Roman numerals I or II (death or prison) next to each name. Another local Perm participant described the compilation of arrest lists: "Before the preparation of the arrest protocols, the commandant of the worker settlement called me in and told me that I had to choose people and find compromising material on them, after which we put together their characteristics, taking several facts from memory. For other names, we looked at work books and disciplinary records, such as absenteeism and so forth. After this, the investigator prepared the arrest protocol for signature."<sup>60</sup>

The sixty-five regions submitted their lists of category 1 and 2 victims



to the Politburo in early July. These lists were acknowledged by the Politburo under the common designation "About Anti-Soviet Elements." Western Siberia submitted 6,600 first-category and 4,200 second-category victims and named its party secretary (Eikhe), NKVD administration head (Mironov), and chief prosecutor (Barkov) to man its troika. Kazakhstan submitted 2,345 first-category and 4,403 second-category victims; Sverdlovsk 4,700 and 3,000. Moscow province named its party secretary (Khrushchev), NKVD head (Stalin's brother-in-law Redens) and chief prosecutor (Maslov) to head its troika.<sup>61</sup>

Stalin clearly was well acquainted with the contents of Yezhov's Operational Order of the NKVD No. 00447 of July 30, 1937 (issued twenty-eight days after Stalin's July 2 telegram). Upon its receipt, he sent a note to his secretary (Poskrebyshv): "I am directing to you Operational Order No. 00447 'About the Repression of Former Kulaks, Criminals, and Anti-Soviet Elements.' I request you send this to members of the Politburo for voting and send the results to Comrade Yezhov."<sup>62</sup> Stalin's decision to approve Order No. 00447 by *opros* suggests that it was worked out within a narrow circle and that Stalin did not wish further debate.

Order No. 00447 was a classic extraordinary decree:<sup>63</sup> It began by stating the urgent need to put an end "once and for all time" to the "foul subversive work" of the masses of enemies at large in society. It then describes nine categories of "contingents" subject to repression and divides them into a first category of the "most dangerous and hostile" to "be shot" (capital letters) and a second category subject to eight- to ten-year terms in camps. (Note that Stalin's Politburo order had called for "deportation" of this category, which was now changed to imprisonment.) The order gives plan "limits" for forty-eight Russian and Central Asian provinces, eight Ukrainian provinces, eight Kazakh provinces, and the Gulag, for a total of sixty-five regional plans. (Gulag inmates were automatically placed in the first category; they were already in prison.) The totals for the sixty-five regions added up to 75,950 executions and 193,000 prison sentences. The operation was scheduled to begin August 5, 1937, that is within six days, and was to end within four months (similar to dekulakization), by early December 1937.

The dekulakization limits had been based on rough percentages of the number of kulaks in each of the nine regions, using Stalin's control figure of 3–5 percent of the rural population. The limits of Order No.

00447 were more complex because they were for sixty-five regions, and they varied from three-tenths of 1 percent to a low of one-twentieth of 1 percent of the population, depending on the region.

Yezhov's list of "contingents" for arrest gave regional party and NKVD officials considerable latitude in their choice of victims. Virtually anyone from a common thief to a foreign spy could be a target. Republic and regional troikas were ordered to "examine materials for each arrested person or group of arrested persons" and "prepare protocols of their meetings in which sentences are registered." The troikas were not to conduct proceedings but to approve the recommended sentences and to order the operational groups to carry out the sentences "under complete secrecy."

Unlike dekulakization where requests to exceed limits were notably denied, Yezhov encouraged requests for higher limits: "In cases where circumstances demand a raising of limits, peoples' commissars of the republic NKVDs and directors of regional NKVD administrations must present to me petitions justifying the request." No further instructions were given but in practice petitions were sent to Yezhov or directly to Stalin.

Yezhov's deputy and head of the GUGB (Frinovsky) was placed in operational charge of the "the magnificent task of destroying with the most merciless methods this band of anti-Soviet elements."<sup>64</sup> The GUGB was to submit reports every five days on the course of the operation.

### Mass Operations Underway

Mass operations got off to a fast start. In the first half of August, 100,990 persons were arrested and 14,305 persons were sentenced. The first victims were the easiest targets—those already in custody. By the end of August, 150,000 had been arrested and over 30,000 executed. The first troika session took place August 5, 1937. There were not enough GUGB officers to head all operational groups; so militia leaders often served in their stead. Chekist reserves had to be tapped. The unsuspecting population did not know what was in store. One of the first Tatar victims was a Red partisan hero, whose wife gathered signatures in vain to protest his arrest. Likely those who signed the petition were themselves later arrested.<sup>65</sup> Operational groups carried out arrests until

their prisons were full and then submitted petitions for higher limits, which flooded into NKVD offices and to Stalin directly. In some cases, limit increases were the result of pressure from above, such as a circular letter from Yezhov, praising a “good” regional NKVD director who had come to see him to request a higher limit.<sup>66</sup>

The overworked troikas exceeded limits by diverting cases to military troikas. Although troikas were supposed to be manned by an NKVD, a party, and a prosecutorial representative, the latter two often played the role of mere extras. One troika met in full form only once.<sup>67</sup> Party representatives were hard to keep anyway, as regional party secretaries and their subordinates were themselves purged.

Although reports of arrests and convictions were supposed to be submitted every five days, the responsible Eighth Department of the GUGB had trouble keeping up. In some cases, executions were carried out without permission, such as in Turkmenia where 7,000 were shot without higher orders. In the rush to meet quotas, executions were carried out not by Chekist officers but by militia, army, and party workers.<sup>68</sup>

For the first time since his accession to complete power, Stalin did not take his lengthy annual vacation in the south but stayed in Moscow to personally monitor the slaughter. Stalin met one-on-one regularly with Yezhov, and the Politburo spent much of its time authorizing changes in the composition of troikas, approving executions, and replacing arrested state and party officials. Elite turnover was exceptionally high throughout mass operations.

Order No. 00447 scheduled mass operations to end the second week of December, and, as this deadline approached, no one knew whether the troikas would be furloughed and the operation shut down. Regional NKVD authorities lobbied Stalin, telling him that the battle was not over and that there were still many enemies at large. On January 31, 1938, Stalin ordered a second phase of mass operations and gave new limits of 48,000 category 1 and 9,200 category 2 repressions.<sup>69</sup> This second phase carried through until mid-November.

The extension of mass operations required changes in procedures. Already in mid-October 1937, the card catalogs of “class enemies” had been largely exhausted. Special troika boards now signed mass orders that authorized arrests first with the names to be filled in later. Officers who refused to continue arrests were themselves arrested. Frantic

Table 6.3. Decisions of Judicial Organs, by Types of Sentence, 1938

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Execution	328,618	58.8
Execution commuted to corrective labor camp	545	0.1
Corrective labor camp: 25 years	797	0.1
20 years	1,178	0.2
15 years	3,218	0.6
10 years	155,683	27.9
5 years	36,135	6.5
3 years	7,953	1.4
Deportation or resettlement	16,842	3.0
Other sentences	3,289	0.5
Freed by procurator or judges	4,325	0.8
Total	558,583	100.0

*Source:* Oleg Mozokhin, “Statistika repressivnoi deiatel’nosti organov bezopasnosti na period s 1921 po 1940 gg.” Posted at [www.fsb.ru](http://www.fsb.ru), “Avtory.” These figures also include “national operations.”

searches for victims were conducted among “dead files.” Operational units began group arrests, such as of all managers from one factory, or simply picked people up from the streets.<sup>70</sup> In the Perm region, people were arrested simply because their names appeared on lists, such as of honored Stakhanovite workers.<sup>71</sup>

Table 6.3 summarizes the work of NKVD tribunals in 1938. They condemned over 325,000 victims to death, for almost 60 percent of the total number of cases. Another 155,000 were sentenced to ten years in the Gulag and 36,000 or 6 percent to five years. Unlike with dekulakization, deportation or resettlement were rare, applied only to 3 percent of tribunal cases.

The Great Terror ended suddenly on November 17, 1938, again with a joint decree of the Central Committee and the Council of Peoples’ Commissars initiated by Stalin.<sup>72</sup> At that time, the cumulative number of convictions stood at 1.4 million, of which 687,000 were shot.<sup>73</sup> The November 17 decree criticized the “substantial deficiencies and distortions in the work of the NKVD and the procurator,” the NKVD was forbidden to carry out further mass operations, and the troikas were furloughed.<sup>74</sup> Yezhov’s arrest followed within six months.

## Fulfilling the Mass Operations Plan

If a dictator's repression plan is grossly over- or underfulfilled, the dictator is not in control. If the result is something other than what the dictator ordered, the end result is not determined by the dictator but by the agents in charge of plan fulfillment.

In fact, there is a "revisionist" literature that blames the pressure from regional party heads for repression and uses the subsequent excesses at local levels as proof that the Great Terror had bottom-up roots: Stalin was simply acceding to pressure from below in his authorization of mass operations.<sup>75</sup> This was indeed the argument made by Stalin after mass operations were halted: mavericks in the NKVD led by Yezhov were to blame, a line of argumentation continued by Stalin's successors until Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956.

The undeniable fact that agents were demanding higher limits (discussed in the next chapter) does not mean that Stalin had to accede. The repression would have indeed "gotten out of hand" if executions and imprisonments took place without the dictator's approval or even against his will. There is no way to know for sure Stalin's true intentions. They could have been expressed in private conversations with Yezhov or with a "wink and a nod" to his deputies. All that we have are the original limits and official approvals of limit increases, some of which may be missing from the written record.

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 showed that dekulakization was kept broadly within the limits set by the dictator, and requests to raise limits were rejected. Were mass operations similarly kept under control? Did the number of repressions equal those authorized?

To answer this vital question, we have to differentiate victims prosecuted under Order No. 00447 from those processed under national operations, which (as will be noted below) began at about the same time. Given the chaos and confusion, we imagine that there was not a clear separation in the minds of the repressors themselves. Any attempt, therefore, to check the degree of fulfillment of Order No. 00447 and its amendments must be regarded as a gross approximation.

Table 6.4 shows the original limits of Order No. 00447, the limit increases approved by the Politburo, and those approved by the NKVD but not by the Politburo. (These calculations are from the work of two German historians, Mark Junge and Rolf Binner, who have gathered all

Table 6.4. Fulfillment of Order No. 00447, 1937–1938

<i>Action</i>	<i>Category 1</i>	<i>Category 2</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. Original limits	75,950	193,000	268,950
2. Limit increases approved by Politburo	150,500	33,250	183,750
3. Limit increases approved by NKVD alone	129,655	170,960	300,615
4. Total limits	356,105	397,210	753,315
5. Total actual sentences (Junge and Binner) <sup>a</sup>	386,798	380,599	767,397
6. Total actual sentences (Pavlov)	434,517	433,264	867,781
7. % Fulfillment (5/4)	108	96	102
8. % Fulfillment (6/4)	122	109	115

*Sources:* Lines 1–3 and 5 are from Mark Junge and Rol'f Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim"* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2003), p. 136. Line 6 is from Pavlov, "Report about the Numbers of Those Sentenced According to Cases of Organs of the NKVD."

<sup>a</sup>Cumulated total of death and prison sentences by extrajudicial tribunals for 1937 and 1938. To adjust for sentences before July 30, 1937, we subtract one-half of the 1936 totals (assuming that the first half of 1937 was like the last half of 1936) and Junge and Binner's estimate of executions and prison sentences under national operations (from Table 6.5).

available information on limit increases.)<sup>76</sup> The key figures in Table 6.4 compare total sentences approved with actual sentences (line 4 versus lines 5 and 6).

We have two measures of actual sentences under Order No. 00447: Junge and Binner's (line 5) and our own calculation (line 6) which subtracts from the official state security totals of prison and death sentences by extrajudicial tribunals (as reported by the famous Pavlov memo of December 1953) the numbers of sentences prior to August 1, 1937 and sentences under national operations. This second calculation yields higher numbers of actual sentences, but does not really change the overall conclusions.

The table shows that most sentences were actually approved either by the Politburo or by the NKVD (presumably its central office). If we take the category 1 and 2 totals, "overfulfillment" ranges from 2 to 15 per cent depending on whether line 5 or 6 is used. Execution targets were

overfulfilled more than imprisonment targets. By Soviet planning standards, these are not large deviations. Most notably, 300,000 of the limit increases were approved *within the NKVD*. Stalin (the Politburo) approved only 184,000 (of which 150,000 were for executions). Some 60,000 of these were issued in one fell swoop with Stalin's extension of mass operations at the end of January 1938.

This gap between Politburo-approved sentences and those approved by the NKVD alone gave Stalin a wedge to blame the excesses of mass operations on Yezhov and his NKVD. In his interrogations, Yezhov claimed that he "kept Stalin informed of what was going on in the NKVD"<sup>77</sup>—an assertion that was rebutted by Yezhov's deputy, M. P. Frinovsky, in his interrogation: "Yezhov declared that he had never concealed or never would conceal anything from the party and from Stalin. In fact, he fooled the party in big and small questions."<sup>78</sup> Clearly, Frinovsky's interrogators wanted him to blame Yezhov for the excesses of the Great Terror, and he obliged.

Yezhov was selected by Stalin because of his extreme loyalty, and it is doubtful that he would have acted as a rogue element. He met with Stalin eighty-nine times (about once every three days) between January 30 and November 17, 1938, presumably at the time when his NKVD spun out of control.<sup>79</sup> Yezhov was gathering statistics on a daily basis from his subordinates and would have been in possession of up-to-date figures. For something as important as this to have escaped Stalin's attention defies credulity. The more likely scenario is that Yezhov kept Stalin informed and received verbal approval for the limit increases. The fact that Stalin could end mass operations and shut down the troikas with one decree also demonstrates that he remained in firm control.<sup>80</sup>

## NATIONAL OPERATIONS

Yezhov's list of category 1 and 2 enemies did not specifically include "national contingents"—Poles, Germans, Koreans, Lithuanians, or other nationalities—who might provide aid and support to a foreign enemy. As clouds of war gathered in the late 1930s, it seemed a logical extension of the thinking behind the mass operations to target foreigners and ethnic USSR citizens. Technically, it was relatively easy for the NKVD to locate them. The nationalities of workers were recorded in enterprise records. Also there were enclaves of foreigners primarily in

border regions, such that a general order could be issued to repress ethnic residents of a particular region.

National operations were distinct from Yezhov's Order No. 00447 and were set in motion by a series of extraordinary decrees aimed specifically against "socially dangerous" nationalities. Preceding Order No. 00447 by five days was NKVD Operational Order No. 00439 "About Repression Operations against German Citizens Suspected of Espionage."<sup>81</sup> On August 9, 1937, the Politburo called for the repression of Polish diversionary espionage groups, two days later there followed NKVD Operational Order No. 00485 against Polish military organizations, former prisoners of war, and political immigrants.<sup>82</sup> NKVD Operational Order of September 20, 1937 condemned former employees of the Chinese Eastern Railway (Kharbintsy) to repression.<sup>83</sup> In September and October 1937, Stalin ordered the resettlement of Koreans to prevent them from spying for the Japanese.<sup>84</sup> NKVD telegram No. 49990 of November 30, 1937 "About the Operation for the Repression of Latvians" ordered the arrest (starting on December 3) of all Latvians under surveillance, political emigrants, migrants from Latvia, members of specific organizations listed, and all Latvian citizens except members of the diplomatic corps. Arrestees were again divided into a first category for execution and a second category to be sentenced to five to ten years in the Gulag.<sup>85</sup>

The two nationalities that bore the brunt of national operations in 1937–1938, were Poles, whose victims numbered over 130,000, and Germans. Five percent of all German located in the USSR were repressed. To handle the large numbers of arrested national contingents, special troikas (often consisting of two persons and hence called dvoikas) processed such cases.<sup>86</sup>

There were no limits for national operations. Anyone falling into this category could be repressed; no central permission was required. There must have been considerable commingling of cases. National operations allowed local administrations that had exceeded approved limits to condemn victims under a special decree. Of the 4,142 persons arrested in the Prikam'e region under "German operations," only 390 were actually German.<sup>87</sup> One Polish employee described his "confession" as follows: "When I said that these were all lies, my interrogator answered: 'We in the NKVD know this and have nothing against you but it is necessary to sign the protocol because you are a Pole by nation-



Table 6.5. National Operations, August 1937–December 1938

Arrests	346,713
Executions	247,175
Prison	96,556
Total sentences	343,731
Mass Operations as a Factor of National Operations <sup>a</sup>	2.1–2.5

Source: Iunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim,"* p. 217.

<sup>a</sup>Based on the figures for mass operations in Table 6.4.

ality.’”<sup>88</sup> In another case, the NKVD arrested a Jew with a Polish-sounding name and listed him as a Pole. Of the quarter-million persons arrested in Ukraine in 1937–1938, 31 percent were arrested under national operations.<sup>89</sup>

Table 6.5 (taken directly from Junge and Binner) shows that national operations accounted for a quarter-million executions and 100,000 prison sentences from August through December 1938. The number of Order No. 00447 victims was between two and two and a half times that of victims of national operations during the period that the two operations were being carried out concurrently. It is our guess that the number of victims of national operations is overstated because of the lack of limits, causing repressors to reclassify victims under national operations.

After the outbreak of war, the campaign against ethnic groups changed from the arrest and punishment of spies, saboteurs, and other “traitors” who belonged to various ethnic groups to arrests and deportations of entire ethnic populations located primarily in border regions. The Politburo approved in 1941 arrests and deportations of Poles, Germans, Rumanians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Finns, and other nationalities in the western borderlands to remote regions.<sup>90</sup>

Such national operations were carried out quickly and on a large scale. By May 1941, Beria’s deputy reported the arrest of 15,000 and the deportation of 25,000 Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians. Beria’s special report to Stalin “About the Order for Resettling Germans from the Volga German Republic, Saratov, and Stalingrad” of 25 August 1941 reported the deportation of almost a half-million Germans; His February 1944 communications to Stalin targeted almost a half-million Chechens and Ingushetians for deportation, and his June 4, 1944 memo

targeted almost 250,000 Crimeans for deportation to Uzbekistan, Bashkiria, and Kazakhstan.<sup>91</sup>

Many more members of national contingents were deported to special settlements than were executed or imprisoned. According to a “completely secret” census undertaken by the MVD, there were 2,761,281 special settlers as of July 1953. Among these were 1.2 million Germans, 323,000 Chechens, 169,000 Tatars, and 140,000 Balts. Only 21,000 kulaks (of the more than one and a half million deported between 1930 and 1933) remained in special settlements;<sup>92</sup> many had returned to their home districts to fall victim to the purges, and others had died in their settlements or in the war.

## THE ELIMINATIONS MODEL AND THE THREE REPRESSIONS

Our basic empirical finding is that the three mass repression campaigns of the 1930s—dekulakization, mass operations, and national operations—were carried out according to Stalin’s plans. Although there was confusion, and some maverick actions, Stalin basically got his desired result from state security. Therefore the stylized facts of these repressions should provide insights into Stalin’s model of repression.

A model adds to understanding if it points out things that would not otherwise be obvious. The eliminations model suggests that the magnitude of the repression should depend positively on the gap between perceived and tolerable enemy levels, the potency of enemies, and the difficulty of identifying enemies. We cannot use the stylized facts of these three repressions to “prove” this was Stalin’s model. We can only determine whether they are generally consistent with the model.

### Information and Labeling

The importance of labeling of enemies is the least intuitive but potentially most useful insight of the eliminations model. The massive repressions of ordinary people in 1937–1938 is often used as proof of Stalin’s irrationality or insanity. Our model suggests, however, that any dictator who shares Stalin’s goals will deliberately eliminate innocents when the quality of information is low.

There were strong informational differences among the three repres-

sions. Of the three, only dekulakization offered Stalin a natural experiment in identifying enemies. The dekulakization decree targeted for major repression (death or prison) those “most actively” resisting collectivization and dekulakization. The village of Platava served as an example in 1930. A crowd of twenty-three hundred villagers disobeyed orders to disperse and advanced against OGPU troops, women and children first. They were frozen in place by machine gun fire above their heads, while a detail went about arresting the leaders. A report from the field to Yagoda described other types of active resistance: “Yesterday I arrived in Tul’chinsky district; the entire territory is caught up in unrest and uprisings, 15 of 17 districts are affected and as of today there are uprisings in 153 villages. They are beating Communists, Communist Youth members, and activists. They are forcing activists to kneel before the church. . . . In a number of villages there are armed uprisings with trenches dug around the village. In one skirmish, shooting continued for three hours.”<sup>93</sup> It was up to OGPU intelligence to identify and arrest those villagers who offered such resistance to Soviet power.

As “enemies” revealed their opposition to state policy, the definition of kulak expanded to anyone resisting collectivization or dekulakization. The majority of first-category offenders were “other anti-Soviet elements, such as speculators, merchants, or church officials, who were also active in agriculture.”<sup>94</sup> Dekulakization, therefore, is a misnomer for a process that struck at such a wide range of political enemies. Notably, dekulakization’s victims were chosen locally, rather than from lists submitted to higher authorities, such as during mass operations. Of course, many “nonactive resisters” were punished as category 1 victims, but the intent was to punish active resisters most severely.

Local authorities relied on denunciations for both dekulakization and mass operations. Denunciations were often motivated by feuds or workplace jealousies or the wish to feign loyalty. During collectivization, denunciations may have generated valuable information. They were commonly directed against households with assets—the very targets of dekulakization. During mass operations, they could scarcely have been an accurate source of information. In the main, denunciations led to the arrests of “simple people with loose tongues and gossips.”<sup>95</sup>

Mass operations and national operations did not create natural experiments in uncovering enemies. Yezhov’s July 1937 list of enemies was broad and vague, including socially dangerous elements, fascists, ter-

rorists, bandits, members of anti-Soviet parties, former officials, criminals, gang members, and counterrevolutionaries. Once the Great Terror began, there was no way to “actively resist” and reveal hostility towards the regime. Instead, the only alternative was to “revert to the mean”—to try to be like everyone else and not stand out in any way. Dekulakization elicited enemies; the Great Terror caused enemies to conceal themselves as best they could.

Not everyone could “revert to the mean” during mass operations. The approximately one and a half million party members who had left the party between 1922 and 1935 “represented a huge pool of self-declared ‘enemies of the people.’”<sup>96</sup> Fifty million Soviet citizens had internal passports, which listed their nationality, class, and other characteristics.<sup>97</sup> Yezhov had 27,650 NKVD “residents” who received information from some 500,000 informants.<sup>98</sup> There was little former Mensheviks, priests, or landowners could do to conceal their pasts other than to acquire forged papers, which would not withstand careful scrutiny.

The national operations orders were very specific, identifying as enemies specific nationalities belonging to specific organizations, or working in specific industries, or living in specific locations. Under these orders, regional NKVD offices were charged with eliminating all of those belonging to a particular category, unlike other repressions where the “most fanatical” or “most active” enemies were targeted. A decree of August 1941 stated unequivocally: “To resettle *all* Germans from the Volga German Republic and from Saratov and Stalingrad province in the general number of 479,841 persons.”<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Beria stated in a special communication to Stalin, “The NKVD considers it necessary to carry out the resettlement of *all* Bulgars, Greeks, and Armenians from the Crimea.”<sup>100</sup> There was little a potential victim of national operations could do other than to flee. Beria, in a February 17, 1944 memo to Stalin, described how he planned to catch his victims off guard: “The population is noticing the arrival of troops. Some believe the official story that they are here for maneuvers.”<sup>101</sup>

Lacking a revelation mechanism for mass operations, the dictator had to enunciate a strategy to take account of type 1 (false positive) and type 2 (false negative) errors. A type 1 error would be to identify a nonenemy as an “enemy.” A type 2 error would be to conclude that a true enemy was not an enemy.

Stalin's attitudes towards type 1 and 2 errors differed according to the operation. His intentions were clear in the case of the Great Terror. He warned that "every communist is a possible hidden enemy. And because it is not easy to recognize the enemy, the goal is achieved even if only 5 percent of those killed are truly enemies."<sup>102</sup> In March 1937, Yezhov reiterated Stalin's rule: "It is better that ten innocent people should suffer than one spy get away. When you chop wood, chips fly."<sup>103</sup> Stalin's 5 percent rule illustrates how the quality of information can affect the numbers repressed. Taken literally, the 5 percent rule means that an error rate of 95 false positives to 5 true positives is acceptable.

Notably, there are no similar statements with regards to dekulakization or national operations. In fact, Stalin was careful to avoid false positives during collectivization. There was a genuine concern that poor or middle farmers would be dekulakized. On February 25, 1930, the Politburo issued the following warning: "In a number of localities there have been strictly forbidden instances of dekulakization of middle-peasant households, which constitute the crudest violation of the party line and will lead inevitably to difficulties in collectivizing agriculture."<sup>104</sup> A March 10 order complained of "distortions of the policy of the party," as a result of which "a number of middle-peasant households were dekulakized."<sup>105</sup> A March 18, 1930 directive from the Supreme Court complained about the "sentencing of a substantial number of middle and even poor peasants without any evidence establishing their guilt," and about "cavalier sentencing to death for counterrevolutionary offenses."<sup>106</sup> The OGPU itself processed complaints from dekulakized peasants claiming to be poor and middle peasants, and even examined tax and other documents in support of their claim.<sup>107</sup>

The number of false positive arrests of nonenemies can also be judged from varying citizen responses. As arrests multiplied in 1937, the Bureau of Complaints of the USSR Procurator was flooded at a rate of 50,000 to 60,000 complaints per month from relatives.<sup>108</sup> After four months of dekulakization, a total of 35,000 protests of false dekulakization had been submitted, of which 6 percent were validated.<sup>109</sup> Although repressed national contingents were equally terrorized, however, they could scarcely claim innocence. According to the national operations measures, they were automatically guilty simply because they were Germans, Poles, Koreans, or Lithuanians.

## The Number of Enemies

Stalin's calculation of the number of enemies changed dramatically between dekulakization and mass operations. Dekulakization dates to the beginning of Stalin's Great Breakthrough, a time when Stalin was fairly optimistic about the support of industrial workers and of poor and middle peasants. The Civil War and its immediate aftermath had largely rid the country of supporters of the old regime, or at least of active resisters. The purge of specialists had reduced the old technical elite, leaving behind a country of workers and peasants. The Great Breakthrough offered workers, Stalin thought, a better life, and he devoted considerable attention to keeping them satisfied, especially those in priority branches.<sup>110</sup> The Great Breakthrough offered the poor stratum of peasants the economies of scale of collective farms, whose livestock, land, and equipment would be secured by expropriation of wealthy peasants, so that the latter were the only ones who would resist.

Thus Stalin approached the Great Breakthrough with the conviction that his enemies were limited to some 3 to 5 percent of the rural population. Virtually all of these would oppose collectivization and would have to be repressed, but Stalin targeted for severe repression only those who actively resisted, which he calculated at about 60,000. Clearly, Stalin did not think that there were only 60,000 "fanatical and active" opponents in 1930, but this was his estimate of the number of enemies needing to be dealt with immediately. Stalin's great disappointment with dekulakization was his failure to receive more active support from the poor and middle peasants.

By 1937, Stalin's perception of the number of enemies facing him had changed. Those repressed during dekulakization were mostly still alive and now embittered beyond redemption. Less than 40,000 first-category offenders had been executed. Those imprisoned were sentenced to terms that were to expire in the mid-1930s, and deportees were finding ways to return to their home villages both by legal and illegal means. As many as a quarter-million kulaks had "self-dekulakized" by fleeing to the cities or finding their ways into collective farms.<sup>111</sup>

Members of banned political parties had been removed from responsible offices but had not been liquidated. German and Polish workers were still employed in defense factories. The 1936 Stalin Constitution

restored civil and voting rights to “disenfranchised” citizens (*lishentsy*), who in 1935 constituted more than 2 percent of the adult population.<sup>112</sup> The newly appointed Yezhov was concerned about the high release rates of imprisoned kulaks, approaching 60,000 per month. Despite organized efforts to destroy religion, more than half the Russian population declared themselves believers according to the 1937 census.<sup>113</sup>

Stalin also added significant new entries to his enemies lists. Up until 1937, collective farmers had been largely off limits to repression. His July 2, 1937 instructions included them, however, as alarming reports about wrecking in collective farms and mass poisoning of livestock reached his ears.<sup>114</sup> According to data from nineteen districts of the Prikam’e region, forty-seven machine tractor station directors, fourteen state farm managers, and 168 enterprise directors were replaced (primarily arrested) by early 1939. Of those working in these positions at the start of mass operations, only seven remained.<sup>115</sup> Industrial workers also were a disappointment to Stalin as they continued their massive turnover, absenteeism, drunkenness, and slacking. Moreover, factories, in his view, had been infiltrated by wreckers and saboteurs, who were turning the workforce against Soviet power.

Most pernicious was Stalin’s growing conviction that the stalwarts of Soviet power—the party and the NKVD—had themselves been infiltrated.<sup>116</sup> Stalin’s deputy (Kaganovich) warned that the party itself had become a circle of enemies.<sup>117</sup> Even the Old Bolsheviks were showing signs of weakness, as Stalin’s attack on A. P. Smirnov, in November 1932 showed. “*Stalin*: There is another group of comrades who are able to spend eight months on vacation or a year and if they are not reminded they don’t even return. One group is wearing itself down, the other is lazing around.” Smirnov’s protest (“I worked 36 years and didn’t leave for one moment”) was brushed off by Stalin: “I don’t speak about those years. I am speaking about now.”<sup>118</sup>

In sum, the number of enemies in 1937 was perceived as being far greater than in 1930. Given the vague definition of enemy, the enemy could be anyone.

The number of enemies among the “national contingents” can be roughly proxied by the numbers of adult male Germans, Poles, and other suspect nationalities. In 1937, in the Russian Republic and Ukraine, there were slightly more than a million Germans and a half million Poles,<sup>119</sup> which would add up to about a half-million adult

males aged twenty to sixty for these two prime enemy groups. Stalin knew these numbers from the aborted 1937 census. He left it to the NKVD to get rid of them.

### Potency

One cannot know for certain whether Stalin considered his enemies more potent in 1937 than in other periods. The fact that he chose relatively mild punishments for the victims of dekulakization (deportation versus execution and prison), however, suggests he considered them less potent than the targets of mass operations and of national operations between 1937 and 1938.

Furthermore, it is clear that in the latter part of the 1930s, Stalin's ever-growing sense of alarm was fed by the fact of impending war, which meant that the USSR, with its vast borderlands, could be infiltrated by enemy agents, many of whom could be recruited from the ethnic minorities living in those regions.<sup>120</sup> Stalin's concern about the effect of war was not new. His OGPU and NKVD had monitored rumors of war by region since at least 1927.<sup>121</sup> Spreading rumors of war in the Gulag was considered a criminal offense.<sup>122</sup> As war became more likely, Stalin's worst nightmare of a vast coalition of domestic and foreign enemies could be realized. Whereas a kulak could incrementally harm Soviet power, a fifth-columnist could do severe damage; as Stalin's put it: "It takes one thousand to build a bridge and one to destroy it."<sup>123</sup> War was one of the few events that could shake Stalin's hold on the party. After the early disastrous defeats on the German front, Stalin was said to have feared dismissal by his Politburo colleagues.<sup>124</sup>

Accordingly, we would argue that Stalin's assessment of enemy potency rose throughout the 1930s as the war approached. The enemy of 1938 was more dangerous than the enemy of 1930 because the former enemy was likely to join forces with the foreign enemy.

The basic stylized facts of dekulakization, mass operations, and national operations are consistent with the dictatorial eliminations model. Mass operations were the largest and most brutal and had the largest number of "innocent" victims. The identification of enemies was most difficult, their potency the greatest, and their numbers the largest. Enemies were fewer, less potent, and easier to identify (in fact, the most active enemies revealed themselves) during dekulakization. The model



clearly suggests that a dictator following this model must accept a large number of repressions of nonenemies despite the costs, and this was indeed the case during the Great Terror.

## CONCLUSIONS

Terror was planned much as the Soviet economy was planned. It was conducted in campaigns, initiated by Stalin's decrees and operationalized by the state security czar of the day. Other countries do not plan the number of spies, counterrevolutionaries, or seditionists they wish to prosecute. Rather they pass laws, employ police and espionage agents, and prosecute those who are discovered violating these laws. It would be very strange for the leaders of the world's democracies to set targets for the number of terrorists or spies they wished to arrest. Stalin did just that because he knew that he lacked popular support and that if the number of people of opposing him either now or in the future became too large, he could be overthrown. Although Stalin had firm control of the party and state apparatus and had subjected the population to a number of purges, there was still a sense that his enemies were out there and that he had somehow failed to get them all. Although the threat of war was routine throughout the early history of the Soviet Union, the rise of the Nazi and Japanese war machines made the threat more credible, and it also reinforced the threat inherent in a multiethnic Soviet Union, whose border region residents might welcome foreign invasion.

There are different views of why these forces converged in 1937 in a maelstrom of terror on a largely unsuspecting population, but the eliminations model is certainly helpful in explaining this phenomenon.

It is clear, first of all, that Stalin's three mass operations of the 1930s that culminated in the Great Terror were the result of careful planning, and that his state security fulfilled his operational plans, probably better than his economic plans were fulfilled. This conclusion allows us to look at the results of his mass repressions as mirroring his intent, hence to gauge whether the eliminations model is consistent with his behavior.

Our results are quite consistent with the model. The greater the difficulty of identifying enemies, the greater the number of victims and the greater the repression of nonenemies (mass operations). The greater the potency of enemies (less potent enemies in 1930 and increasingly potent ones thereafter), the greater the number of repressions and the greater

the brutality of repression. The greater the number of perceived enemies (more in 1937 than in 1930), the greater the repression. The model clearly suggests that a dictator following this model must accept a large number of repressions of nonenemies despite the costs, as was indeed the case during the Great Terror.

In this way the eliminations model provides, at a minimum, a framework for organizing and understanding events. At a maximum it provides fresh insights, such as into Stalin's indifference to false positives during the Great Terror and his great concern about improper dekulakizations in the period 1930–1932.

## 7 Simplified Methods

THE SOVIET DICTATOR must find a way to increase and decrease repression as his demand varies despite the relatively fixity in the number of repressors. Business enterprises with fluctuating demand face a similar problem: how to produce more as demand increases and less when demand falls. The first stylized fact of Soviet repression, presented in the introduction, was the cyclical nature of repression—its ups and downs.

The repression campaigns of 1930–1932 and, most importantly, of 1937–1938 were designed as short-run campaigns. Although there were increases in Chekist-operational workers—the OGPU was given more activists and troops in 1930 and the NKVD's ranks expanded in 1937—these personnel increases in no way matched the increase in “production tasks.” Yet, as the previous chapter showed, the OGPU and NKVD fulfilled their repression targets throughout the 1930s. Methods were found to accommodate the dictator's increases in demand.

This chapter uses a modified repression model to explain how the dictator's “productivity problem” was resolved by “simplified” methods—the use of troikas and the substitution of confession for proof. When Lenin and Stalin needed substantially more repressions, they changed procedures in the repression cycle of investigation, arrest, trial, conviction, and punishment. Both Stalin and Lenin resorted to simplified judi-

cial procedures during repression upturns. Stalin's innovation (of December 1, 1934) was to substitute confessions for evidence to accelerate the repression cycle.

## THE MODEL

We again consider a dictator who combines loyalty and repression to produce sufficient power to remain safe and in power. The dictator's state security force cannot be expanded or contracted at will. Considerable time and care are required to recruit, vet, and cultivate his Praetorian Guards. The dictator also knows that his impending campaign will be of short duration; why expand to a larger security force than he needs in the long run? Moreover, the dictator might want to keep its size down due to possible Praetorian Guard problems. From Lenin through Stalin, periods of "normal" but high by international standards repressions alternated with mass repression campaigns designed to be completed quickly.

If the dictator decides on an acceleration of repression of short duration, he will not do so by increasing the size of his state security forces. The dictator's answer is to increase their productivity. One agent must convict, say, four times as many enemies as before. Unless state security has considerable slack during "normal" repression activity, agents can scarcely double or quadruple their productivity without some kind of change. Although work in Yagoda's OGPU and NKVD was characterized as more relaxed than under Yezhov,<sup>1</sup> the OGPU was stretched to its limits during dekulakization and passportization. Chekist-operational workers did not lead a quiet life even during normal repression.

With little or no slack in the system, the productivity of Chekist-operational workers had to be increased by "simplifying" the repression cycle. In effect, the various steps of the cycle had to be either reduced in number or accelerated if they were not reduced. For example, if the evidence-gathering phase could be dropped or if the judicial hearing could be speeded up, the number of convictions per operational worker could increase.

The first part of this chapter deals with two simplified procedures—troikas and confessions. The second part discusses the consequences of using these simplified procedures. The formal model of "simplified methods" is explained in Appendix 7.

## TROIKAS AND SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURES

In Western democracies, the longest phase in a criminal case is usually the trial, before either professional judges or a jury of peers. The trial proceeds according to specified rules. The defendant has rights to representation and to gathering exculpatory evidence or seeing the evidence of the prosecution. The defendant may be given a specified amount of time to prepare for the case.

The rules of Soviet “socialist legality” were created in the early 1920s and found their culmination in the Stalin Constitution of 1937. Socialist legality gave defendants some limited rights, such as an arrest warrant signed by a prosecutorial official and representation by a lawyer. Socialist legality also prohibited torture. Insofar as the courts and the prosecutor’s offices were subordinated to the dictator, they could be generally counted on to rule as the dictator wished, but there were some exceptions that raised the dictator’s doubts.

Stalin and his associates clashed with judges and prosecutors, who were too responsive to local pressure. It was reported to Stalin in 1933 that lenient courts had sentenced 36 percent of thieves of socialist property to less than the obligatory ten-year terms and that some republics had even more “substantial defects.”<sup>2</sup> The antitheft law of 1947 required minimum five-year jail sentences, but noncustodial sentences did not decrease after its passage. Justice ministry surveys showed the widespread acceptance by judges of mitigating circumstances—incorrectly set alarm clocks or substituting for a drunken comrade—and acceptance of testimony of offenders.<sup>3</sup> Particularly lenient courts and prosecutorial officials had to be referred to the justice ministry for prosecution.<sup>4</sup>

Stalin would have been reluctant to use regular justice for repression campaigns because of this problem of lenient sentencing alone. The more insidious impact, however, was to slow down the process of repression because courts followed rules of procedure. Even during those periods where Stalin wished to make greater use of the courts, simplified procedures continued to be used in a number of cases because of the backlog of court cases.

The greatest simplification would be for state security to carry out the entire repression cycle itself—from investigation to punishment—without interference from regular justice. Stalin could trust state security,

more than the courts, to follow his orders more closely and complete the repression cycle quickly.

Feliks Dzerzhinsky made the case for Chekist control of the entire repression cycle in 1918 as follows: "The Cheka was born in the process of revolution and, as party workers and specialists in arrests and executions, cannot be controlled by justice officials. If so, the Cheka is no longer necessary."<sup>5</sup> This was in the course of the first of many clashes between the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD and the judiciary and prosecutor over extrajudicial tribunals.<sup>6</sup> Before he became an avid facilitator of the Great Terror, the notorious USSR prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky clashed with Yagoda and Yezhov over prosecutorial approval of NKVD arrests.<sup>7</sup> Vyshinsky again, after the Great Terror, complained in May 1939 that Beria's NKVD was still arresting without approval of the prosecutor.<sup>8</sup> Vyshinsky's replacement, M. P. Pankratiev, complained to Stalin in September 1939 that the NKVD's Dalstro administration was arresting and torturing party members without permission.<sup>9</sup>

The substitution of the extrajudicial troika for "regular" prosecution and courts was the greatest simplification of all. According to appearances, troikas did not dispense summary justice. The three-person troika included an OGPU/NKVD/MVD officer, a party representative, and a representative of the prosecutor's office. Representation of all three branches of justice was supposed to provide some balance, but in practice, the troikas were dominated by the state security representative, and they proved able to dispense extrajudicial justice at incredible rates.

A troika-like body was first approved in the September 1918 decree "About Red Terror" which authorized revolutionary tribunals to render summary judgments including the death sentence. Revolutionary tribunals were designed "to make terror legitimate and to simplify the procedures for applying repression."<sup>10</sup> Troikas continued during the mid-1920s. When world opinion condemned the summary execution of Polish citizens following the assassination of the Soviet ambassador to Poland, justice official Nikolai Krylenko argued that a troika would have given the executions better cover.

Troikas were the workhorses of dekulakization and mass operations, as discussed in the previous chapter. Yagoda's February 2, 1930 dekulakization decree ordered that the cases of category 1 enemies be "concluded expeditiously by troikas created by the OGPU according to an

extrajudicial legal process.”<sup>11</sup> The OGPU tribunals were instructed “to examine cases and pass sentences quickly.” They should investigate only when it promised to yield something of substance.<sup>12</sup> Troika activists were rewarded, such as a Comrade Ilin, who obtained troika sentences for more than eleven thousand of whom more than a thousand were shot (“He has without a doubt earned the highest award, the Order of the Red Banner”).<sup>13</sup>

The 1933 campaign to cleanse the cities also used troikas (called passport troikas) to sentence violators of passport laws to labor camps or penal resettlement colonies. When the new NKVD USSR was launched in July 1934, the special powers of the OGPU troika system were scheduled to be transferred to a restructured court system, heralding a return to “socialist legality.” Troikas did not prove easy to dispatch, however. As the crush in the court system produced considerable processing delays, Yagoda and Vyshinsky worked together to reestablish troikas.<sup>14</sup>

Troikas were used during the war to organize executions, such as the execution of Polish POWs—the Katyn Affair. On March 5, 1940, Beria raised a “Question of the NKVD” in the Politburo: “Taking as true that all of them [14,736 Polish “officers, officials, police officials, gendarmes, and prison officials”] are hardened and unredeemable enemies of Soviet power, the NKVD recommends that their cases be examined in special order [by troikas] with the application of the highest measure of punishment—shooting . . . without summoning the arrested parties and without the posting of charges.”<sup>15</sup>

It is crucial to understand that troikas did not conduct hearings. There was no “trial.” Troikas rarely saw their victims face to face, and their work was conducted under extreme secrecy. In effect, the troika’s job was to sign off on the recommendation of the operational group that arrested and interrogated the defendant. The operational group prepared a brief summary of the case, including perhaps an excerpt from the confession, and a recommended sentence, sometimes stating the relevant article of the criminal code, such as Article 58.

Troikas were described as a “repression conveyer” during the Great Terror. The conveyer placed all its players under pressure. As NKVD administrations battled the flood of paperwork required for mass operations, typewriters became a deficit commodity. As time passed, brief summaries replaced the more detailed and colorful earlier reports of imaginative case writers. The troika members themselves worked under

extreme pressure and sometimes signed hundreds of execution orders in one sitting. Notes would be taken as the troika examined the case files and excerpts of these notes were returned to the operational group head as the official sentence, which was to be carried out immediately. The execution order was filed separately. Relatives of those executed were told that the defendant had been sentenced to ten years “without the right of correspondence.”<sup>16</sup>

The troikas kept national leaders busy. Stalin and his associates, Molotov and Kaganovich, as well as Yezhov and Vyshinsky, spent their time signing execution orders, authorizing changes in troikas, and ordering new repression campaigns. Politburo members and high state officials signed whole execution lists (called “shooting lists”) at once. Molotov and Vyshinsky signed off on 1,000 names in one night.<sup>17</sup> Stalin was barraged with requests for limit increases—from the North Ossetian party committee for 200 more, or increases of 3,500 in Kazakhstan’s, of 400 in Archangelsk, and of 1,500 in Kalininsky province—and for confirmations of death sentences, such as eleven requested by the Saratov party committee. As troika members were themselves arrested or transferred, Stalin had to name replacements, such as “Tselykh for Stepanov,” or “Samoilov and Sidorenko in place of Nikitin and Simanovsky,” or “Meleshkov in place of Makarenko.”<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt that the troika system made possible the sentencing of over a million and a half victims of mass operations in a period of less than two years. Between August 1, 1937 and the end of November 1938, troikas (and associated extrajudicial tribunals) issued more than fifteen hundred death sentences per day. The regular courts and the prosecutor’s office could not have accomplished such a task.

## CONFESSIONS AS A SIMPLIFIED MEASURE

The “Law of December 1” pushed through the Politburo by Stalin two days after Kirov’s assassination was a second “simplification” that facilitated the processing of large numbers of victims of mass operations. This extraordinary law canceled the minimal socialist legality protections in place (although it did not explicitly authorize torture). Its key provision was the substitution of confessions for evidence. Once a confession was obtained, the investigation could be terminated. No evidence was needed. Thereafter, the defendant had no right to be present



at any proceeding, the verdict could not be challenged, and the sentence was to be carried out immediately.<sup>19</sup> Within weeks of Kirov's murder, the executions began under the December 1 rules.

In addition to accelerating the repression cycle, confessions offered other advantages. In a setting where both the interrogator and victim know that no crime has been committed, but a conviction is required, confession offers a practical solution. Evidence cannot be accumulated on a fictional crime except by fabrication. In some cases, interrogators even directly asked for a false confession: "We, the examining officers, are also forced to lie, we also say things which cannot be entered into the record and to which we would never sign our names."<sup>20</sup> Confession also appears to assure the infallibility of the process. If the accused confesses, then the punishment must be justified and deserved. Finally, confessions are a convenient indicator of plan fulfillment. Indeed, NKVD interrogators were graded on the basis of how many confessions they produced per day.

Armed with the Law of December 1, the NKVD operational groups became focused on confessions. Those NKVD officials who were good at extracting confessions were "considered successful operatives and a poor NKVD operative had a short life expectancy."<sup>21</sup> These confessions were then used for recommending sentences to troikas or military tribunals, or in those cases tried before courts, such as the various regional and national show trials. Confessions to spectacular plots offered a convenient excuse not to gather evidence, which would have had to be fabricated anyway.

It was an open secret that confessions were extracted by physical and mental torture. Physical torture (called euphemistically "physical intervention") was officially not allowed. Under Yezhov, torture was done at night after the office staff had left to keep it quiet, if that were possible.<sup>22</sup> Orders to torture were passed down from the highest levels. When Yezhov sent to Stalin the "unsatisfactory" confession of a former head of the Russian NKVD (A. G. Beloborodov), Stalin ordered torture to get a real confession."<sup>23</sup> According to Yezhov's account, Stalin ordered Yagoda "to beat in the faces" of Kamenev and Zinoviev to obtain their confessions.<sup>24</sup> Yezhov was himself an enthusiastic torturer.

Young operational officers began interrogations after minimal training. One such recruit described his initiation: "After two days on the job, I showed my boss the results of my interrogation. He read my re-

port aloud and taunted me: ‘You call this a protocol? Let me show you what confessions you need to get.’ I then read a signed protocol with great interest and was shocked at what a poor interrogator I was. I decided to learn from my boss and that evening I witnessed the following: The accused refused to sign the prepared confession saying there was not a word of truth in it. My boss then began to beat him forcing him to sign the protocol. I couldn’t sit in the office any longer.”<sup>25</sup>

There was constant pressure for more confessions. As explained by one interrogator from the Perm area: “At the operational meeting, our superior scolded us that we were slowing down the process and that we had too few confessions and proposed to speed things up and conduct the investigations according to a simplified procedure. After the meeting, he put together a standard protocol of interrogation in two variants, one for ordinary persons, the other for the leadership. In addition to the protocol, he put together a standardized confession, which was copied and distributed among the interrogators.”<sup>26</sup>

Prisoners were held under inhumane conditions. Confessions were extracted by promises of release or short sentences. In the Perm operation, a group of four to five interrogators produced almost a hundred confessions a day. Economies of scale were gained by interviewing prisoners in groups. A norm of fifteen minutes per confession was set.<sup>27</sup>

## SCAPEGOATING

The party (Stalin and the Politburo) dictated policy on behalf of the worker and peasant state. The party did not make mistakes; they were the fault of those who executed the party’s policy. It was the party that ordered dekulakization, mass operations, and national operations. If mistakes were made, this must have been the fault of “cadres.” The wise party surely would have had appropriate safeguards—such as rules against torture or fabrications. Hence, the entire state and economic system employed the scapegoat principle: if something went wrong, a scapegoat must be identified and punished.

Stalin demanded complete loyalty from his subordinates. He offered none in return. When Zinoviev asked “Does Comrade Stalin know what gratitude is?” Stalin’s purported reply was: “Certainly I know; it is a malady that afflicts dogs.”<sup>28</sup> Stalin demanded complete loyalty from state security. Again, he offered none in return. He executed both Ya-

goda and Yezhov despite their service, which he concluded was less than faithful. Although it was common to blame scapegoats for the many things that went wrong, blaming the OGPU, NKVD, or MVD could be dangerous. Their direct link to the party and its leader was too obvious, and they had to have credibility as the party's own "warriors" to do their job. If they were questioned or challenged, the whole state security operation could collapse like a house of cards.

There was no need for scapegoating in the case of dekulakization. According to the 1934 Party Congress ("The Congress of Victors"), collectivization and dekulakization were a success that created socialism in the Soviet Union. If anything, Yagoda's OGPU was to be congratulated. It would prove harder to conclude the same about mass operations.

### Protecting the OGPU

From 1918 to the late 1920s, as a direct arm of the party state security enjoyed immunity from criticism. Stalin spared the OGPU after calling off the 1928 repression of engineers and technicians, and other specialists working in the Donbas coal region, which had spread to the railroads and defense industry (the so-called Shakhty Affair). Sparked by Yagoda's dramatic announcement in February 1928 of a vast conspiracy, the OGPU's repression of specialists was controlled by a special Politburo commission. Fifty-three defendants, accused of wrecking in the Donbas region, were tried by order of the Politburo in Moscow in the summer of 1928 with Vyshinsky as the prosecutor. Five defendants were executed, six had their death sentences commuted, and the majority was sentenced to jail terms.

These trials were preceded by and followed by massive arrests, which eventually depleted the coal, metals, and defense industries of specialists. It was not until Stalin realized the enormity of the economic losses that he called off the repression of specialists. However, the purge proved difficult to halt as enthusiastic party and OGPU officials continued their arrests.

By early 1929, doubts were spreading. Three Politburo members proposed that fifteen Chekist leaders be awarded the Order of the Red Banner, but the proposal was denied in January 1929, as word was spread (by ranking OGPU officials) that cases had been falsified. The Politburo itself was surely aware of false confessions; Stalin had earlier circulated

to Politburo members the suicide letter of an engineer who preferred “death to humiliation and suffering.”

Stalin had to decide whether to blame the OGPU for these excesses. In this case, Stalin concluded that the OGPU, as the direct arm of the party, be held harmless. His instructions to the head of the OGPU (Menzhinsky) of September 16, 1929 emphasized the danger of questioning of the OGPU’s infallibility and hence his own. Stalin: “Self-criticism would threaten the existence of the OGPU and be the ruin of Chekist discipline. Do not forget that the OGPU is a military organization.”<sup>29</sup> Stalin ordered Menzhinsky to handle any problems decisively and quietly within the OGPU. In the end, it was those OGPU officers who disclosed the fabrications that suffered. In August 1931, a number of high OGPU officials who had spread “untrue” rumors that the campaign against wrecking in military industry was an “empty matter” were demoted. The party’s full confidence in the OGPU was asserted: “The Central Committee considers that the OGPU is and continues to be the sword of the working class, efficiently and courageously attacking enemies and honestly and bravely fulfilling its responsibilities to Soviet power.”<sup>30</sup> As late as early 1937, Yagoda was still being blamed for “not believing” in the guilt of the Shakhty wreckers.<sup>31</sup>

### Blaming the NKVD for Mass Operations

The 1928 purges of specialists affected a few thousand people. The mass operations of 1937–1938 affected one and a half million. We do not know all the reasons why Stalin shut the operations down in November of 1938, but their enormous human and economic costs must have been apparent to Stalin. The flood of complaints from victims’ families was pressing on Stalin’s administration. Scapegoats were needed, and they had to be found within the ranks of the NKVD—the party’s armed warriors. Unlike Stalin’s pardoning of the OGPU in 1929, he could not look the other way for Yezhov’s NKVD. He had to prove that mass operations were a rogue operation headed by Yezhov and his lieutenants without Politburo approval.

Stalin’s personal direction of the terror campaign was undeniable. His signature was on execution orders condemning thousands. In a number of documented cases, Stalin bypassed the usual fiction of the Central Committee and sent out orders under his own name. On August 27,

1937, for example, Stalin ordered a regional party secretary: "I advise you to sentence the wreckers of your region to death and to publish the news of their execution in the local press."<sup>32</sup> Stalin's inner circle was likewise compromised. Nikita Khrushchev, who waited until 1956 to blame Stalin for the Great Terror, recommended the arrest and death sentences of 41,085 persons as head of the Moscow party committee.<sup>33</sup>

Stalin's trick was to blame certain leaders of the NKVD without blaming the NKVD itself. The fired Yezhov and his deputies were fair game; his replacement Beria and the NKVD itself were off limits. Just about any active participant in mass operations was a candidate for blame. All of them had had to arrest, convict, and extract confessions by any means possible. Formally, they were not supposed to torture, but then veiled threats came down through the NKVD hierarchy that "enemies of the people being interrogated with white gloves."<sup>34</sup> One Ukrainian NKVD official ordered the use of torture with a frank declaration: "We are not playing around with enemies of the state. If two or three die, this is nothing terrible. No one of you will have to answer. I myself will answer with my own head and party card."<sup>35</sup>

Yezhov represented the ideal scapegoat, and the fact that mass operations carried his name, the "Yezhovshchina," already shows a successful linguistic diversion of blame. Stalin maintained a formal distance between himself and Yezhov and his NKVD apparatus. As historian Oleg Khlevniuk writes: "What attracted Stalin to Yezhov was his understanding that an eventual end of the purges was inevitable and that it was only natural that he would need to have a number one scapegoat."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as Stalin ended the purges, Yezhov and his associates understood the danger. Yezhov's head of the Far North division fled to Manchuria. His Ukrainian division chief went into hiding for five months prior to his capture. With Beria in the wings, Yezhov could only remind Stalin of his unwavering loyalty and write that "despite all these large deficiencies . . . the NKVD did a healthy job in smashing our enemies."<sup>37</sup>

### On Your Own

In both dekulakization and mass operations, Chekist-operational workers were left to their own devices to interpret instructions and

hence to bear responsibility for “misinterpretations.” Although the Politburo clearly ordered dekulakization and mass operations, the operational instructions (which were widely distributed) were written by state security. There was no paper trail (outside the closely guarded “special files”) leading to Stalin or other Politburo members.

On January 30, 1930, the collegium of the OGPU asked Molotov (the head of the Politburo commission that drafted the dekulakization decree) to appear before them to explain how it was to work. Molotov consulted with Stalin, who answered that it would be unwise and meaningless to allow a concrete and exact directive of the Central Committee to become a subject of wide discussion. All that was required was to give all representative offices the decree, nothing more, nothing less. It was up to them to execute the decree according to their own interpretation and responsibility.<sup>38</sup>

Yezhov could scarcely ask for interpretation of his own mass operations decree. It laid out the campaign in great detail. Stalin’s instruction was simply to form troikas and to punish “criminals and returning kulaks.” Yezhov’s Order No. 00447 made no mention of torture. Moreover, he was meeting regularly with Stalin; any clarification he could obtain in person (and with no record kept). A notable feature of Order No. 00447 is Yezhov’s use of the first person, establishing his personal role: “In connection with this, *I* order: to begin in all republics, regions, and provinces operations for the repression of former kulaks, active anti-Soviet elements, and criminals on August 5, 1937.” And: “In cases where a commissar of the republic NKVD, or a head of an administration or of a provincial department, having completed first-category operations, considers it possible to begin operations on the second category, he is required to ask *my* permission and only after that to start the operation.”<sup>39</sup>

After the purge of state security in the wake of mass operations, subsequent state security heads tried to be more cautious, but Stalin parried their efforts to limit exposure. After witnessing the arrest of his two predecessors, the new minister of state security (S. Ignatiev) proposed to Stalin on July 15, 1951 to limit the use of extrajudicial tribunals to extreme circumstances that could not be handled by the regular courts. There was no response from Stalin (which meant a negative response) even after Ignatiev met personally with him to discuss his proposal.<sup>40</sup>

### Playing the Scapegoating Game

The natural reaction of any organization head, such as Yagoda and Yezhov, would be to try to push the scapegoating down to subordinates. As Yagoda saw Stalin's support slipping, he fired two administration heads with the warning that others would suffer the same fate, if they "also cease to feel the beating of the pulse of political life, if their senses to detect hostile phenomena have been dulled, or if they become Chekist-gossips."<sup>41</sup> As Yezhov in turn saw his position weakening, he tried to convince his head of the Far Eastern NKVD administration to commit suicide. Instead, the latter fled to Japan, leaving the appearance that he had been tipped off by Yezhov.<sup>42</sup> Understanding that he was to be the scapegoat, Yezhov "sat in his shirtsleeves on a sofa laden with bottles of vodka. His hair was ruffled and his eyes were swollen and inflamed: he was obviously drunk but he also seemed excited and alarmed."<sup>43</sup>

The Great Terror ended as suddenly as it began—on November 17, 1938 with a joint decree of the Central Committee and the Council of Peoples' Commissars initiated by Stalin.<sup>44</sup> This decree which was distributed in limited circulation criticized the "substantial deficiencies and distortions in the work of the NKVD and the procurator." The NKVD and the procuracy were forbidden to carry out further mass operations and arrests. The decree also stated that enemies had infiltrated the NKVD.<sup>45</sup> Yezhov was arrested in 1939 and was shot in 1940. The USSR prosecutor, Vyshinsky, escaped without a scratch.

After Stalin shut down mass operations, regional party secretaries and justice officials went after Chekist-operational workers with a vengeance, accusing them, among other things, of unlawful torture. To avoid the decimation of the ranks of operational workers, Stalin had to admit that torture had been permitted "to uncover spies, diversionaries, terrorists and other active enemies of the Soviet people, who mean-spiritedly refuse to give information or confessions."<sup>46</sup> Shortly thereafter, the USSR Prosecutor (Vyshinsky) was granted permission to distribute this memo to local prosecutors. Just as Stalin could not allow terror to spin out of control, he had to maintain limits on scapegoating to preserve his NKVD.

The complaints of regional party officials terrorized by Yezhov flooded in to Stalin (who feigned surprise although he had personally approved the executions of such officials). He responded to the Orel

province party secretary (Boitsov) in customary fashion: “I received your communication about six falsified confessions. I am receiving similar reports from others, and also complaints against the former minister of NKVD, Yezhov, that he, as a rule, did not react to such signals. Such complaints serve as one of the reasons for the removal of Yezhov. Your communication has been given to the NKVD for immediate investigation.”<sup>47</sup>

Those state security officials prosecuted in the immediate aftermath of the Great Terror were formally accused of the illegal use of torture and falsification of evidence and confessions. Stalin complained of Yezhov’s drunkenness and poor work, which Yezhov freely admitted in a grueling four-hour meeting with Stalin on November 23, 1938.<sup>48</sup> Other NKVD officials were arrested for not following proper procedures. In a report of December 16, 1938 to Stalin and Molotov, Vyshinsky wrote that “our preliminary investigation established that the special troika of the Zhitomir NKVD administration, under the directives of the chief of the provincial NKVD commission, Viatkin, executed 2110 persons on the basis of unsigned troika protocols.”<sup>49</sup>

There were many who deserved to be scapegoats. According to a case review dating from January 1956, the head of the Tomsk municipal NKVD “crudely violated revolutionary legality, carried out a large number of unsubstantiated arrests, distorted the investigation of operational-investigative work, practiced illegal interrogation methods, allowed falsifications, and used standardized arrest warrants.”<sup>50</sup> The files were full of complaints against NKVD officers and entire NKVD administrations who fabricated evidence and forced confessions. In Saratov, people arrested on the streets were included in the quota, prior to any investigation.<sup>51</sup> Entire villages were placed in a single “diversionist-terrorist group.” Protocols of confessions were dictated before interrogations began using standardized forms, and young operational workers were advised only to avoid making glaring errors like accusing a cobbler of diversionary activity as a steel worker. A “clean” NKVD administration would have been hard to find.

The limited number of case reviews were designed to clean up the record, not to correct injustices. Even before mass operations, it was rare to overturn OGPU or NKVD cases. Yezhov, while still Stalin’s state security overseer for the Central Committee, found that, in (Yagoda’s) case against an alleged espionage organization in the Far North region,



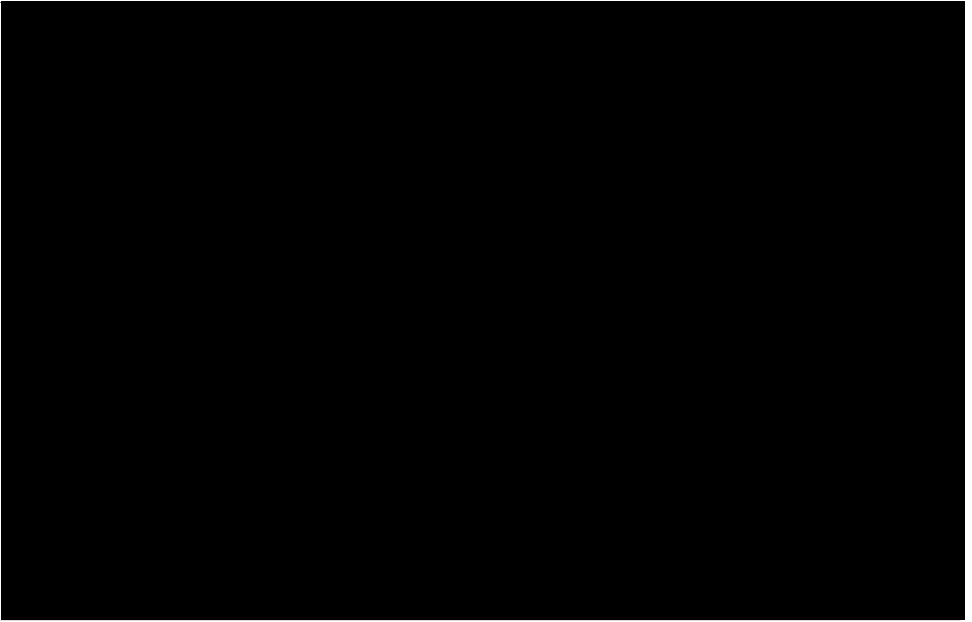
all defendants had used exactly the same language in their confessions, but they had then retracted their confessions, and a key piece of evidence was shown to be worthless. Yezhov concluded, however: "Insofar as there is no material refuting the admission of the main organizers of the espionage-diversionary organization [names leaders, who had already been executed], the matter is closed and their guilt established." The prison sentence of one of the few "conspirators" not already executed was changed to banishment because "the case had not been proven" but the defendant is a "suspicious person."<sup>52</sup> Another Yezhov review of April 1934 upheld death sentences for Belorussian nationalists but commuted the sentence of two "less guilty" brothers to ten years in prison. Even though thirteen defendants had already retracted their confessions, Yezhov concluded that "deficiencies do not call forth any doubts as to the seriousness of the case, that the OGPU does not want its sentences overturned, and that a closed investigation in Moscow would require 15–20 days."<sup>53</sup>

That scapegoating's goal was to protect higher-ups (the most important being Stalin himself) is seen in the fact that there was no concerted effort to correct the excesses of the Great Terror. In the second half of 1939, the state procurator's office reexamined only 19,000 of the almost 1.5 million cases.<sup>54</sup> Case reviews, both before and after mass operations, were not intended to consider guilt or innocence. The operational groups and troikas that set the sentences had little interest in this issue.

It was not until 1956 and later that relatives were allowed to petition for information that might lead to the victims' usually posthumous rehabilitation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Yezhov, in his own interrogation, disclosed the true reason for "simplified procedures": "In order to carry out such mass operations, we needed a 'simplified order' of investigations, during which, as a rule, we limited ourselves to the acquisition of confessions and completely forgot about gathering material evidence." Yezhov admitted that this procedure led to "very large deficiencies and distortions" in the organs of the NKVD and the procuracy."<sup>55</sup> What Yezhov was saying is that the only way to meet the ambitious quotas of mass operations was to use the simplified procedures of troikas and confessions.



*Figure 7.1.* Approximate Productivity of Chekist-operational Workers (Convictions per worker). Sources: Table 3.1; Colonel Pavlov, “Report about the Numbers of Those Sentenced According to Cases of Organs of the NKVD,” December 11, 1953; GARF, Fond 9401, op. 1, del. 4157, l. 205.

Simplified procedures allowed the repression conveyor to run at high speeds. From July to October 1937, Tomsk NKVD officers processed 1,360 arrestees per month, of whom an average of 1,020 were executed. These figures meant that, on a daily basis, 45 persons had to be processed, of whom 34 had to be executed.<sup>56</sup> Western Siberia had 600–700 operational workers to cover 124 districts and had to draw recruits from Komsomol, NKVD, and party schools.<sup>57</sup> Makeshift rooms were set up for investigations and for holding prisoners. University students were hired. Only a modicum of evidence was required, such as the “social characteristics of the arrested party and two accusations.”

The empirical facts show that each mass repression was indeed accompanied by a massive increase in Chekist “productivity.” Figure 7.1 shows the remarkable fluctuations in the productivity of core Chekist-operational workers between normal and peak periods of repression. During quiet years (such as 1928, 1934, and 1939), each operational worker averaged about three convictions per year. During dekulakiza-

tion, the average operational worker produced ten convictions and during mass operations more than twenty. These numbers, even during peak periods, do not appear particularly large at first glance, but the production of convictions was a team operation. If we calculate average “team” productivity using sixty-five regions, this indicator rose from 1,500 convictions per year in 1934 to over 10,000 in 1937.

Dekulakization and mass operations were chaotic and confused. Viewed from the ground level, it must have appeared that the “gross distortions” of each operation had local origins. Each administration was improvising, was trying to cope in some fashion with a difficult task. Case studies might indeed seem to permit the conclusion that the excesses of the Great Terror were the result of local decision making. Such an interpretation would be incorrect. Although Stalin did not order any of these “gross distortions,” they were the necessary result of the pressure to fulfill the high quotas that he wanted. They were also the result of the tone he set with respect to interrogations and torture, and his general attitude to questions of guilt or innocence, in particular his view that it was better to arrest the innocent than to let the guilty go free. Without their improvisations involving confessions and torture, the regional NKVD administrations would have fallen short of their targets and their leaders would surely have been repressed themselves.

## 8 The Repressors' Dilemma

WE TURN NOW TO CONSIDER the “terror manager” in much the same fashion as economists formerly studied the behavior of Soviet enterprise managers. Terror managers constituted a large cast of characters that included, among others, Chekist-operational workers, deputized high party officials, police officers brought in to assist, and members of troikas who stamped approval on the recommended sentences. Our attention focuses on the two prime terror managers in the mass operations of 1937–1938, the heads of regional NKVD administrations and the regional party leaders, who were held most responsible for the fulfillment of terror plans. The role of the local party official in this story has been underplayed in past studies.

Yezhov's Order No. 00447 of July 30, 1937 made both regional party secretaries and regional NKVD administrators executors of mass operations. Regional secretaries formally proposed the initial “bids” and petitioned for higher limits. NKVD officers carried out arrests and interrogations and dominated troikas. As terror progressed, limit increases were more often requested jointly as the power of the party diminished, such as “the request of the Irkutsk party committee and the NKVD administration to raise its first-category limit by 4,000.”<sup>1</sup> The NKVD regional head was in charge of actual operations and was the dominant figure on troikas. Both he and the party secretary were faced with strate-

gic choices in the course of mass operations. How many victims should they ask for? Should they pay attention to what was being done in other regions? Should they repress only victims who fit Stalin's profile or should they repress "innocent" persons to achieve higher numbers? What methods should they apply to get confessions?

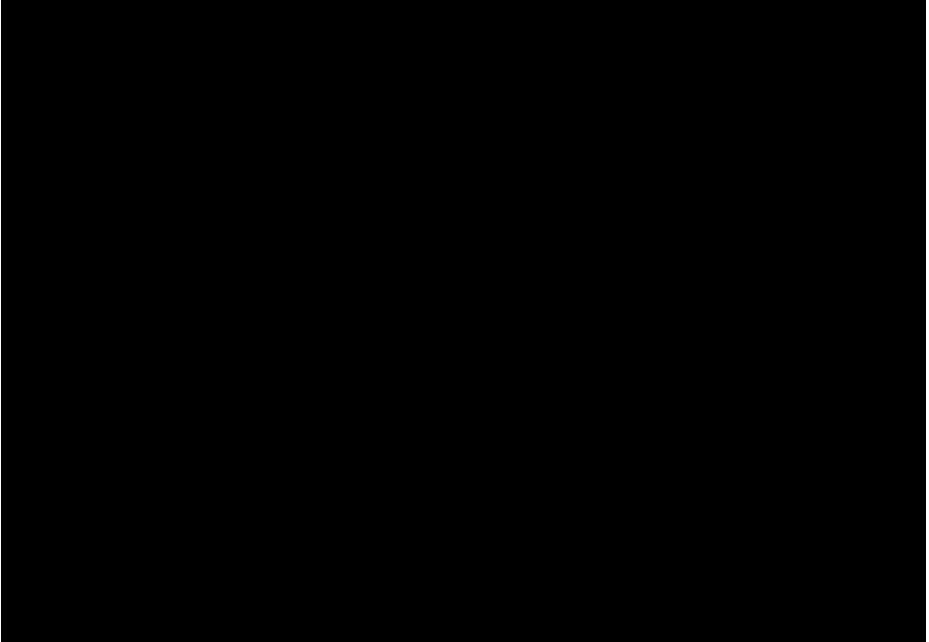
## THE REPRESSORS' DILEMMA

The "prisoners' dilemma," a game theory model widely used by social scientists, analyzes situations that require strategic decision making by two or more players. In its original version, it considered two bank robbers being interrogated in separate cells. They cannot communicate and can only guess what the other will do. Each is promised a short sentence (two years) if he confesses, but a long sentence (ten years) if he does not and is implicated by the other bank robber. If neither confesses, they both go free for lack of evidence. Both not confessing is the optimal outcome for them (both go free), but both are expected to confess (and get two years) as the least-worst outcome (called the minimax solution), because each cannot be sure of the other's decision. By not confessing, each runs the risk of a ten-year sentence, if the other confesses.

Confession by both is the predicted outcome if the game is played only once. If it is played many times, a routine can develop and players can actually learn to cooperate for mutual benefit. We apply the prisoners' dilemma to Stalin's Great Terror. It was played only once in its full form.

The prisoners' dilemma resembles the strategy choices faced by the sixty-five regions whose party secretaries and NKVD heads were responsible for carrying out the mass operations of 1937–1938. Unlike the standard prisoners' dilemma, where the outcomes of different strategy choices are given by absolute numbers, Stalin's repressors were playing a game of *relative* results. Regional bids for victims were considered low if other regions placed higher bids. Even if plan limits were met or overfulfilled, other regions might overfulfill by more. Regions could thus underperform even if they met or exceeded their repression plan limits. Such relative underperformance could signal a lack of enthusiasm, poor organizational work, sympathy for class enemies, or, in the worst case, that the repressor was himself a class enemy.

Figure 8.1 illustrates the repressors' dilemma. Although there were actually sixty-five regions, we reduce the number to two to simplify the



*Figure 8.1.* The Repressors' Dilemma

exposition. Neither region can communicate its strategy to the other and both understand that they will be judged relative to the other. They each have one of two choices in this example: to bid low or to bid high.

There are costs to bidding high. High bids mean that many victims must be repressed and (because of the limited supply of enemies that fit the dictator's profile), some will be "innocent," for which there may be later punishment. Bidding low has its advantages; it is necessary to repress only citizens who meet the dictator's profile of "enemy," and there is less need to use torture or to fabricate evidence. Bidding low is risky, however. If the other district bids high the repressor himself may be repressed as someone who is protecting enemies of the state.

The prediction of the model is that both will bid high to minimize their risk. It will be very hard for anyone to win, although the individual players may think they can. Also the model suggests that those who repress large numbers of people and engage in excesses, may be punished late in the game. Those who fail to compete, on the other hand, will be punished early. As far as the dictator is concerned, neither has won. They have both produced the same result. By bidding high, both players

have only succeeded in staying even. Each can only win over the other player if that player decides not to engage in the competition by bidding low.

## COSTS OF EXCESSES

A repression conveyer running at high speed (all players submitting high bids) inevitably means that citizens who do not fit the dictator's enemy profile will be repressed. To convict such persons requires that they confess to something they have not done or that their "degree of social danger" be falsified; e.g., a Russian is classified as a Pole or a citizen with no past party affiliations is falsely listed as a former Menshevik. A too fast conveyer will also mean violations of established rules against torture, arrest procedures, or fabrication of confessions or evidence.

Figure 8.2 shows the risks of too much repression which are built into the payoff matrix of Figure 8.1. The horizontal axis measures the effort repressors expend to obtain convictions—their time and the methods they use. Convictions are measured on the vertical axis. The curved line labeled as "convictions" shows how many convictions different levels of effort will produce. A small number of convictions can be produced with normal levels of effort. In order to produce a larger number of convictions, repressors must turn more and more to the extraordinary methods, such as torture and fabrications, discussed in the previous chapter.

If a bid equals the number of "true" enemies (as defined by the dictator's profile and shown as the horizontal line), the repressor can obtain the necessary convictions (at point *a*) without extraordinary methods. If the bid is high (point *b*), however, the repressor must resort to extraordinary methods, for which he may later be held accountable. If, as a hypothetical example, the dictator decrees that he wants all former Social Revolutionaries convicted, and there are 100 former SRs in a region, the regional NKVD can convict all 100 without torture or fabrications. If the regional NKVD, however, needs to repress 150 former SRs, torture and fabrications will be required for 50 of the 150.

With a large number of regions and the impossibility of coordination, each region will fear that the others will submit high bids. Accordingly, they all submit their bids at *b* rather than *a*. To locate at *a* would be the likely fatal decision to not participate in socialist competition. Yet locat-



*Figure 8.2. The Costs of Using Simplified Methods*

ing at  $b$  will not likely result in an advantage over other regions, which will also locate at  $b$ . No region is made better off and all are at risk of punishment for use of extraordinary methods.

This model is an abstraction. In reality, the line between “true” and “false” convictions was difficult to draw. False confessions were extracted even from “true” enemies (as defined by Stalin) to make them appear even more reprehensible, as in the various show trials. Because of the difficulty of labeling enemies, bands of uncertainty surround each of the lines in the above model. Nevertheless, the model captures an important truth—that a speeding conveyer puts extreme pressure on repressors to use methods and to choose victims in ways that they may have to pay for later. This fact of life is related in a biography of a relatively high NKVD official (Bogdanov), whose former superior warned him against the use of torture, stating that at some time “the party will demand an answer from us.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, Bogdanov was eventually repressed along with Yezhov for his purported use of torture.

The Perm district NKVD office provides a typical case study of the extraordinary methods employed to generate convictions. Operational workers with vivid imaginations were put to work writing descriptions of plots and confessions. One such writer of fiction wrote colorful protocols of sixty to seventy pages for people he had never seen. Another such writer transformed the few regular churchgoers of his district into a “Society of the Working Clergy.” Witnesses were paid for their false



testimony. In another case, a fictional plot carried out for the German General Staff made no sense because it called for barges that could not navigate the shallow waters of the local river. With the abundance of weapons, it was easy for the NKVD or militia to plant weapons caches in the homes of accused persons or in factories. In one case, the NKVD arrested two illiterate workers, who did not fit the fictional plot at all. According to the interrogator: "I went to my superior and complained: 'What kind of counterrevolutionaries are these?' His answer: 'They are true enemies,' and then he gave me a new case against Tatar kulaks and White Guards, which seemed to fit them better." Of the more than four thousand "Germans" arrested under "German operations" less than 10 percent were actually German. This work was done by a close circle of Chekists, who kept circulating new rumors about vast conspiracies and sabotage. They were required to complete ten cases per day. After working twenty hours straight, they would get drunk together. They were punished if they did not do enough. The deputy head of a municipal administration arrested all operational workers of a district "because of their lack of battle against counterrevolutionaries."<sup>3</sup>

The Perm district appears no better or worse than others. In Saratov, people arrested from the street were included in the quota, prior to any investigation.<sup>4</sup> Entire villages were placed in a single "diversionist-terrorist group." The head of the Tomsk municipal NKVD "worked over" detainees with the help of subordinates so that every one of them completed five to seven cases per day. Confessions were accepted without checking or documentation. The Tomsk official personally tortured many victims. Notably, he was shot May 19, 1940 under Article 58-10.<sup>5</sup>

#### INITIAL BIDDING AND THE JULY 30, 1937 LIMITS

The sixty-five regions found themselves locked in a potentially fatal prisoners' dilemma, which they were unlikely to win as mass operations began in August 1937. Bids and initial "limits" were handled according to the following chronology. On July 2, 1937, Stalin's telegram ordered each region to submit a bid for the number of class enemies to be executed or imprisoned in their region. Stalin's Politburo decree appeared to leave the initiation of the most basic plan indicator—repression limits—to the regions. Each had to decide how many victims to bid for. Approximately a week later, most regions submitted their bids, stating how

many enemies they proposed to execute or imprison. On July 30, Yezhov issued the limits for each of the sixty-five regions in his Operational Order No. 00447.

Stalin's July 2 directive set off feverish activity in Yezhov's Moscow office and in the regions as they prepared their proposals. Yezhov gave Ukrainian officials five days to check "agent material" for the compilation of "exact lists" of arrestees, containing, among other things, "their locations, the composition of their families, protocols of interrogations of witnesses, and the prosecutor's sanction of the arrest."<sup>6</sup> Regional officials sent emissaries to the districts "to compile lists of alien elements among social misfits and lists of all criminal recidivists."<sup>7</sup>

Most regions submitted bids to Moscow between July 7 and 10. Western Siberian NKVD head S. N. Mironov stated on July 8 that he could manage 10,924 first- and 15,036 second-category quotas,<sup>8</sup> compiled from materials such as the "List of [59] class-foreign" workers provided by the Narymsky executive committee (dated April 9, 1937), which included Trotskyites, former nobles, children of kulaks and priests, drunks, persons fined for overexpenditure, and slackers.<sup>9</sup> Western Siberia was eventually awarded quotas of 5,000 and 12,000 respectively on July 30).

We do not know the amount of coaching the regions received from Moscow during this period. According to one second-hand account (whose veracity has been questioned), Yezhov called regional NKVD heads to Moscow in mid-July after the first bids were in, warning them that "I will cut down and shoot all independent of rank, who try to slow down the battle against enemies of the people." He then handed out tentative regional limits,<sup>10</sup> which were met with deathly silence. The Omsk NKVD head purportedly expressed doubt that there were so many enemies in his province and was arrested on the spot. (This arrest occurred much later, which calls into questions the whole account.)<sup>11</sup> What is definitely true is that Yezhov set a savage tone throughout, ordering NKVD officials to "beat, threaten without engaging in real investigations," and declaring that some innocent people must inevitably perish in such a campaign. When asked about arrests of seventy- and eighty-year-olds, Yezhov responded: "If they can stand, shoot them."<sup>12</sup> Yezhov would not have set such a tone without consulting Stalin. Taking their cue from Yezhov, regional NKVD leaders understood that they were to propose high limits.

Table 8.1. The July 7–10, 1937 Bids of Reporting Regions versus the July 30, 1937 Limits

	<i>Category 1</i>		<i>Category 2</i>		<i>Total</i>		<i>Population (millions)</i>	<i>Total bid per capita of population</i>
	<i>Bid</i>	<i>Limit</i>	<i>Bid</i>	<i>Limit</i>	<i>Bid</i>	<i>Limit</i>		
Azerbaijan	1,500	1,500	3,900	3,750	5,400	5,250	3.05	0.018
Armenia	500	500	650	1,000	1,150	1,500	1.21	0.010
Belorussia	3,000	2,000	9,800	10,000	12,800	12,000	5.19	0.025
Georgia	1,419	2,000	1,562	3,000	2,981	5,000	3.37	0.009
Tadzhikistan	—		—		1,775	1,800	1.38	0.013
Turkmenistan	500	500	1,475	1,500	1,975	2,000	1.16	0.017
Uzbekistan	1,489	750	3,952	4,000	5,441	4,750	5.84	0.009
Dagestan	600	500	2,485	2,500	3,085	3,000	1.0	0.031
Crimea	143	300	1,385	1,200	1,528	1,500	0.99	0.015
Komi	211	100	221	300	432	400	0.3	0.014
Mari AR	704	300	1,439	1,500	2,143	1,800	0.56	0.038
Mordovan AR	1,250	300	2,263	1,500	3,513	1,800	1.19	0.030
Udmurt AR	63	200	423	500	486	700	0.93	0.005
Chechnya-Ingushetia	1,417	500	1,256	1,500	2,673	2,000	0.65	0.041
Chuvash AR	140	300	877	1,500	1,017	1,800	1.02	0.010
Azov-Chernomor	6,664	5,000	6,962	8,000	13,606	13,000	5.6	0.024

Far East	3,017	2,000	3,681	4,000	6,698	6,000	5.61	0.012
Western Siberia	10,800	5,000	0	12,000	10,800	17,000	6.43	0.017
Ordzhonikidze	2,461	1,000	3,672	4,000	6,133	5,000	1.82	0.034
Voronezh	850	1,000	3,687	3,500	4,537	4,500	6.08	0.007
Gorky	2,295	1,000	4,285	3,500	6,580	4,500	3.68	0.018
Kursk	1,798	1,000	2,986	3,000	4,784	4,000	4.16	0.012
Kuibyshev	1,881	1,000	4,259	4,000	6,140	5,000	3.94	0.016
Kirov	368	500	510	1,500	878	2,000	2.38	0.004
Moscow	8,500	5,000	32,805	30,000	41,305	35,000	11.97	0.035
Omsk	479	1,000	1,959	2,500	2,438	3,500	2.33	0.010
Orenburg	1,720	1,000	3,150	3,000	4,870	4,500	1.56	0.031
Saratov	437	1,000	1,586	2,000	2,023	3,000	1.88	0.011
Stalingrad	800	1,000	2,200	3,000	3,000	4,000	2.22	0.014
Sverdlovsk	5,000	4,000	7,000	6,000	12,000	10,000	4.12	0.029
Kazakhstan	2,346	2,500	4,403	5,000	6,749	7,500	5.12	0.013
Moldovia	11	200	248	500	259	700	0.57	0.005
Karelia	12	300	74	700	86	1,000	0.51	0.002

Source: Mark Iunge and Rol'f Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim"* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2003), chap. 3.

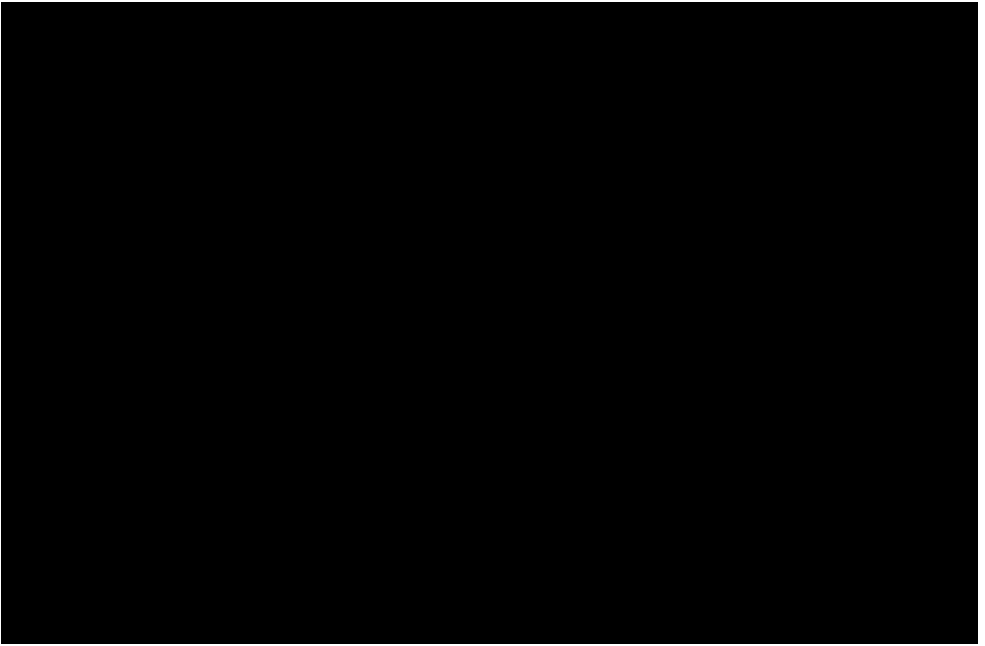
We have the early-July bids from thirty-two of the sixty-five regions thanks to a careful study by Mark Junge and Rolf Binner,<sup>13</sup> which we can compare with the limits of Operational Order No. 00447 handed down on July 30. The fact that we have no records for early July bids from thirty-three regions (including breakdowns of the key Ukrainian districts) may mean that the information was lost or deliberately removed, or that their bids were submitted by telephone or in person. However, in the Soviet system where most everything had to be committed to writing, all bids were likely made on paper. The missing bids remain to be discovered in some secret file.

Table 8.1 shows the bids and the resulting official limits, handed down on July 30, 1930, which constituted Moscow's reaction to the bids. The center "corrected" all thirty-two bids; some corrections were quite small, others were quite large.

The bid phase showed the expected general tendency of overbidding. The thirty-two regions submitted 66,707 first-category and 125,585 second-category bids. The first-category bids were cut by 19,207 and the second-category figures were raised by 2,615 in the July 30 limits. In the aggregate, the regions overbid by 16,592, or almost 9 percent, in their offers of victims.<sup>14</sup> The overbidding was not uniform: fourteen bids were raised, and eighteen bids were lowered. There is no apparent pattern, although these figures could be subjected to more detailed analysis.

Looking at the bids for executions, a few regions bid unrealistically low relative to the eventual limit (such as Karelia and Moldovia, at 12 and 11, respectively). They were assigned 300 and 200, respectively. Others bid very high, such as the Mordovian Autonomous Republic (bid 1,250 versus limit 300), Western Siberia (bid 10,800 versus limit 5,000), Ordzhonikidze province (bid 2,461 versus limit 1,000), and Gorky province (bid 2,295 versus limit 2,000). Of the thirty-two regions, twelve bid round numbers, and the rest bid exact numbers, suggesting that the latter were actually making counts from lists, while the other regions were making quick approximations.

A "rational" dictator would distinguish Moscow province's (12 million population) bid for 41,305 from Komi's (300,000 population) bid for 432. At some point in the process, the center would have converted these figures into per capita numbers.<sup>15</sup> There seems to be no particular geographical or other pattern to distinguish high from low bidders on a



*Figure 8.3.* Correlation Between Initial Bids per Capita and Order No. 00447 Limits. Source: For data, see Table 8.1.

per capita basis, but this matter should be the subject of a separate investigation.

Unless special circumstances require (such as expectations of high concentrations of enemies in a particular region), the dictator would tend to even out bids per capita. The accompanying scatter diagram (Figure 8.3) suggests that this was indeed the methodology used to “correct” the original bids. It shows a negative correlation between the percentage correction and the original bid per capita. The center raised those with below average per capita bids and lowered those with relatively high per capita bids. (In fact this procedure explains about half of the variation in the percentage correction).

The “evening out” of corrections suggests that, as a first approximation, Moscow assumed that enemies were fairly evenly distributed, although half of the percentage corrections remains unexplained. The experience of an NKVD official operating in the city of Luga confirms this thinking: An outside inspector concluded that the official’s operation was poorly run because Luga was not repressing as many people as

comparable cities, and the inspector was not moved by the official's argument that different locations would have different concentrations of enemies.<sup>16</sup>

There were other factors that explain the center's decision to correct the bids of the regions, such as personal relations, the demographic composition of a region, and undue concentrations of former kulaks in areas of special settlements, but they cannot be elicited without considerable statistical analysis.

### INCREASING LIMITS

Once regions received their limits, they had to decide whether to ask for more. Unlike dekulakization, where regions were ordered to stick to the limits, Yezhov's Order No. 00447 stated: "In cases where circumstances demand a raising of the confirmed limits, the republic NKVD commissars and the heads of regional NKVD administrations are obliged to present to me a corresponding petition explaining the increase." Yezhov went on to say ambiguously: "Reductions of figures and also the transfer of persons from the first to the second category and vice versa are to be resolved."<sup>17</sup>

The option of applying for higher limits also created a prisoners' dilemma during the operations phase. If *A* does not ask for a higher limit and *B* does, *A* will be judged as performing less well than *B* and vice versa. According to the prisoners' dilemma, both *A* and *B* should again follow the "least worst" course and request higher limits.

Indeed, petitions from regional party bureaus to "raise the limits of victims to be repressed according to NKVD Order No. 00447" flooded the Politburo and were routinely approved.<sup>18</sup> Regional officials, fearing charges of "operational inertness," joined the socialist competition to raise their quotas. Western Siberian NKVD officials "reached ecstasy" when they attained second place among the various regions in liquidating enemies of the people.<sup>19</sup> By October 1938, they had arrested more than 25,000, and almost 14,000 had been sentenced to death.<sup>20</sup> When a new NKVD head (Gorbach) arrived in Omsk in July 1937, he immediately requested to raise Omsk's category 1 limit from 479 to 1,000. He obtained increases to 5,444 and then to 8,000, and finally received personal approval from Stalin for 9,000.<sup>21</sup> By the end of 1938, Omsk province, a territory of 2.3 million, produced half the number of victims

in Moscow province which was five times as populous. The same official, when transferred to Khabarovsk, raised the limit from 10,000 to 20,000, and another NKVD official assigned to Western Siberia raised the original limit from 1,000 to 2,000 and then requested an additional 11,000 from Yezhov.<sup>22</sup>

Officials who participated vigorously in the socialist competition initially fared well. Yezhov's own fervor, zeal and dedication won him accolades for "introducing party spirit and Bolshevism into NKVD work."<sup>23</sup> On October 12, 1937, he became a candidate member of the Politburo on Stalin's proposal.<sup>24</sup> He was praised by a Politburo member (Mikoyan): "He has smashed the vicious spy nests of Trotskyist-Bukharinite agents of the foreign intelligence services, cleansed our land of many enemies of the people who sought to turn back the wheels of history."<sup>25</sup> Such praise was repeated down to the lowest levels of the NKVD. A head of the Belorussia NKVD assembled his interrogators and handed out medals and large sums of cash to those with the most convictions, telling them that "Stalin knows about you and remembers you."<sup>26</sup>

On the flip side, NKVD officers received rebukes for relatively poor performance, such as a regional official (Bogdanov): "It seems that you are not a full Chekist and a bad worker. Your region has not been purged of rightists, who are continuing their sabotage work."<sup>27</sup> The same head of the Belorussian NKVD, described above handing out awards and cash, also handed out arrests: "Suddenly after a dead silence, he loudly called out a name: 'Mikhailov Aleksandr Stepanovich, come here to the table.' All heads turned. One man advanced to the table with nervous steps. His face was distorted in fright. 'Here is Mikhailov Aleksandr Stepanovich! Look at him, comrades. He finished three cases in a week. Not one execution. He is sentencing to five and seven years.' There was complete silence. He slowly turns to the unfortunate investigator and stares him in the face. A minute passes and another minute. 'I . . .' the unfortunate interrogator stammered. 'Guard! Take him away.' 'It is clear that this person was recruited by our enemies to sabotage the work of the organs and to prevent the fulfillment of the personal orders of Comrade Stalin. This traitor is to be shot!'"<sup>28</sup>

Even the most ardent Chekist feared punishment. The head of an operational group working near Novosibirsk wrote to his superiors that he was "very disappointed that only 157 first-category cases of the 260



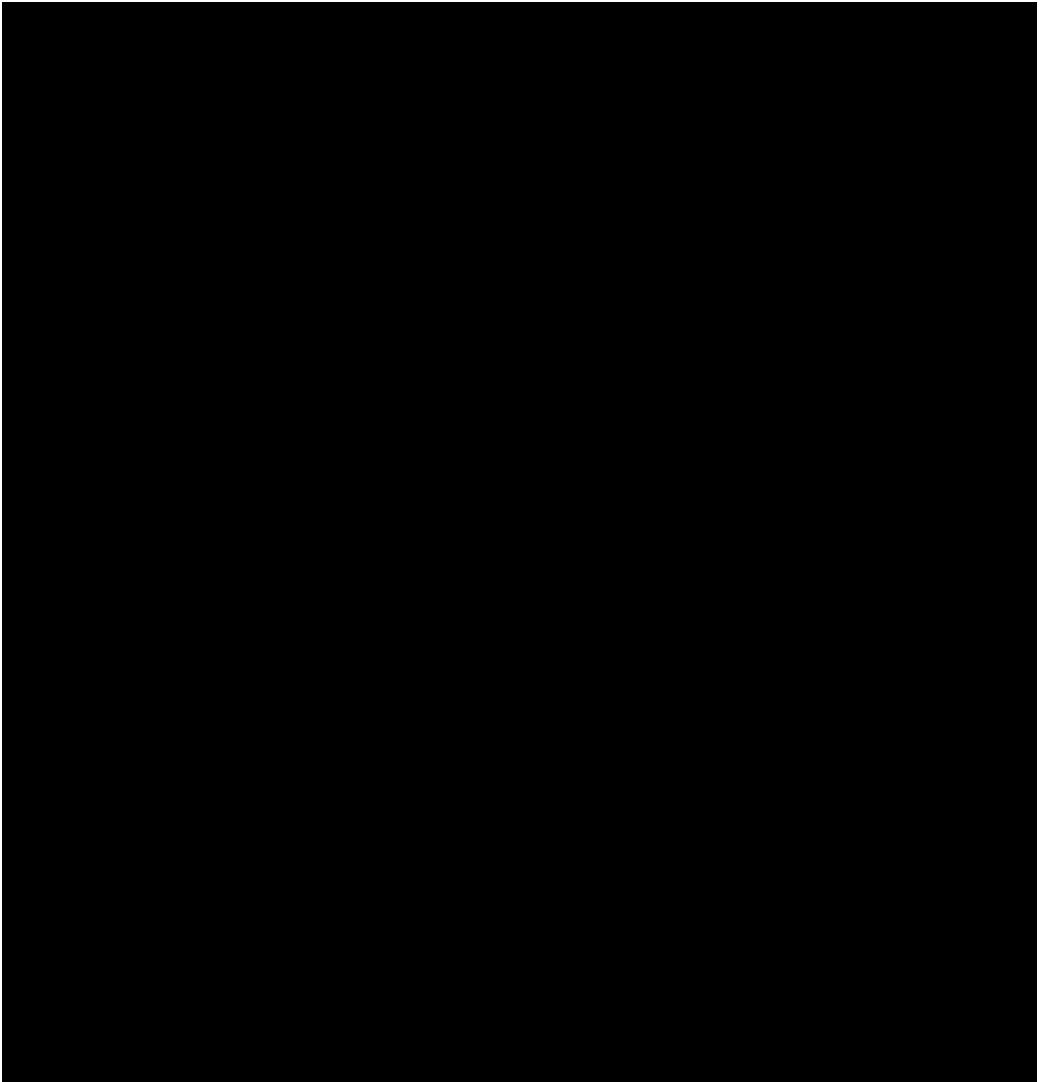


Figure 8.4. Original 00447 Limits of July 30, 1937 versus Total Limits Eventually Approved. Source: Mark Iunge and Rol'f Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim"* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2003), pp. 122–134.

I submitted were approved.” His “disappointment” was really fear that his superiors were dissatisfied with his work: “I admit that in connection with haste, the proceedings were not conducted in a high-quality manner.” He was heartened to learn that the delay was not his fault, but that his superiors were “waiting for their limit.”<sup>29</sup>

The February–March 1937 Central Committee plenum took place in the midst of purges of regional party leaders. Each engaged in elaborate self-criticism of his lack of vigilance and bragged about the number of plots he had uncovered in his district (thus raising questions about his own oversight). When Lavrenty Beria, the party of the small Georgian republic, reported 803 convictions and he was attacked by General Georgy Zhukov for not arresting thousands, the irritated Beria shot back: “I am speaking in Russian, and you should understand the Russian language better than I.”<sup>30</sup>

Newly appointed secretaries (replacing those arrested) were freer to speak of arrests within the party and state organization of their regions and to petition Stalin to speed up the work of the tribunals.<sup>31</sup> Other party secretaries informed Stalin of their heroic struggles against wrecking and sabotage (such as reducing the number of forest fires) while asking for extra limits for executions. “For the further purging of kulak—White Guard elements, I ask you to approve a supplementary limit of 3,000 persons of which 2,000 are to be shot and 1,000 to be sentenced to prison. Today I was handed data about those uncovered by the NKVD in counterrevolutionary groups. I ask you to approve the speedy examination of these cases in the Military Tribunal according to the Law of December 1, 1934 and to publish the sentences in the press.”<sup>32</sup>

Figure 8.4 shows that the petitions for limit increases of the fifty-two regions (accounting for 96 percent of the USSR population) for which we have data doubled the limits in the July 30 order. The original sum of category 1 and 2 limits was 256,000, which was raised to 503,000 by limit increases (including Stalin’s additional limits issued January 30, 1938). The average percentage increase was a huge 96 percent.

Some regions asked for more than a doubling; others asked for less. In Ukraine, there was a feverish effort to ask for higher and higher limits. On September 5, 1937, the head of the Ukrainian NKVD, I. M. Leplevsky, asked Yezhov for a first-category limit increase of 4,200. By the beginning of October, Ukraine had already exceeded the original first-category limits. On September 29, Leplevsky asked for further increases to 4,500 first-category and 15,200 second-category limits. By the beginning of November 1937, the original 00447 limits had been exceeded two and a half to three times. On December 11, 1937, Leplevsky asked for yet another increase of 6,000 first-category and 10,000 second-category victims. Despite these “heroic” efforts, Yezhov concluded that

Leplevsky had not exposed sufficient enemies and replaced him with the head of the Orenburg province NKVD, A. I. Uspensky, who had been even more brutal in carrying out repression. Leplevsky was arrested on April 26, 1938 and shot on July 28. Under Uspensky, Yezhov continued to apply pressure. In February 1938 he held meetings with regional NKVD heads, complaining about the "almost complete absence of work on the exposure of the organized anti-Soviet underground."<sup>33</sup>

The doubling of the initial 00447 limits clearly confirms the expected prisoners' dilemma behavior. Fearing that it would end up with convictions that were low relative to others, each region pushed for ever higher limits. To not ask for limit increases seemed tantamount to asking for removal or arrest.

#### ACTUAL FULFILLMENT AND OVERFULFILLMENT

The repression manager's "plan" under the mass operations of Order No. 00447 was the sum of the initial limit of July 30, 1937 and any limit increases approved by superiors. As a matter of procedure, limit increases were granted by the Politburo, but most of them went first to NKVD headquarters. In the economy, enterprise managers and ministries had the option of overfulfilling the plan and were encouraged to do so. Given the tight control of mass operations, we would not expect much overfulfillment (repressing more than the authorized number), but there could have been some for technical reasons or because of simple overzealousness.

The prisoners' dilemma provides a powerful explanation for the upward spiral of repression. There was yet another built-in dynamic towards overfulfillment: terror operators had to grow their lists of victims to protect themselves on purely practical grounds. The NKVD required confessions to fulfill their terror plans. Interrogations were supposed to produce confessions about organized counterrevolutionary groups, and part of the confession process was the implication of other class enemies.

In a typical confession, the accused leader of "counterrevolutionary espionage diversionist activity" in Novosibirsk "admitted his own guilt and unmasked the accused Semianov (case no. 39), Koshina (cases nos. 40–45), Ageikin (cases nos. 47, 48), Pantiukhin (case no. 69), and the witnesses Portniagin (case no. 50) and Fedorov (case nos. 51, 52)."<sup>34</sup>

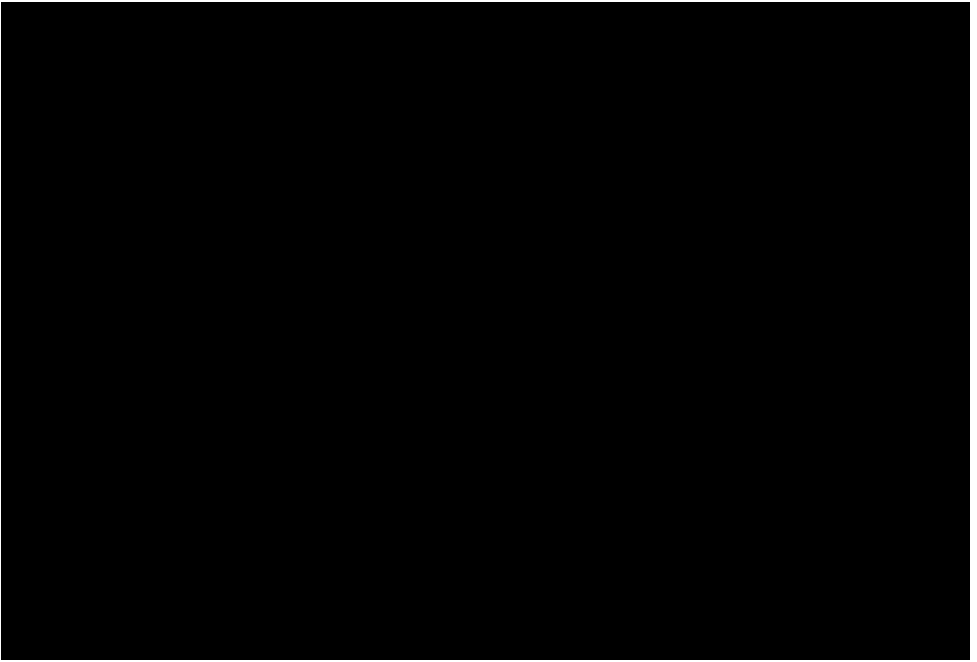


Figure 8.5. Number of Convictions by Tataria Troika Sessions. August 11, 1937 to January 6, 1938. Source: Iunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim,"* p. 314.

One interrogation implicated an additional five conspirators and two “witnesses” with some knowledge of the conspiracy. If each of these was to implicate similar numbers, the list of potential class enemies would grow exponentially. If the local NKVD workers did not, as a consequence, ask for supplemental limits to deal with these new names, they could be accused of criminal conspiracies themselves. Virtually every interrogation of this period produced names of new suspects.

The purge of the elite had this same growth dynamic. In his report to Stalin on the interrogation of M. N. Iakovlev (July 1, 1936), Yagoda described a twelve-person conspiratorial web identified by Iakovlev. The June 22 and 23, 1936 interrogations of two suspected counterrevolutionary terrorists (Dreitser and Pikel') yielded seven new co-conspirators.<sup>35</sup> Presumably, their interrogations provided even more suspects.

The exponential growth of co-conspirators generated by interrogations could generate “bubbles” of repression activity, similar to a stock-market or housing bubble. Figure 8.5 illustrates exponential growth by showing the convictions from troika sessions of the Tataria troika from

August 11, 1937 to early January 1938. Although it shows less than a year of troika work, the exponential trend (shown as the dark line in the graph) is evident, and given this trend, the number of convictions could easily outrun the number approved. With enemies of the people being exposed at an exponential rate, if the NKVD workers did not follow up expeditiously, they could be accused of “operational inertia.” Once the interrogation began and confessions were extracted, it would be tempting to execute and get permission later just to stay even.

Figure 8.6 compares the approximate<sup>36</sup> final number of convictions versus the total of victims approved under 00447 in our fifty-two regions for the period July 1937 through the end of 1938. The differences between the final number of convictions by extrajudicial NKVD tribunals and the number approved under the auspices of NKVD Decree No. 00447 (the original limits plus approved increases in limits) equal the overfulfillment of approved limits plus national operations. Unfortunately, we cannot break out national operations by regions, so we really do not know how many of these convictions fell under mass operations and were unapproved.

Here is what these calculations tell us. Over a half-million (523,000) first and second-category victims were approved by the Politburo, but 1,181,000 persons were convicted.<sup>37</sup> The difference of 658,000 persons would be the result of national operations and overfulfillment of plans approved by the Politburo under mass operations. If we exclude executions and prison sentences under national operations (345,000),<sup>38</sup> 313,000 persons were repressed under Order No. 00447 on the basis of initiatives that took place either locally or within the NKVD without (or prior to) Politburo approval. Because national operations would be unevenly spread regions, we cannot use these data to determine which regions had more “unapproved” convictions than others.

The study by Junge and Binner finds that more than one-third of mass operations was handled within the NKVD itself. Fewer than two-thirds of the victim limits were approved centrally. In Ukraine, there were Politburo approvals for 106,000 victims but 217,000 were repressed. In Leningrad, there were Politburo approvals for 16,000 but 54,000 were repressed, and so on down the line. We must regard such figures as tentative because a number of limit increases may have been approved by Stalin without going into Politburo minutes.<sup>39</sup>

This result takes us back to the issue raised in Chapter 6: the excuse

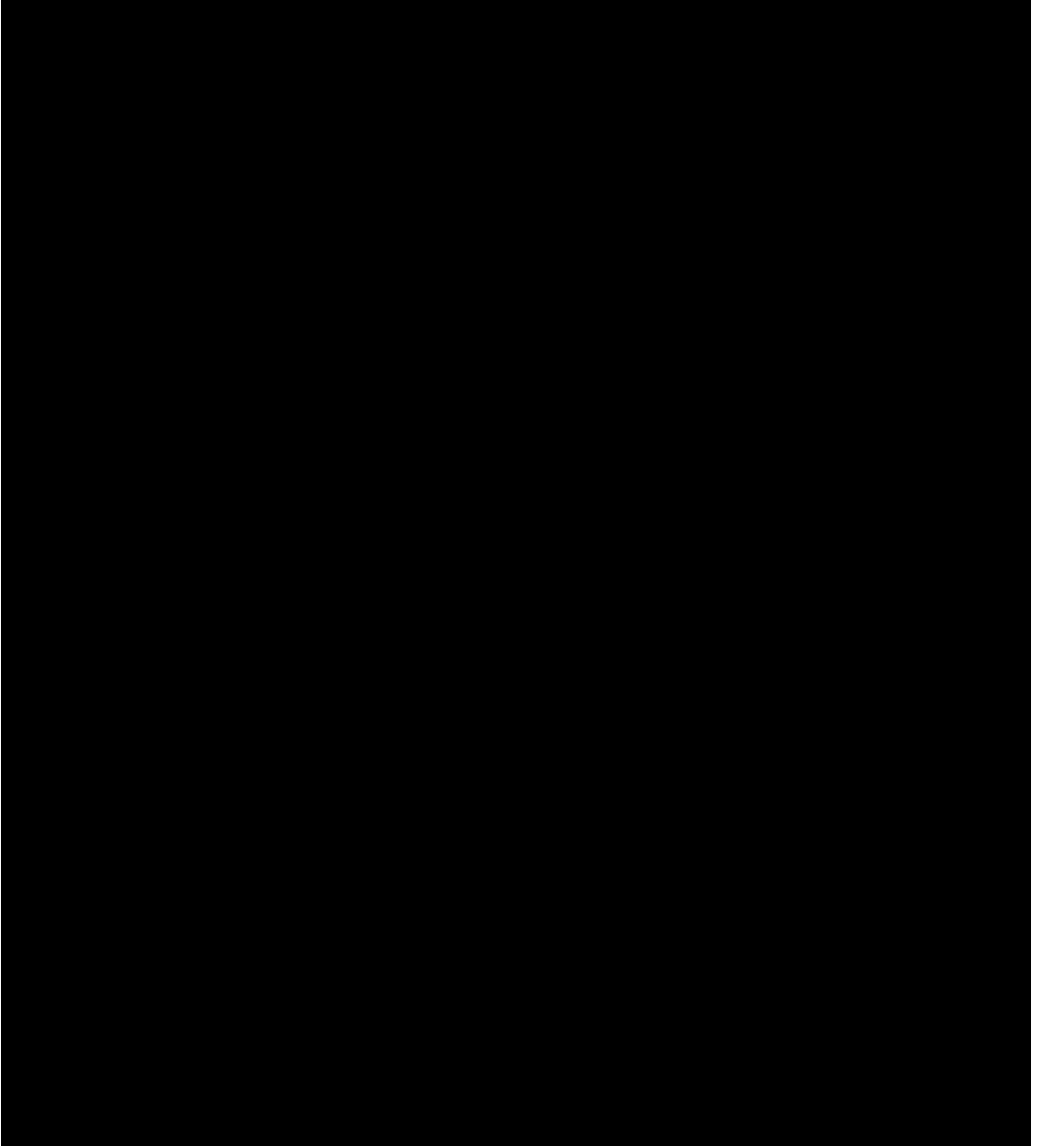


Figure 8.6. Total Number of Category 1 and 2 Convictions versus Convictions Approved under Order No. 00447. (All figures per capita.) Source: Iunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim,"* pp. 122–134. The total number of convictions is calculated from O. B. Mozokhin, "Polnomochie na repressii (1918–1953)," [www.fsb.ru](http://www.fsb.ru), February 22, 2005. Mozokhin gives arrests by regions but does not give convictions. We convert arrests into convictions by multiplying by the average conviction rate (85 percent).

that Yezhov was acting as a maverick, out of Stalin's control. We repeat the argument of that chapter, that Yezhov was unlikely to act alone and our conviction that Yezhov was receiving approvals and encouragement from Stalin in their almost every-other-day meetings.

### Who Survived?

The repressors' dilemma model predicts that there will be few if any winners. The various regional administrations have no real choice but to compete against each other; if they do not, they will be repressed immediately. They all submit high bids and requests for higher limits. They have to run faster and faster to stay in the same place. There were probably heads of regional NKVD administrations who understood the hopelessness of their situation. Others may have truly felt that they could not only survive but advance by running their own repression conveyers at top speed.

An example of the repressors' dilemma was Dmitry Dmitriev, the head of the Sverdlovsk NKVD administration. Already in February 1937, he ordered the arrests of hundreds of managers, as members of a vast anti-Soviet conspiracy organized into military units. He personally wrote Yezhov long reports about the dangerous bloc of anti-Soviet elements he had uncovered. He even came to the attention of Stalin, who wrote: "Dmitriev is working well. It is necessary to arrest both the large and small participants in this counterrevolutionary group in the Urals." When Dmitriev's first limits were exhausted, he came up with a new threat, the "foreign base" (*inobaz*) conspiracy, which he used to justify new limit increases and to arrest an additional 24,000 citizens. Dmitriev kept pestering his superiors for permission to have a show trial, to advance his career. Dmitriev played the repressors' game as hard as he could, but he was arrested in June 1938, a half-year before the end of mass operations, and shot in March 1939.<sup>40</sup>

Dmitry Shlenov, a longtime Chekist and Civil War veteran, headed the Udmurt Autonomous Republic's NKVD administration throughout mass operations. According to records, he did not request limit increases beyond the seven hundred initially assigned in July 1937, but he convicted almost four times his approved limits. He headed the Udmurt NKVD administration until May 1939, after which he was transferred into economic and party administration. If anything, he played

the repressors' dilemma game less strongly than Dmitriev, but he survived.<sup>41</sup>

Dmitriev and Shelenov are striking examples, but we can only draw more general conclusions by examining a larger number of cases. The toll on top NKVD officials was heavy from the start of mass operations through Beria's takeover and its aftermath. Of the top NKVD leadership in 1935, some 40 percent were executed. In all, 937 NKVD employees were arrested, 91 from the central office, and 99 were reported as deceased, with no information given on the cause of death.<sup>42</sup> Of the 104 top NKVD officers in 1936, half did not survive to 1940<sup>43</sup>—which of course means that the other half was not repressed. This empirical fact provides an opportunity to differentiate the characteristics of these two groups. Mass operations created enormous flux within the NKVD. At the peak of the Great Terror (1937–1938) and its aftermath (1939 and 1940), there were complete turnovers of top NKVD officials, with more job changes and firings than among top state or party officials.<sup>44</sup> During more “normal” years, NKVD turnover resembled that in other branches of administration.

Table 8.2 summarizes the results of our statistical study of regional NKVD leaders drawn from a list of heads of territorial administrations of the NKVD during the period of mass operations.<sup>45</sup> We include heads of NKVD regional administrations in place when mass operations were announced at the end of July 1937, those put in place shortly thereafter (by August or September), and new heads as they were replaced (either transferred or, more likely, arrested). We do not include any heads appointed after Yezhov's dismissal in November 1938 as Beria began to bring in his own people. For each territorial leader, we determine his fate (repressed and when or whether he survived) from his biography.<sup>46</sup> For each territory, we can calculate measures of “repression performance.” We use four such measures, the first three by per capita of population of each region: (1) the July 30 limits plus limit increases (the approved repression task); (2) limit increases (the regional administration's request for more difficult tasks); (3) total repressions under both mass operations and national operations (the gross number of repressions); and (4) the ratio of total repressions to the initial limits of July 30—(3) to (1)—which can be interpreted as gross repression output as a ratio of the initial plan assignment. For all measures, a larger number signifies greater repression or a greater effort to produce repression.



Our task is to link the performance of the region with the fate of its NKVD head. The heads of regional NKVD administrations during mass operations could either survive or not. We count them as surviving if they were alive and not in prison at the start of 1941. If they were executed or imprisoned (in two cases they committed suicide to avoid arrest) between July 1937 and the end of 1940, they are counted as non-survivors. We break the nonsurvivors into two groups: those who were repressed during mass operations, and those who were repressed after mass operations ended in November 1938. In all, we have data for fifty-three NKVD regional administrations, which is the unit of observation.

We classify the regional NKVD administration as having a survivor if any one of its administrators was not repressed. We classify the regional NKVD administration as having a chief repressed during mass operations if any one of its chiefs was imprisoned or executed during mass operations. Similarly, we classify it as having a chief repressed after mass operations if any one of its chiefs was repressed between the end of mass operations and the start of 1941. According to this coding scheme, a region could theoretically be listed as having all three types, but in none did this occur. One half of the regions had chiefs who fell into two categories, meaning the other half had chiefs who all fell into one category.

We attempt to examine a number of propositions with this data set. The first proposition is that those who played the repressors' dilemma game harder than others would not benefit. The alternative proposition is that repression performance really did matter, and those who worked harder at repression were more likely to survive. A second proposition is that those who played the game harder were more likely to use extraordinary methods and be subject to repression after mass operations were over. This proposition predicts that those repressed after mass operations produced more repressions. A third proposition is that those who failed to play the game were eliminated quickly; thus those administrators who repressed relatively few were more likely to have a head repressed during mass operations.

Our data set cannot answer these questions with any precision because most regional NKVD administrations were headed by more than one administrator during mass operations. There was a considerable amount of transferring among administrations, some of it purely administrative but often to replace a repressed head. We have fifty-three

Table 8.2. Fate of Region Heads According to Repression Performance, 1937–1940

	<i>A. Regions with survivors (19) vs. other regions (34)</i>	<i>B. Regions with heads repressed after mass operations (42) vs. other regions (11)</i>	<i>C. Regions with heads repressed during mass operations (24) vs. other regions (29)</i>
(1) Per capita 00447 repression limits plus increases	.0031/.0038	.0031/.0022	.0040/.0032
(2) Limit increases per capita	.0016/.0016	.0014/.0009	.0019/.0014
(3) Total repressions per capita (mass operations plus national operations)	.0039/.0053	.00040/.00037	.0043/.0052
(4) Ratio of (3) to (1)	4.49/4.31	3.49/4.31	2.68/3.08

*Source:* Database compiled by the author from Iunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal “bol’shim”*; Oleg Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii: Vnesudebnye polnomochiia organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti (1918–1953)* (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, 2006); and V. Petrov and K. V. Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD, 1934–1941* (Moscow: Zvenia, 1999). The database is available upon request.

regional administrations but eighty-four administration heads. Predecessors or successors may have made the bids for victims or petitioned for limit increases. A new head may have arrived to take over a struggling administration and not have been held accountable for its earlier deficiencies. The worst tortures or fabrications may have been the work of a predecessor or successor. Despite this statistical noise, our data set should capture some general tendencies. At least one of the administrators should have been awarded credit for high repression marks. At least one of the administrators should have received blame for the excesses committed in a regional NKVD administration.

Column A in Table 8.2 considers whether the survivors tended to outperform the nonsurvivors in the production of repression. According to measures (1) to (3) above, survivor regions underperformed (or performed equally as well) as all other regions. As measured by the ratio of gross repression output to the original limits of July 30, 1937—the ratio of (4) to (1) above—the surviving regions may have had a slight performance advantage. The necessary conclusion is that outperforming

other regions does not appear to have materially improved the survival chances of the administration head.

Column B looks for a relationship between a chief's repression after mass operations and regional repression performance. The working proposition is that those who committed the most excesses during mass operations would be most likely to be repressed in their aftermath. The first two repression performance measures are consistent with this proposition, but the last contradict the proposition. The evidence is at best mixed.

Column C looks for a relationship between regional repression performance and the repression of regional administration chiefs during mass operations. The working hypothesis is that those repressed during mass operations did not engage as well in the socialist competition for victims and were hence repressed themselves. The first three performance measures suggest the exact opposite. The regions whose chiefs were repressed during mass operations were ones which in general were outperforming other regions.

This evidence suggests that there was no systematic effort to punish those who engaged in the worst excesses. Arrests after mass operations were to divert blame from higher-ups (the most important being Stalin himself), and for this a number of Chekist-operational workers had to be sacrificed. In some cases, the sacrificial lambs were indeed those who had committed excesses, but this was not done in a systematic fashion. Overall, there was no concerted effort to correct the excesses of the Great Terror. Case reviews, both before and after mass operations, were not intended to establish guilt or innocence. We would imagine that those NKVD officers actually punished for excesses were also ones the incoming boss, Beria, wished to get rid of. The limited investigations that did take place simply gave Stalin a forum to complain about Yezhov's excesses, of which he (Stalin) purportedly knew nothing. It gave USSR Prosecutor Vyshinsky, who may have signed more death warrants than any other official, the chance to "discover" excesses that had occurred in various NKVD administrations.

Our database of regional NKVD administrations does not lend convincing support to any of the propositions above. In fact, there seems to be no systematic correlation between the repression performance of a regional administration and the survival chances of its head. True, the failure to get clear results could be due to the statistical noise in the data,

but it more likely reflects a larger truth. In a prisoners' dilemma situation, we should expect no systematic determinants of who wins and who loses. In fact, we should expect primarily losers, which is what we see. Many more NKVD department heads perished than survived. The winners seem to have won by chance; they were among Khrushchev's drawers of "lucky tickets." Stalin's order ending mass operations blamed the NKVD, headed by Yezhov and the prosecutor's office, headed by Vyshinsky. Vyshinsky survived; Yezhov did not. Vyshinsky drew a lucky ticket.

### Other Systematic Factors?

Table 8.3 examines a slightly larger data set of NKVD regional department heads. We are no longer trying to tie the fate of the head to the performance of the region, but to determine whether their characteristics, such as nationality, who appointed them, or years of service affected their chances of survival. We continue to divide regional chiefs into survivors, those repressed during mass operations, and those repressed after mass operations were over.

Panel A shows what happened to regional NKVD heads according to date of appointment. (Individuals can be counted twice or three times if they had multiple appointments.) It classifies regional NKVD heads into those appointed under Yagoda (approximately up to December 1936); during the early months of Yezhov (January to June 1937); at the start of mass operations (July to September 1937); after mass operations were underway (October to December 1937); and during the second phase of mass operations (all of 1938).

Those NKVD heads in place when mass operations began stood a higher chance of repression during mass operations, especially if they had been in place for a while. Almost 60 percent of Yagoda appointees and 43 percent of those appointed shortly before mass operations began were repressed during the operations. The later the appointment (now as replacements for those repressed or transferred), the greater the chances of avoiding repression: only 10 percent of those appointed in 1938 were repressed before the end of mass operations.

The flip side is that those appointed later had a much higher chance of being repressed along with Yezhov. Well above half of those appointed July 1937 and later were repressed after mass operations ended. There is

Table 8.3. Fate of NKVD Region Heads by Various Characteristics (All figures are percent of total)

<i>A. Date of Appointment as NKVD Administration Head</i>				
	<i>Repressed during mass operations</i>	<i>Repressed after mass operations</i>	<i>Survivors</i>	<i>Total</i>
Up to December 1936 ( <i>n</i> = 29)	58.6	20.7	20.7	100.0
January–June 1937 ( <i>n</i> = 28)	42.9	35.7	21.4	100.0
July–September 1937 ( <i>n</i> = 38)	26.3	55.3	18.4	100.0
October–December 1937 ( <i>n</i> = 23)	13.0	60.9	26.1	100.0
1938 ( <i>n</i> 557)	10.5	63.2	26.3	100.0
<i>B. NKVD “Journeyman” (headed more than one division)</i>				
“Journeyman” ( <i>n</i> = 23)	17.4	60.9	21.7	
Other NKVD ( <i>n</i> = 127)	31.5	44.1	24.4	
<i>C. Date joined State Security</i>				
1918–1919 ( <i>n</i> = 29)	41.4	34.5	24.1	100
1920–1921 ( <i>n</i> = 84)	29.8	48.8	21.4	100
1922–1927 ( <i>n</i> = 26)	26.9	50.0	23.1	100
1928–1938 ( <i>n</i> = 20)	5.0	55.0	40.0	100
<i>D. Nationality of NKVD Administration Head, 1935</i>				
Russians ( <i>n</i> = 80)	16.3	55.0	28.7	100
Ukrainians and Belorussians ( <i>n</i> = 23)	21.7	39.1	39.1	100
Georgians ( <i>n</i> = 5)	20.0	40.0	40.0	100
Jews ( <i>n</i> = 27)	48.1	48.1	3.7	100
Others (Poles, Baltic nationalities, Germans) ( <i>n</i> = 14)	50.0	21.4	28.6	100

*Source:* Database compiled from biographical section of Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, available from the author upon request.

no strong pattern of survivors, although those appointed after the first phase of mass operations seemed to have a slightly better survival chance. The notable factor about survival is how few regional NKVD personnel survived; according to our sample only between 20 percent and a quarter. Mass operations, among other things, gave the dictator and his current NKVD chief the opportunity to purge the state security apparatus of regional cliques and of appointments made by a predecessor.

During mass operations, regional heads were sent to head another region for administrative reasons as replacements, presumably a sign of confidence in the person concerned. Our data set picks up these transferees, or NKVD journeymen as we call them, as they show up as heads of different administrations at different times.

Panel B shows that these journeymen were less likely to be repressed (17 percent versus 31.5 percent for all others) during mass operations, but they were more likely to be repressed with Yezhov. Their “experience” did not raise their chances of long-term survival. Their overall survival rates were, if anything, below those of other heads.

A number of authors argue that Stalin used the Great Terror to rid the leadership of the old guard, in whom he had lost confidence or who knew too much.<sup>47</sup> Clearly he used the Great Terror to destroy the regional party leaderships. Panel C links the dates that NKVD regional heads joined state security with their eventual fates. We divide the dates of joining into four periods (1918–1919, 1920–1921, 1922–1927, 1928–1938). The panel shows that “Old Chekists” of the 1918–1919 cohort had the highest chance (over 40 percent) of being repressed during mass operations. Those joining state security late had a lower chance of repression under mass operations but a higher probability of being repressed along with Yezhov. The date of joining state security seems to have had little impact on chances of survival, other than for very late joiners, who were typically party officials transferred to the NKVD near the end of mass operations to fill gaps.

Chekist-operational workers were drawn disproportionately from nationalities that were later repressed, such as Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Germans. Seventy percent of the regional NKVD administrations were headed by Russians, Ukrainians, or Belorussians in 1935; but 18 percent were headed by Jews, and slightly under 10 percent by Poles, members of Baltic nationalities, and Germans. Few of these national minorities survived the 1930s.

Panel D shows that Russian administration heads stood a smaller chance (16 percent) of repression during mass operations but a higher chance (55 percent) of repression along with Yezhov. Jews had a particularly bad time. They had a 50 percent chance of either being repressed along with Yezhov or under mass operations. There were no survivors. The other nationalities also stood a 50 percent chance of repression under mass operations but a lower chance of repression along with

Yezhov, and a surprisingly high survival rate. Georgians occupied a privileged position but their numbers are too small for analysis.

Unlike the inconclusive Table 8.2, Table 8.3 gives a number of systematic factors related to the chances of survival. It seemed to make a difference “who” and “whose” person you were. If you had been appointed under Yagoda, there was little chance that you would survive the first wave of mass operations. If appointed by Yezhov, particularly after replacing a repressed administration head, you had less of a chance of falling victim to mass operations but a high chance of perishing in their aftermath. Even more discouraging was that factors you could not change in the 1930s, such as your nationality or the date when you joined state security, determined your fate, not your bidding for victims or your zeal in repressing enemies in your region.

#### STALIN'S PARTY SECRETARIES

The fates of Stalin's regional party secretaries cannot be analyzed empirically like those of regional NKVD administration heads. With two exceptions, they all perished. We cannot look for patterns of variation when there was no variation.

Some regional party secretaries actively promoted mass operations, such as Robert Eikhe of Western Siberia (also a candidate member of the Politburo), who had already conducted a brutal regional terror campaign in 1934. At the June 1937 plenum he and other party secretaries appealed for more repressions. If the regional party secretaries had known what lay in store, they would have kept quiet. They were not yet aware that Stalin considered them disloyal feudal barons, resisting and blocking orders from Moscow. Regional bosses, such as the head of the Smolensk party, were known for their high living and luxurious mansions. Many regional officials had joined the party to gain immunity from prosecution. Counterfeit party cards were circulating.<sup>48</sup> Stalin's original call to terror in early July 1937 singled out the party as a possible hiding ground for enemies.

Regional party leaders had built up interlocking directorates of state and party officials to conceal their local wheelings and dealings from the center. One first secretary protected his network by insisting on a state funeral for an alcoholic subordinate killed in a drunken brawl.<sup>49</sup> Eikhe was able to use his influence to silence even *Pravda* after its local corre-

spondent characterized Western Siberia as “a nest of bribe takers and embezzlers.”<sup>50</sup>

As long as disciplinary actions were limited, party secretaries could keep their cliques together, but as mass arrests began, networks crumbled. Subordinates implicated their superiors. In a number of cases, regional NKVD officers who belonged to a clique also went down with the party secretary.<sup>51</sup> As part of the regional networks, state officials were hit as well. From the leadership of the Moscow executive council, there was only one survivor (Nikolai Bulganin).

Stalin sent his personal emissaries into the provinces to remove regional party secretaries. Politburo member Andrei Andreev was sent to Sverdlovsk to arrest the Sverdlov party boss (Kabakov), who, along with Eikhe, had been one of the loudest advocates of mass operations. Andreev's note to Stalin reported that the Sverdlovsk conference had removed “the band of Kabakov” and had expelled nine hundred party workers. Andreev requested permission to arrest seven district secretaries whose “conduct tells us they are active Rightist Diversionaries,” assuring Stalin that he could “find replacements on the spot.”<sup>52</sup> In his confession Kabakov admitted: “A large number of party leaders were imperceptibly enveloped into the clique [by means of illegal gifts] such that within a year or two after they understood the criminal nature of what they were involved in, they were already beholden to us.”<sup>53</sup>

Stalin ominously ordered party secretaries to have two deputies ready at all times to replace them.<sup>54</sup> As the regional networks collapsed and the turnover of party officials accelerated, the most stable element in the regions was the NKVD administration,<sup>55</sup> which was able to veto party appointments with compromising information.

These purges created huge advancement opportunities for up-and-coming party members. Of the 33,000 employees of state and economic agencies (including appointments handled by the Central Committee), almost half were newly appointed in 1937–1938. Forty-one percent of the top economic administrators were new to the job in 1939, and almost half of industrial managers were appointed during the Great Terror.<sup>56</sup>

The decimation of the regional party leadership was almost total. Beria, the party secretary of Georgia, was one of two survivors (along with the party secretary of Azerbaijan, M. D. Bagirov),<sup>57</sup> despite Yezhov's collection of incriminating evidence against him. Yezhov had even



signed an arrest order for Beria, but Beria rushed to Moscow for a meeting with Stalin, which resulted in his being named as Yezhov's deputy (and eventual replacement).<sup>58</sup> Other party secretaries were not so fortunate. The dividing line between repressor and repressed was a fine one. In July 1937, Eikhe, was ordering arrests;<sup>59</sup> less than a year later (April 1938), he was himself arrested and subsequently executed.

Half of the repression teams—regional party secretaries in place as mass operations began—did not solve the prisoners' dilemma. Although they asked for more victims, they could not escape by outbidding other regions. Stalin spared the two he wished spared and let the rest be destroyed. The liquidation of the regional party secretaries meant the destruction of a large percentage of the Old Bolsheviks, many who had served on the Central Committee as Stalin loyalists. Once they were replaced by a new generation of party secretaries, as represented by Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and M. A. Suslov, the repression of regional party secretaries stopped.

The purge of the party secretaries temporarily gave the NKVD the upper hand over the party. Prior to the Great Terror, the party controlled the NKVD. During the Great Terror, the NKVD controlled the party, at least at the regional level. During mass operations, most communications between the two were from the NKVD to the regional party, demanding information. There were even cases of party meetings conducted by NKVD officials. Arrested regional party officials could not be sent to troikas; instead they were judged by military tribunals. Commonly, they were charged with misuse of funds or malfeasance in office. The local NKVD officer could have his way in the district because he carried with him the threat of arrest.<sup>60</sup>

Stalin's first step upon closing down mass operations was to restore the regional parties to dominance over the regional NKVDs. Now instead of the NKVD choosing party officials, the shoe was on the other foot.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on terror decision making at the grassroots level. Although terror operations were planned, local executors were left with considerable discretion with respect to the number and the actual choice of victims. Stalin oversaw the general campaign by person-

ally selecting and signing off on high-level victims, and he controlled the number of victims of mass operations by signing requests for higher limits and by giving Yezhov personal instructions. Stalin had the power to halt terror campaigns at any time. In fact, he stopped mass operations in their tracks when he decided it was time. There may indeed have been gaps between the desired and actual number of victims of mass operations, but we imagine that Yezhov did indeed "tell Stalin all" (as he claimed) in his every-other-day meetings with Stalin. Stalin had convenient scapegoats, whom he could permanently quiet by executing them in the aftermath of the Great Terror. Those whom he chose to blame were such unsympathetic figures that few mourned their departure.

There was a fine dividing line between repressor and victim. On June 1, 1936 Yagoda was reporting to Stalin on confessions of participants in Trotskyite organizations.<sup>61</sup> Yagoda was arrested in March 1937 and was sentenced to death for participation in the "Rightist-Trotskyite bloc." Yezhov terrorized the entire nation until his abrupt firing in November 1937, followed by his execution the night of February 2, 1940. According to an official witness: "He started to hiccup, weep, and when he was conveyed to 'the place,' they had to drag him by the hands along the floor. He struggled and screamed terribly."<sup>62</sup>

The repressors were caught in a prisoners' dilemma from which they could not escape. Their performance, they were told, would be judged relative to the performance of others. They could either engage in socialist competition for victims or be victims themselves. Yet as long as everyone came to this conclusion, there was no way to win—to significantly raise one's own chance of survival. Indeed, the terror performance of the region seemed to have little effect on the prospects of regional NKVD heads. Even if they played the game well during mass operations, they stood a high chance of repression when scapegoating began. The systematic factors that determined survival chances were ones that the regional administrator could not change. If he were Polish, German, or Jewish, he stood little chance. If a Georgian or a Russian, his chances were better. If he were an Old Chekist he stood a poorer chance than someone who had joined the "organs" late.

One consolation was that Stalin had not decided and probably could not decide to liquidate the NKVD leadership as he did in the case of regional party secretaries. He presumably concluded that he could create a new generation of party leaders that would be better than the one they

replaced. Apparently, he concluded that he needed to preserve a core of Chekist-operational workers. When retribution against repressors threatened to get out of hand, Stalin issued in January 1939 a rare admission that "torture" was allowed "in rare cases" and in this way limited the number of NKVD officers repressed along with Yezhov. According to Stalin's calculations, party secretaries were more easily replaced than good Chekists.

The new crop of regional party secretaries, most of whose predecessors had been executed, were in attendance at a rare Politburo meeting of October 11 and 12, 1938, one month before Stalin called off the Great Terror. In the course of discussion Stalin delivered to his apprehensive audience a remarkable soliloquy about his annihilation of the party elite. He began by stating that many of the party officials purged "were not properly prepared politically." He went on: "Because they were weak and unprepared and thought nothing would come of this, we 'lost' [through execution] a large number of capable people. We can explain this *mistake* in a number of ways, but I explain it by the fact that we were engaged in great deeds. In this period, we lost many but we acquired new cadres who won over the people to collectivization and won over the peasant. Only this explains why we were able so easily to replace yesterday's party elite."<sup>63</sup>

This chilling off-the-cuff remark unlocks Stalin's mindset. His decimation of the party elite had really not been necessary and had perhaps even been a mistake; few of them constituted a real danger [although most had been condemned as traitors or spies]. At the time Stalin spoke almost three-quarters of a million citizens had already been executed, a figure that included at least half the party elite. But Stalin went on blithely to inform his listeners that no real harm had been done. He was pleased that the "lost" had been easy to replace with a new generation of party leaders.

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lowing state security too much power and freedom can lead to equally disastrous results. State security must have enough power and the dictator must have enough control. A Stalin can ill afford opportunism or disloyalty. A watchdog is not a watchdog if other watchdogs are required to watch it.

Soviet state security, in its various manifestations, accomplished its main task throughout the course of Soviet history: no party head was assassinated; there was no serious challenge to the party's monopoly. State security did not organize coups; the one KGB head, Iury Andropov, who became party head was selected according to established party practice. The Praetorian Guard that Lenin and Stalin molded was one of the most successful of Soviet institutions as judged by the system's objectives.

The Soviet state and party archives offer a huge database for exploring questions of dictatorship and state security from 1918 to 1953 and later. Totalitarian regimes do not readily reveal their secrets. The availability of the internal records of the Soviet dictatorship is a windfall from which broader lessons can be learned: Do totalitarian and democratic systems differ systematically in their handling of state security and political enemies, and, if so, why and with what consequences? Are terror and repression inevitable under totalitarian regimes or are they the result of unique confluences of historical events? Is repression the glue that holds the totalitarian system together or the virus that dooms it to collapse?

As an exercise in political economy, we are interested in determining whether Soviet repression can be explained by rational choice models that apply to other dictators operating under similar circumstances but at different times and places. Or was it the result of historical accidents—the unlikely victory of eccentric revolutionaries or the ascendancy of a paranoid or even mentally ill dictator—that are unlikely to be repeated? If dictatorial behavior is the consequence of personality quirks, mental illnesses, or happenstance, there is little need for further economic analysis. The matter should be left to other disciplines.

That specific political-economic systems breed repression of the Stalin type speaks in favor of more general explanations. Mass political terror practiced against one's own people is either rare or nonexistent in democracies but regrettably occurs in dictatorships. Table 9.1 shows that democracies rarely kill their own citizens but authoritarian and to-

Table 9.1. Numbers of Persons Killed in Different Political Systems, Twentieth Century (through 1993)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Own Citizens</i>	<i>Others</i>
Democratic	2,028,000	159,000	1,858,000
Authoritarian	28,676,000	26,092,000	2,584,000
Totalitarian, non– Marxist-Leninist	27,691,000	1,265,000	26,425,000
Marxist-Leninist	110,286,000	101,929,000	8,357,000
Other (guerillas)	518,000	464,000	54,000

Source: Gunnar Heinsohn, *Lexikon der Völkermorde* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1998), p. 53. The author uses the 1948 United Nations definition of genocide to include direct killings and also killing by failing to provide aid and assistance during famine.

talitarian regimes often do. Of the estimated one hundred million persons killed in one form or another by Marxist-Leninist regimes in the twentieth century, more than 90 percent were their own citizens versus less than half of 1 percent in democracies. Even if these figures are exaggerated by a huge factor, they would still confirm the proclivity of dictatorships to execute, imprison, or deport their own citizens.

Statistics such as these support a continuing need to study the lessons of Soviet repression. Totalitarianism, which provides the soil from which repression grows,<sup>1</sup> remains prominent in the contemporary world. Forty-five countries are today governed by totalitarian regimes. Although a larger number of countries are rated as “free,”<sup>2</sup> democracy’s numerical superiority is a recent historical phenomenon whose durability cannot be known. Russia’s own democracy rating has been downgraded under President Vladimir Putin. In the last two decades alone, there have been more than two million victims of genocide in faraway places like Rwanda, Darfur, and the former Yugoslavia, sponsored or tolerated by nondemocratic regimes.

We have used, throughout this book, political economy models of a dictator whose goal is power. The dictator—a single person, a Politburo, a military junta, or an elders’ council of mullahs—produces this power by combining loyalty and repression, both of which cost resources. The more loyal the citizenry or state security officers, the more secure the dictator’s power. In some models, we assume that the dictator strives for as much power as possible; in others he wants enough power to stay safe and in office with resources left over for other things.

We must again emphasize that we would be surprised if such models explained most of observed dictatorial behavior. Historical accidents, serendipities, personality quirks, chance, and other unique factors would be expected to explain more. We are seeking instead to extract from this historical “statistical noise” systematic factors that would apply to other times, personalities, and places. It should also be emphasized that rational choice modeling only tests the rationality of a Stalin-like figure by whether his actions further his objectives, without stating the obvious: what he was doing was abhorrent. Stalin’s former secretary, who escaped to the West and evaded Stalin’s assassins, summarized Stalin’s objective function succinctly: “He had only one passion, absolute and devouring: lust for power.”<sup>3</sup> We are simply asking whether Stalin’s actions systematically promoted this “lust for power.”

Administrative planning, Soviet style, takes place when enterprises are ordered to produce quantities or assortments of products by some central authority. Law enforcement also produces a “product”—investigation, arrest, and sentencing. Democracies do not “plan” arrests or convictions; instead, the rule of law and the amount of law enforcement resources determine the number of arrests and convictions. Soviet-style dictatorships, on the other hand, plan repression. Repressions campaigns from Lenin to Stalin were directed by extraordinary decrees. The dictator planned the number of victims by selecting them directly, by giving his “organs” of repression “limits.” or by issuing laws dictating minimum sentences and then monitoring judicial and prosecutorial agencies to ensure that they were producing “enough” sentences.

One of the findings of this study (Chapter 6) is that Stalin’s state security fulfilled his terror plans. If Stalin issued terror plans that were grossly underfulfilled or overfulfilled, it would be his terror agents who were deciding repression, not himself. The stylized facts of repression would, therefore, not necessarily reflect the intentions of the dictator. Our studies of the dekulakization of 1930–1932 and mass operations of 1937–1938 make it clear that the OGPU and the NKVD delivered what Stalin and his Politburo wanted.

Stalin’s industrial ministers and managers fought for lower plans. The lower the plan, the easier it was to fulfill. Stalin’s terror planners, in the most violent outburst of terror in 1937–1938, fought for higher plans! The dividing line between repressor and repressed was pencil-thin. The state security torturer could be himself the one tortured, if he lost the

dictator's confidence. The best way to show one's worth was by repressing more rather than less.

## EXPLAINING THE STYLIZED FACTS

Our models yield hypotheses or predictions about how a dictator, whose overriding objective is political power, behaves; we must test these hypotheses against observed behavior. Stylized facts consistent with (explained by) the model offer evidence that the model was indeed used in practice. If the model cannot explain the stylized facts, it must be rejected and explanations sought elsewhere.

We began by enumerating the stylized facts of repression from Lenin through Stalin. We then modeled the working arrangements of Soviet state security, trying to extract from them predictions about how the dictator, his state security agents, and even his victims would behave under a dictator whose main goal was power. We must now consider the extent to which our various models explain these stylized facts. In such an exercise, it may be possible to explain any stylized fact with a tortured interpretation. Our test, however, is whether the theory explains facts in a direct and convincing manner that does not strain credulity.

### The High Volume of Repression

Even during "normal" periods under Lenin and Stalin, the execution, imprisonment, and deportation of political enemies by state security tribunals was high by any international standards.<sup>4</sup> During mass repression campaigns, the numbers of victims reached record proportions. This dominant fact of Soviet repression—its magnitude and pervasiveness—likely has more than one explanation.

Persistent high rates of repression are directly tied to the three pillars of Leninism-Stalinism: party dictatorship, state ownership, and administrative (rather than market) allocation.<sup>5</sup> Party dictatorship deprives citizens of an institutionalized voice in public decision making. State ownership means that property belongs to the dictator and must be protected from "disloyal" citizens by his state security forces. Planning means that commands substitute for the "invisible hand" of markets and that failure to comply is a violation of the dictator's trust. The Bolshevik political model necessarily created state enemies out of those dis-



satisfied with state policy, deemed misusing state property, or not obeying orders.

For the Bolsheviks, there was never a choice of the political model. They were a minority revolutionary party founded on conspiratorial principles. They gained political control by offering land, bread, and peace and were successful largely due to the incompetence of their opponents. The Bolsheviks could garner only 20 percent of the vote for the Constituent Assembly at the peak of their popularity in 1918. If they were to continue in power, it had to be by force.

Democracy was not a choice for the Bolsheviks. Rather the political struggle was over “democratic socialism,” or the level at which the party would make decisions. Once Stalin and his allies captured control of the Central Committee and the Politburo (largely through Stalin’s control of appointments), he favored decision making through these bodies. Stalin’s opponents—Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev—backed the losing proposition that issues should be decided by the grassroots of the party. Stalin remained in the Politburo majority by adopting the majority position but once he had eliminated his most potent opponents, he turned his attention to eliminating any party leader who disagreed with him or had the potential to disagree with him. Thereafter, Stalin ensured through a system of rewards and punishments that the Soviet selectorate, defined as those who chose the leader (Chapter 5), remained a small group of his own choosing. His ability to replace any dissident at will freed Stalin to pursue any policy he wished unconstrained by others.

Stalin’s strategy was not unlike the many historical cases of dictators and monarchs facing high-level opposition, and it can easily be modeled (Chapter 5). He won by being more brutal than his opponents; some half of the party leadership did not survive, but there have other savage power struggles in the course of history. Stalin’s repression of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people was something entirely different, and it presents the greatest challenge to the rationality assumption. Surely, such slaughter could not further the goal of power accumulation. The paradox, however, is that the Bolsheviks from Lenin through the end of the USSR could not stay in power except by force. It was simply a question of how much. Under Lenin and Stalin, repression was applied with extreme force; under Stalin’s successors, a form of “lesser terror” was used, but it was force nevertheless.

Force was required because the regime had many enemies. The enemy was anyone who, given a free and costless choice, would have preferred to live under another political and economic system. By this standard, the enemies of Bolshevism numbered in the tens of millions. It was the job of the dictator—Lenin, Stalin, or the Politburo—to decide how many of these millions of enemies to repress.

If the victor in the struggle to succeed Lenin had been someone other than Stalin, the number of victims of political repression would have been different and probably less. Under an unlikely regime of Nikolai Bukharin, victims would have been fewer, but still significant. Under Stalin's rival from the left, Grigory Zinoviev, repressions would have been substantial and would have included Stalin. It was Zinoviev who declared: "NEP without the death sentence would mean the ruin of the party."<sup>6</sup> Even the moderate Bukharin spoke of citizens as "material" who needed to be molded into "socialist material," and he persecuted his own Politburo enemies harshly and without remorse when he had the upper hand. Industry czar Sergo Ordzhonikidze's prescription for state enemies was to "kill the scoundrels." There was little chance for a "soft" leader to have won the power struggle.<sup>7</sup> Whoever would have won would have dealt harshly with his enemies.

If the dictator limits himself to active resisters, the number of repressions will not be large. But the dictator, especially one of Marxist persuasion, will have nagging doubts about the rest. A Bolshevik dictator understands that many are hostile, at least in their hearts. Few of these will voluntarily reveal their opposition. Instead, they "revert to the mean" by appearing passive or even as supporters. The dictator can only see a mass of humanity that voices no opposition, but he does not know what lies underneath. It is this uncertainty that turns state security into eavesdroppers on gossips, braggarts, and drunks.

The dictator will also fear that his enemies are simply biding their time; if the right opportunity comes along (such as a foreign invasion), they will not be, as Stalin's deputy (Molotov) stated long after Stalin was gone, "people we could rely on in a decisive moment."<sup>8</sup> Was this doubt alone sufficient to warrant repression? Under Stalin the answer was apparently yes. The dictator must deal not only with his current enemies but with potential enemies as well.

In most other societies, citizens can avoid being arrested or executed as political enemies by not engaging in actions that are hostile to the

state. If they do not spy, sabotage, plot to assassinate, or seek the overthrow of the government, they are safe, even if they harbor hostile thoughts. Contrary to this basic principle, Bolshevik judicial philosophy, which conveniently mirrored Stalin's and Lenin's own, concluded that "socially dangerous" persons could be repressed, whether or not they engaged in hostile acts. Social danger could be measured by class (merchants, wealthier peasants), associations with other people, or even by presumed thoughts that only the persons concerned could know. Repression according to "social danger" cleared the way for persecuting large numbers of "enemies," most of whom were trying their best to stay out of trouble.

The high rate of "normal" repression can therefore be explained by the fact that the Bolshevik regime had a large number of enemies, broadly defined. Few of these engaged in active resistance, but that did not matter. Stalin's successors focused their attention more on the relatively few active resisters, but they felt a deep undercurrent of resentment and dissatisfaction that justified the retention of a huge empire of eavesdroppers, wiretappers, and informants.

Dictatorships can indeed limit the number of enemies by enacting policies that resound with the people. But dictators are dictators because they wish to enact policies that would not be voluntarily chosen by the citizenry. If they favored policies that resounded with the majority, they might as well be democrats. None other than the first head of state security, Feliks Dzerzhinsky, captured this point in a letter written shortly before his death in 1926: "I am confident that we can deal with our enemies if we take the correct line in the practical administration of the country and its economy. . . . If we do not find the correct policy and pace of development—our opposition will grow and the country will then find its dictator—the gravedigger of the Revolution irrespective of the beautiful feathers on his costume."<sup>9</sup> Unwittingly, the dedicated Chekist Dzerzhinsky was admitting that unless Bolshevik policy appealed to a broad spectrum of the population, a dictator would be necessary to contend with the large numbers of enemies.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, tyrants, who act solely in their own interests, must use extreme repression, for they command little loyalty. Contemporary Jordan needs less repression than Syria or Iran.

Ideologically based totalitarian systems, such as the Soviet Union or contemporary Iran, use high levels of repression but also can attract

ideological loyalists. A Stalinist system that forcibly transfers peasant property to the state, deports the better farmers to remote regions or imprisons them in Gulags, and pushes extreme industrialization will attract some party loyalists but hundreds of thousands of enemies.

One of the unexpected findings of this book is the concern of the Bolshevik leadership, well before Stalin's ascendancy, about world reaction to their summary and arbitrary forms of justice. Similarly, the dictator can lose the loyalty of citizens who do not believe that his enemies deserve punishment. This explains why few of Stalin's "enemies" were formally punished for their real sins; most were executed or imprisoned on trumped-up charges of absurd and bizarre plots and actions. Yagoda could not be executed for his failure to "find the assassins of Kirov among the Zinovievites," but he was sentenced as a German spy. A small-town schoolteacher could not be sent to the Gulag because his name showed up in a forced confession. He had to be part of a vast armed conspiracy seeking to overthrow Soviet power in the region. NKVD officials executed in the wake of the Great Terror were condemned for fabricated plots. It was as if Goering had been sentenced for sabotaging the Nazi war effort rather than for his participation in the "final solution."

The dictator's public relations problem is that he must punish enemies whom "normal" people do not consider to be enemies. He must therefore engage in a massive charade to reframe his enemies into something they are not. This practice did not die with Stalin. His successors did the same to Beria, nine months after Stalin's death. "Even in those rare cases [where state security officials were punished for their actual offenses], there was an attempt to hide the facts from the people and in many cases, they hide them to the present day."<sup>11</sup>

### Cyclicity of Repression

Soviet repression ebbed and flowed against a backdrop of "normal" high repression. Purges and mass repressions were followed by periods of relative quiet. The most notable spikes of repression were dekulakization (1930–1932), the purge of the party elite (1935–1938), mass operations on the Yezhovshchina (1937–1938), and national operations and their aftermath (1937–1945). Why was repression not "smoother" with higher "normal" rates that did not vary so dramatically from year

to year? Why were the major repressions designed as “campaigns”—high-speed sprints in which repressors went all out until they were called off?

The “eliminations model” advanced in Chapter 6 addressed repression cycles: dictators ramp up repression whenever the actual threat (as measured by the perceived number of enemies and their potency) is greater than the revolution constraint, at which the dictator becomes subject to overthrow. For a nation operating close to the revolution constraint, an increase in the number of enemies or in their potency will spark a new repression campaign. This campaign ends when it is successful—when enough enemies are eliminated to drive the threat level back below the revolution constraint. Under this model, repression will remain constant only in the unlikely case where the dictator concludes that the number of enemies and their potency remain constant despite changing domestic and international events.

The parameters of the eliminations model (the number of enemies, their potency, and the ease of identifying enemies) were indeed changing throughout the 1930s. Stalin began in 1930 with the hope that workers and poor and middle peasants would be on his side and that only the kulaks need be dealt with. By 1937, Stalin concluded that dekulakization had not “liquidated the kulaks as a class,” that even the collective farms were full of enemies, that the workers were not becoming “new socialist men,” and that the party, the state, and even the state security forces had been infiltrated. Even worse, the threat of war was raising the potency of his enemies; the worst of his fears—a union between internal and external enemies—seemed imminent.

The model of the repressors’ dilemma (Chapter 8) also predicts the cyclicity of repression. If NKVD regional administration heads conclude they must engage in socialist competition with other administrations, a repression bubble can be set in motion, which is reinforced by interrogations that generate new lists of enemies at an exponential rate. Once a repression bubble starts, it will be hard to stop, but it must eventually be stopped because exponential growth cannot be continued for long. A repression bubble that is not halted by the dictator can generate “too much” repression, which pushes the dictator beyond the optimal combination of terror and loyalty. One of the predictions of the power-maximizing dictator model is that the dictator must stop “excessive” repression in its tracks before loyalty collapses.

Critics could argue that changes in the number of enemies and their potency existed only in Stalin's mind. He may have been acting according to the model but he was plugging in false information fed to him by ambitious OGPU or NKVD heads or by regional party leaders, who saw "broad bases for insurgent rebellions" everywhere.<sup>12</sup>

The enemies of dekulakization were clearly not imagined. Collectivization and dekulakization caused a collision between an irresistible force and an immovable object—Stalin's drive to rule the countryside by ridding it of class enemies versus those who knew they were to be liquidated as a class. The violence of resistance to dekulakization is proof enough. Whether the accumulation of "enemies" facing Stalin in 1937 placed him near the revolution constraint is highly debatable. Would the absence of mass operations and national operations have raised the chances of a destabilization or overthrow of the Stalin regime? For Stalin, the answer was easy. He placed virtually no cost on repression of "innocents." As far as he was concerned, it was far better to err on the side of caution—if in doubt execute or jail—and let someone else, such as Yezhov, bear the consequences.

### Most Arrests for Political Crimes

State security agencies engage in preventative protection of the state and its leaders from enemies who wish its overthrow or engage in acts that weaken it. The number of hostile agents actually arrested is usually low relative to the manpower resources expended. Common criminals, murderers, child molesters, bandits, and white-collar criminals are left to the police and prosecutors. They deal with large numbers; state security deals with small numbers.

The stylized fact that Soviet state security—responsible for the security of the state not for the security of its citizens—arrested and convicted such large numbers of "enemies of the state" suggests that the Soviet state defined political crimes very broadly. The magnitude of repressions for *political* crimes can be measured in two dimensions. One is convictions by state security versus the regular institutions of justice. According to this measure, the OGPU, NKVD, or MVD tribunals' share of total convictions was exceptionally high during periods of mass repressions. Moreover, ordinary crimes were included as political crimes. In fact, Stalin's July 1937 telegram to start mass operations singled out

“criminals” along with “returning kulaks.” A second measure of the breadth of the definition of “political” criminals is the percentage of convictions by state security agencies specifically for offenses defined as political crimes, such as violations of the notorious Article 58.

Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR included under counterrevolution “any action against the fundamental economic, political, and national achievements of the proletarian revolution.”<sup>13</sup> Such acts specifically included the “undermining of state production, transport, trade, monetary relations, or the credit system, or likewise cooperative trade, done with counterrevolutionary purposes,” and failing “to perform defined duties or intentionally negligent fulfillment of them, with the special purpose of weakening the authority of the government and functioning of the state apparatus.”<sup>14</sup> According to Article 58, you could be a *political* criminal if you made mistakes at work, if you were negligent, if you stole from your workplace, or if you did not carry out your orders properly.

In “normal” years, most of the convictions by state security tribunals were for crimes other than “political crimes.” In 1934, less than 20 percent of the almost 200,000 NKVD tribunal convictions were for terror, espionage, counterrevolutionary uprisings, treason, diversions, anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, and belonging to banned parties. Thirty percent were for wrecking, accidents, and occupational crimes, and another quarter for theft of socialist property and speculation (Chapter 3). But in 1937–1938 most convictions were for political crimes under Article 58.

Stalin’s famous slogan “cadres decide everything” opened the door further for a broad interpretation of counterrevolution. “Cadres decide everything” meant that the party and its state security must determine whether failures, errors, and missteps were deliberate or accidental. What would be interpreted elsewhere as errors of judgment, accidents, or simply bad luck were possible counterrevolutionary acts under “cadres decide everything.” As Stalin ordered in August of 1937: “The fire at the mill must be organized by enemies. Take all measures to discover the arsonists and try the guilty parties quickly. The sentence is death. Publish the news of the execution in the local press.”<sup>15</sup> The party and state security were themselves not immune to making such errors; they had to be vigilant even with respect to their own ranks.

For Chekist-operational workers, such general definitions raised as

many questions as they answered. Was a manager failing to fulfill a plan “undermining state production?” Was a collective farmer not working the required number of hours “consciously failing to carry out duties?” What specific acts constituted a “conscious weakening of the achievements of the Soviet state?” Was inadequate vigilance in their own ranks a crime against the state?

With state ownership, all property belongs to the state (the dictator). There are no private owners or profit-sharing managers to ensure that property is put to efficient use. People misuse property that they think “belongs to everyone and hence to no one”; the dictator considers that the property belongs to him. Misuse of state property (including theft) therefore can be construed as a crime against the state (the dictator, especially one who sees enemies everywhere).

With such a mindset, every plan shortfall, industrial mishap, or plane or train accident must be investigated as a potential act of sabotage: As the Politburo ordered: “To assign the NKVD (Comrade Yezhov) to meticulously investigate the circumstance of the catastrophe of October 1–2 involving five planes flying from Moscow to Khabarovsk.” Such investigations usually ended with extreme measures, such as “to shoot the main party responsible for the train accident at Gul’kevich station on November 12, 1936.”<sup>16</sup>

The counting of economic and occupational crimes as political crimes is only part of the explanation for the large number of political crimes. Article 58 portrays a fragile state unable to tolerate any form of criticism. Its section 10 defines propaganda and agitation (including banned literature) to overthrow, subvert, or weaken Soviet authority as political crimes. In 1937, almost a quarter of the million persons convicted by NKVD tribunals were sentenced for “counterrevolutionary agitation,” more than twice the number convicted for more conventional political crimes. Of the latter, the 94,000 convicted of espionage—about half (45,000) of spying on behalf of Poland—suggests a country overrun with foreign agents. (Such large numbers suggest that the act of espionage also must have had a low threshold.) In the more normal year of 1950, if the twenty thousand sentenced for collaboration with German occupation forces are excluded, anti-Soviet agitation was again the most widely punished political crime.<sup>17</sup>

We would have to work our way through thousands of cases to determine what people actually did to be convicted of anti-Soviet agitation.



Anecdotal evidence suggests that most of it was routine complaining about everyday problems or, worst of all, an unkind word here or there about Stalin and his entourage. A substantial portion was “simple people who did not understand the seriousness of loose tongues and gossip.”<sup>18</sup> What is clear is the fervor with which the Bolshevik leadership tried to stamp out any form of criticism, going at times to absurd lengths, such as banning particular forms of folk music.

Article 58 made it a political crime to criticize in a country in which more was going wrong than right. Yet the dictator himself engaged in a massive game of blame by playing on the tendency of common people to think that someone or something must be deliberately causing things to go wrong, such as the Perm resident who wrote Yezhov that someone must be to blame for the “long lines and lack of electricity.”<sup>19</sup> The dictator’s concern was, of course, that people might draw the right conclusion, that it was the fault of the leadership and the system.

### Ethnic Minorities

Minorities, ethnic, religious, or otherwise, are easy targets of state terror. Hitler and the Spanish Inquisition targeted Jews; Saddam Hussein terrorized Kurds; Iranian ayatollahs targeted members of the Bahai faith among others. The repression of minorities may make sense for a power-maximizing dictator. He may worry that they pose a danger to his regime, and if the repressed minority is lacking in public support, he can repress them without losing the loyalty of other citizens. If the ethnic minority is large, its repression offers an opportunity to rid the country of a group that may eventually grow strong enough to challenge his regime.

In democracies, minorities form into tight-knit groups, who use their cohesiveness to accumulate political power in excess of their numbers. In close-fought elections, a minority that votes as a bloc can sway elections. The formation of interest groups appears to be an effective protection of minorities in democratic societies.

In Marxist theory, people are distinguished by class, not by race or ethnicity, although strongly religious ethnic groups will naturally be suspect. The Old Bolsheviks were themselves drawn from a vast mixing pot of Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Georgians, Poles, and Armenians. A substantial share of Lenin’s Politburo was Jews and his first state secu-

rity head was a Pole. Although Stalin was strongly anti-Semitic, several of his most trusted deputies were Jewish.

Stalin's repression of ethnic minorities had little to do with ethnic animosity or prejudice, but had a more practical bent. Stalin, like other Bolshevik leaders, had remarkably little confidence in the message of communism. In a nation surrounded by capitalist enemies, citizens could easily be infected with anti-Bolshevik ideas. Within the borders of the Soviet Union, the party's monopoly over print and propaganda could shield Soviet citizens from anti-Soviet ideas, but those with relatives abroad or ethnic populations living in border regions would be most subject to foreign influence.

Once Stalin had removed his last domestic political opponents, he and his state security ensured that citizens had no domestic options apart from him and his regime. The sole alternative to Stalin was a foreign power, such as Germany, Japan, or a Poland. In order for a foreign power to replace Stalin, it had to win allies among the Soviet citizenry, and the most likely allies were those who lived in close proximity to it or shared its ethnicity.<sup>20</sup>

Ethnic minorities (Poles, Germans, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Koreans, Turks, Greeks, and Bulgarians) were repressed in proportions far greater than their shares of population, but they were singled out not due to their ethnicity but to the perceived danger of alliances with foreign enemies.

Ukraine, a republic of thirty million, was populated primarily by Slavs. At 22 percent of the USSR population, Ukraine encapsulated Stalin's borderlands problem. It had a common frontier with Poland and Romania, and it had its own history, national culture, and language. Too large to be labeled an ethnic minority, Ukrainians nevertheless represented the greatest danger of infection both by foreign ideas and by nationalism. As a vast borderland subject to forces of nationalism, it would seem that Stalin would especially have singled out the Ukraine for repression.

According to the security service's own convictions statistics, Ukrainians accounted for 15 percent of OGPU convictions between 1930 and 1932 and for 23 percent of category 1 and category 2 limits of *dekulakization*, versus their 22 percent share of Soviet population (in 1937). Statistics of Great Terror convictions by nationality have yet to be published, but Ukraine's 27 percent share of 1937–1938 convictions was

in excess of its population share. In the immediate postwar period, Ukrainians accounted for as high as 35 percent of NKVD/MVD tribunal convictions, a figure well in excess of their population share.<sup>21</sup> The greatest Ukrainian losses occurred not during a repression campaign but in the “harvest of sorrow” of 1931–1932 during which several million Ukrainians died from starvation. It remains a matter of considerable controversy whether these famine deaths were deliberate<sup>22</sup> or the result of incompetence and bungling.<sup>23</sup> The policies that Stalin adopted during the famine (roadblocks, food only for those able to work) increased the number of deaths, but the alarmed Stalin placed his most trusted deputies in charge of Ukraine and warned them: “We can lose Ukraine!” and ordered his deputies “to turn Ukraine into a model republic” and “not to spare money for this purpose.”<sup>24</sup>

Although Stalin clearly targeted ethnic minorities, he was an equal-opportunity repressor. Being Russian provided little protection. For those years for which we have data for repression by nationality, the Russian majority accounted for a share of victims only slightly below its share of the total population.<sup>25</sup>

### Extrajudicial Tribunals During Mass Repressions

A striking regularity of Soviet repression, under both Lenin and Stalin, was the use of extrajudicial tribunals, the most notorious being the troikas, to conduct mass terror operations. The first step of mass operations at the beginning of July 1937 was Stalin’s order to form troikas. Dekulakization and national operations used troikas to sentence victims. The key mass terror operations—dekulakization, mass operations, and national operations—were all initiated by extraordinary decrees that replaced the limited legal protections of citizens by a form of martial law. The workhorse of mass terror operations was the troika, a cosmetic tribunal suited for mass sentencing under simplified procedures.

Extrajudicial proceedings and simplified methods are attractive to the dictator for a number of reasons: First, dictators do not necessarily trust the judgment of others; they only trust their own judgment and perhaps that of their most immediate subordinates. Local justice establishments are embedded in the community and, as such, are subject to its influ-

ence. Indeed, in Chapter 3, we pointed out Stalin's lack of faith in local justices and prosecutors: They did not go after enemies of the state with sufficient vigor, and they tended towards leniency. During a campaign of mass repression, when harsh sentences based on little or no evidence were required, regular justice could not be counted on. The dictator needed the party's own "armed warriors"—the Chekist tribunals.

Regular justice, even operating according to codified criminal law that favored the state over the individual, presents another problem. If the code states that only active opponents are enemies, a dictator who agrees to abide by the law cannot suddenly decide to make class, background, or hidden thoughts into crimes. Stalin had his codified rules of law, but when it came time for serious repressions, these codes were superseded by extraordinary decrees.

Chapter 7 pointed out another reason why mass repressions require the simplified methods of troika justice. Stalin, knowing that periods of all-out repression would be followed by normal repression, would not want to add operational workers each time to meet his current demand for repression. After all, true Chekists had either two paths—in Stalin's words, "advancement or prison." Transferring them back and forth from other branches of government was not one of these paths. During mass terror operations, Chekists had to improve their productivity; they had to arrest, convict, and punish many more victims, which required a simplification of the repression cycle. Both Lenin and Stalin used troikas and other extrajudicial tribunals to speed things along, and Stalin simplified the repression cycle even further with his substitution of confessions for objective evidence on December 1, 1934, the day of Kirov's assassination.

These simplifications made possible the deportation of tens of thousands of kulak families, the execution of nearly 700,000 persons in less than two years, the deportation of entire ethnic nationalities in a few days, and the execution of Polish POWs in the Katyn Forest—all done with a semblance of legality.

It should be clearly understood that troikas and other state security tribunals did not conduct trials. Their job was to rubberstamp sentences proposed by OGPU, NKVD, or MVD operational groups. The faster they rubberstamped, the better.

### Innocent Victims

A basic message of this book is that the dictator's enemies are anyone the dictator determines is his enemy. Hence, it could be argued at some semantic level that there were no "innocent" victims. However, even Stalin distinguished between the "guilty" and the "innocent." In his view, anyone was "guilty" who met his profile of enemy, as defined by class, actions, or even thoughts. A kulak, a party official who doubted the party line, or a Pole living in a border region was an enemy of the state. A poor peasant wrongly identified as a kulak, a party official true to the party line but identified as a doubter, or a Russian incorrectly labeled as a Pole would be "innocent."

The eliminations model of Chapter 6 predicted that a "rational" dictator will repress innocents. The more difficult it is to identify the guilty, the greater the number of innocent victims. The dictator's true enemies will do their best to conceal themselves by "reverting to the mean." If the dictator must trim back on the number of enemies, innocents must be repressed along with the guilty. The lack of concern about innocent victims was one of the great continuities of Bolshevik repression policy, starting with Dzerzhinsky's "Cheka swords falling on innocent heads," Stalin's "report people if you are right only 5 percent of the time," to Yezhov's "when you chop wood chips must fly."

The pattern of repression of innocents conforms to the predictions of the eliminations model. During collectivization and dekulakization, kulaks, supporters of the old regime, and active resisters could scarcely conceal themselves. During mass operations, Stalin's enemies included a poorly defined motley crew of "former kulaks," returning criminals, workers not meeting the standards of the new socialist man, collective farmers, and even party and state security officials whose ranks had allegedly been infiltrated. There was no way to "actively resist" mass terror; the only strategy was to lie low and hope for the best. The number of true "innocents" of national operations was, by definition, low. Targeted ethnic groups or residents of border areas were defined as enemies. Even in this open-and-shut case, there were abuses as fearful NKVD officers counted mass terror victims as ethnic minorities to stay within their limits.

After Stalin's death, a kind of collective leadership replaced his "cult

of personality.” This new dictatorship installed its own definitions of class enemies to replace Stalin’s earlier encompassing concept. After allowing what they felt was sufficient time to pass (until February 1956), the new dictatorship admitted to the “atrocities committed against worthy people, against Old Bolsheviks and Young Communists” by Stalin.<sup>26</sup> There was no official regret expressed about the hundreds of thousands of ordinary victims. Admissions that huge numbers of innocent victims had been killed and imprisoned in 1937–1938 were left to top-secret internal memos that remained within the top leadership.

### Harshness of Punishment

The harshness of punishment, in particular the cavalier application of the “highest measure of punishment,” was another stylized fact of repression under Lenin and Stalin. Most prison terms, even for petty offenses, were long enough to land prisoners in the vast Gulag system.

In democracies, the terms of punishment are set in legal codes that are interpreted by judges and juries. The terms of punishment tend to reflect social norms of what constitutes a “just” sentence. In dictatorships, the “measures of social protection” are set by the dictator, not by social norms.

In a democratic society, the punishment of citizens imposes costs on the community. Those being sentenced are part of the community; they have friends and relatives; it is costly to incarcerate them. The choice of punishment will be the outcome of a balancing act between the need for retribution or prevention and the costs of punishment. The dictator does not necessarily have to consider the costs to the community in selecting “measures of social defense.” The only costs and benefits considered are those of the dictator, whose evaluations may be diametrically opposed to those of the community.<sup>27</sup> The availability of a Gulag camp system lowers the cost of incarceration by directing prison labor to state tasks. Petty theft is a minor cost to private businesses and is punished mildly; petty theft of the dictator’s property can spread if undeterred, and the dictator will punish it harshly, such as with mandatory long prison terms.

The dictator may, however, internalize another potential cost of harsh sentencing. If the public concludes that sentences are undeserved, that

the people being convicted are not really dangerous after all, they may decide that repression is excessive and withdraw their loyalty or even move to a stance of active resistance.

It is for this reason that Stalin went to considerable lengths to convince the public that his victims deserved harsh punishment, but to do so required the charade of convicting them for other offenses. Local leaders whose loyalty Stalin doubted were convicted of plots to assassinate Politburo members or to organize the overthrow of the state in coordination with the exiled Trotsky. State security heads who were not brutal enough were sentenced as German spies. Stalin invented a whole new genre—the show trial—to showcase the perfidy of his enemies whose confessions were drafted by imaginative ghostwriters.

The forced confession added a nice finishing touch to the charade. As the naïve NKVD officer asked: “Why would anyone confess if they did not do it?”—only to find himself confessing to an unlikely crime later. One of the great accomplishments of Yezhov’s NKVD was that forced confessions withstood the scrutiny of open trials. Methods of intimidation were truly formidable. Yezhov confessed immediately when confronted with two of the NKVD’s most feared interrogators. Only the Old Chekist Efim Evdokimov, himself one of the inventors of Stalinist interrogation procedures, could hold out for more than a couple of weeks. Confessions were extracted by a variety of methods. Interrogators promised to spare loved ones; beat prisoners until they cracked; appealed to their patriotism; and promised to let them go if they confessed.

The OGPU’s and NKVD’s black-and-white statistics (which ceased to be published when their implications were recognized) show the degree of fiction that was required to transform harmless citizens into “evil” enemies of Soviet power. The majority of victims were young and poorly educated, and a remarkably high proportion were drawn from the worker and peasant classes, the very people the dictatorship of the proletariat was supposed to represent.

### High Risks for Leaders of State Security

The Praetorian Guard model explains why leadership positions in state security were risky. In order to do their job well, state security officers must have considerable power and must gather sensitive information that could, in theory, be used against the dictator. If anyone could

organize a coup, it would be the leaders of state security. Any dictator, be it Stalin or someone else, would have to worry about the loyalty of his Praetorian Guard.

Stalin's solution to the Praetorian Guard problem was to remove state security heads and their followers at the first sign of trouble. Because the various leaders of state security organized cliques, a Stalin could not be content with simply removing the leader. The leader's clique had to be removed as well in a general house cleaning. Stalin engaged in three general purges of state security following the removals of Yagoda, Yezhov, and Abakumov (minister of state security in the late 1940s). Stalin's successors did the same after the arrest of Beria. The fallout, however, had to be limited. Stalin's grudging admission that torture had been approved suggests that Stalin felt that he needed to preserve an active core of Chekists rather than rebuilding from scratch as he did the party.

Khrushchev summarized the Politburo's Praetorian Guard problem that arose as Beria took charge of an expanded MVD immediately after Stalin's death with the simple prediction "that will be the end of us all." Beria will use his offices "to spy on members of the Politburo, to eavesdrop, to fabricate cases, to engage in intrigue." Beria's control of special forces and domestic intelligence meant that he had to be caught off guard: hence his arrest by a special military force headed by Zhukov.<sup>28</sup>

Both regional party and state security heads were faced with a repressors' dilemma, having to make suboptimal choices in order to avoid the risk of an even worse outcome, during the Great Terror. Virtually no regional party secretary survived; about a quarter of regional state security heads did. Stalin's regional NKVD heads concluded in 1937 to minimize risks by competing with other regional heads for more victims—a macabre form of socialist competition which would yield only losers. The more regional NKVD heads and regional party secretaries competed against one another, the faster their repression conveyers ran. The higher the speed, the more they violated rules of socialist legality and the more liable they were to prosecution as scapegoats. To compete, they had to fabricate, torture, and engage in other "distortions" for which they could later be punished. The discouraging prediction of the repressors' dilemma model is that no single terror manager could come out ahead. Even though all were trying hard to beat each other, no one could win.

Our analysis of a database of regional NKVD heads reveals there was little they could do to avoid repression themselves. Their regions' re-



pression performances had little to do with whether they lived or died. What counted was who they were—whether they had “negative” characteristics that doomed them to repression. Most survivors simply drew what Khrushchev referred to as “lucky tickets.”

### Chekists from Ethnic Groups and Other Compromising Factors

One way for the dictator to secure the loyalty of his Praetorian Guard was to recruit heads of state security who were themselves compromised and hence easy to blackmail. Also, it would be more difficult for a leader of state security drawn from an ethnic minority to unseat the dictator. From 1918 to 1935, the heads of state security were either Polish (Dzerzhinsky and Menzhinsky) or Jewish (Yagoda). Ethnicity was only one of many possible compromising factors. A number of heads of state security and their immediate subordinates had belonged to anti-Bolshevik parties or had assisted tsarist or foreign intelligence services. Many were sadists or social deviants or had criminal backgrounds.

Like dictators before and after them, Lenin and Stalin wanted a secret police that shared their values and whose officers were, as NKVD minister Nikolai Yezhov declared in 1937, “devoted to our party, to our Soviet people, to Soviet construction, dedicated without question and ready at any moment to sacrifice their life, no matter what the circumstances.”<sup>29</sup> Talk of loyalty was cheap, however. Yezhov’s fanatical Ukrainian NKVD head tried to save himself by leaving a fake suicide note.<sup>30</sup> The same NKVD officers who publicly greeted high execution quotas with boisterous approval<sup>31</sup> had to be plied with vodka on the nights of executions.<sup>32</sup> Especially after the purge of Old Chekists in 1936 and 1937, the NKVD was made up of opportunists, fabricators, and other riffraff who paid little attention to Bolshevik ideology.

Stalin looked for specific traits in his top security officials: brutality (and even sadism), a clear understanding of his wishes, ruthlessness in carrying out the appointed task. Within top Bolshevik circles, “softness” was regarded as a fatal weakness. As Stalin’s Politburo crony K. E. Voroshilov put it: “I fear Bukharin because he is a soft-hearted person.”<sup>33</sup> In state security, only the most brutal could survive, and they were allowed no mistakes. Genrykh Yagoda had no compunctions about imprisoning or deporting more than two million peasants, but

when he delayed fabricating evidence against Stalin's top party enemies, he was rebuked by Stalin: "You have to torture them so that they finally tell you the truth and reveal all their ties."<sup>34</sup> Lavrenty Beria caught Stalin's eye as party secretary of Georgia by his brutal oppressions of friend and foe alike.<sup>35</sup> Stalin personally ordered the execution of his political enemies, either using the Politburo or deciding their fates in one-on-one meetings with his head of state security. Lenin was more of an armchair revolutionary who ordered executions from afar, while requesting pardons when approached by distraught relatives.<sup>36</sup>

It is telling that antiseptic gas chambers or lethal injections were not used in Stalin's NKVD. The sentence of death was referred to in its direct literal form—"shooting." In the infamous "Butovsky Polygon" killing field near Moscow, trucked-in victims were led one by one into the field to be shot at close range by NKVD officers, who were transported back to Moscow usually dead drunk.<sup>37</sup>

Sadism was another acceptable if not desirable trait. Yezhov reached a state of ecstasy during torture sessions.<sup>38</sup> Beria used his office and dacha not only as a personal torture chamber for interrogations but purportedly to rape young girls.<sup>39</sup> Yezhov was a bisexual and an alcoholic. Although Stalin was not interested in the moral behavior of his associates, he would later use their "personal decadence" to destroy their last vestiges of dignity, a precedent continued by Stalin's successors in their interrogation of Beria in June 1953.<sup>40</sup>

### Reorganizational Reshuffling and Continuities

The search for the optimal structure of state security did not prove a simple task. Nearly one hundred pages of a standard work are required to describe the administrative changes and reshuffling that took place within state security from 1917 onwards.<sup>41</sup> State security was subject to more tinkering than other Soviet institutions.

The structure of state security changed with its task. Under Dzerzhinsky, the Cheka was an elite force of "party warriors" dedicated to eradicating the enemies of Soviet power with extreme violence and without mercy. Other law enforcement matters—policing, prisons, public safety, etc.—were handled by other agencies. Yagoda's OGPU increasingly incorporated the civil police and prisons. It carried out the first mass terror operation—dekulakization—and also put to use in the Gu-

lag the hundreds of thousands of prisoners that dekulakization and other OGPU terror operations produced. Stalin created a unified state security administration with the formation of the NKVD USSR on July 10, 1934—a vast administrative empire that combined civil and political police, civil registration, and border and fire services. It was this vast one-stop repression machine that conducted Stalin's most notorious terror operation—the Yezhovshchina of 1937–1938.

The mass operations decree of July 30, 1937 promised to eliminate “once and for all time” the enemies of Soviet power. More than one and a half million citizens fell victim to mass operations in less than two years. Killing and imprisonment on such a scale could not be continued; it had to be halted and scapegoats found. With the enemies of Soviet power presumably liquidated “once and for all time,” there was no longer a need for a one-stop terror machine, although the task of managing terror at the front and in the borderlands during World War II remained part of the portfolio. The NKVD/MVD was again split into an internal affairs and a state security ministry, with the head of the latter reporting directly to Stalin. After Beria left state security to become deputy head of state at the end of 1945, the state security ministry gained in power versus the MVD with its increasing control of the civil police and special troops. Other than dealing in a brutal fashion with POWs, returning troops, and occupants of borderlands, Stalin had turned his attention to another type of enemy—the thief of state property and the poor worker—who could be punished by regular justice and not waste the time of state security.

Vast organizational changes obscure two key continuities—the permanence of the Chekist-operational core and the short agency chain.

Lenin and Stalin used their Chekist-operational workers as the “armed wing of the party.” Chekist-operational workers ran informant networks, did foreign intelligence, maintained lists of enemies, made arrests, prepared (often fabricated) case materials, conducted interrogations, served on troikas, and carried out executions. Under Yagoda, the Chekist core numbered around 20,000. Under Yezhov, they numbered around 35,000. Under Beria, they reached 40,000 or more. Chekist-operational workers were well paid, enjoyed many privileges, and were, in effect, the elite of state security.

Another continuity from Lenin through Stalin was the short agency chain between the dictator and the head of state security. The more re-

mote agents are from the principal, the more likely their opportunism. An enterprise manager reporting to the industrial minister through a complex chain of command was a number of steps removed from Stalin. A Stalin-like dictator would want a short agency chain between himself and his state security agency. The need for a direct link was not lost on Lenin, who characterized the Cheka as a “direct organ of the party”<sup>42</sup> and spent hours closeted behind closed doors with Feliks Dzerzhinsky.<sup>43</sup> The directness of the link between the dictator and the state security agency was never more evident than during Stalin’s major terror campaigns. In the course of 1937, NKVD head Nikolai Yezhov spent more than five hundred hours behind closed doors in Stalin’s office receiving direct orders on the conduct of mass operations.<sup>44</sup>

Stalin and the Politburo provided the ultimate authority and legitimacy for mass terror campaigns, but their instructions to the OGPU, NKVD, or MVD were placed in Politburo special files or were circulated to small groups of party leaders who were obliged to return them. The NKVD’s operational instructions, such as Yezhov’s Order No. 00447 of July 30, 1937, did not reference the initiating order of the Politburo. By themselves issuing the operational orders for *dekulakization*, mass operations, and national operations, the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD had to count on the fact that everyone understood their direct link to the ultimate political authority. On the basis of these orders, whole ethnic populations were exiled, hundreds of thousands of peasant families were deported, hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens were executed or sent to the Gulag by plenipotentiaries arriving from Moscow or from republic capitals.

Remarkably, few questioned the legitimacy of these operations despite the absence of documentation of certification by Stalin or the Politburo. When someone had the temerity to raise questions, state security authorities were nonplussed. Perm NKVD authorities did not know what to do when an ordinary citizen (named Subbotin) burst into an interrogation room in February of 1938 and began beating the interrogator, shouting “You are arresting people who fought for Soviet power.” The remarkable Subbotin was not arrested on the spot, because the record shows that he intervened as another citizen was being arrested, telling him to demand that the authorities produce an arrest warrant.<sup>45</sup> Implicit in the public’s docile acceptance of repression was the understanding that state security was the party’s direct organ, although some

harbored the hope that they were being persecuted without the knowledge of Stalin.

The OGPU, NKVD, and MVD could work effectively as the direct representatives of the highest political authority, but this also meant that their mistakes could be attributed to the party. When OGPU officers revealed that cases against specialists in the Shakhty case of 1928 had been fabricated, Stalin's instructions to the OGPU emphasized the danger of questioning of the OGPU's infallibility and hence his own: "Self-criticism would threaten the existence of the OGPU and be the ruin of Chekist discipline. Do not forget that the OGPU is a military organization." In the end, those OGPU officers who disclosed the fabrications were demoted, and Stalin declared his full confidence in the OGPU as the "sword of the working class, efficiently and bravely attacking enemies and honestly and bravely fulfilling its responsibilities to Soviet power."<sup>46</sup>

Stalin could not issue such a similar blanket endorsement for Yezhov's NKVD as he shut down mass operations in November of 1938. The NKVD had gained the upper hand over the regional party organizations, which wanted revenge, and complaints were flooding in about excesses, fabrications, and other distortions. Stalin was caught in a bind. Mass operations had been legitimized by the party. Stalin's telegram initiating mass operations had been delivered to regional party secretaries and NKVD administrators. Even though the copies had been returned, their content remained etched in the minds of their recipients. The NKVD had engaged in excesses and distortions, but it was the direct organ of the party!

Stalin's only option was to blame a maverick group within the NKVD led by Yezhov and controlled by German spies. But such excuses raised serious questions about the party's own fallibility. The party was supposed to be vigilant; why had it not detected these distortions earlier? If its vigilance was faulty in this case, might it not be deficient in the future?

Stalin's successors faced a similar dilemma shortly after his death. Their signatures were affixed to hundreds of death warrants; as party leaders they each had sent tens of thousands to camps or to killing fields. But now mass amnesties were emptying the Gulag of prisoners who would return to civil society and tell their stories. The people, sooner or later, would need answers. The immediate resolution was to single out

Beria and his retinue as scapegoats and to spare Stalin, who was supposedly hoodwinked by Beria due to his advancing age and deteriorating health.

It was not until Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 that the truth about Stalin was told, to the great consternation of the party faithful. Khrushchev's speech unleashed a backlash throughout the Soviet empire, the most notable being the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The denunciation of Stalin deepened the Sino-Soviet rift as Mao viewed with displeasure Stalin's posthumous humiliation, a fate that he feared he could share if "reformers" got the upper hand. Domestically, Khrushchev and his fellow Politburo members had to face embarrassing questions about their own complicity.

Low-level administrators could claim that they were only following orders—an assertion less easily made by Politburo members. Addressing an open meeting after he had exposed Stalin's crimes in 1956, Khrushchev received a written question asking why he had allowed such things to happen. Khrushchev asked the audience who wrote the question and, upon receiving no answer, responded: "He who wrote this question is afraid, just as we were all afraid to act against Stalin."<sup>47</sup> Khrushchev did not go on to elaborate that he himself had condemned tens of thousands of victims as Moscow party secretary or had served as a dedicated executioner, as a complaint from the Ukrainian NKVD minister of September 27, 1939 reveals: "On September 23, 1939 Comrades Timoshenko and Khrushchev arrived in the morning in Vinniki [four kilometers from Lvov]. Yesterday an incident occurred in Proskurove. . . . Comrade Khrushchev attacked Comrade Mikheev with the words: 'You are doing nothing here in the rear. You should obviously work more, but your work is not to be seen.' Comrade Mikheev answered that he was working. Then Khrushchev said: 'What kind of work is this—not one person executed.' To this, Comrade Mikheev answered that twelve persons were executed in Zlochive and that we do not execute without cause."<sup>48</sup>

## REPRESSION AS GLUE OR FATAL VIRUS?

The Soviet system could not survive except by force, be it the great terror of Stalin or the lesser terror of his successors. A Soviet-type

regime that insists on policies radically different from the interests and desires of the citizenry requires more repression than one that tries to satisfy its population. Stalin's policies of forced industrialization, collectivization, and wholesale liquidation of "class enemies" inevitably meant public opposition that had to be quelled. Stalin demanded that people work hard and conscientiously for little pay or else be subject to criminal punishments. Stalin's successors, on the other hand, attempted to satisfy the public with functional apartments and increases in consumer goods. They did not demand that people work hard and conscientiously; instead they installed a "jobs rights" system in which workers were allowed "to pretend to work" without suffering any consequences. Although there were periodic "discipline campaigns" and anti-alcoholism campaigns, they were of short duration, abandoned when the public protested. The post-Stalin leadership did, however, remain resolved to stamp out any type of independent thinking, either of domestic or of foreign origins. Only reliable people could read Western literature; contact with foreigners was strictly limited, and dissidents were carefully isolated or placed in mental institutions.

It has been argued that the move from greater to lesser terror was one of the causes for the downward spiral in economic performance. The system, it was said, could not function without the threat of raw force.

According to what we have learned in this book, the move from greater to lesser terror is unlikely to explain any deterioration in economic performance. Stalin's terror was designed simply to terrorize, not to direct behavior in a positive way. Stalin's repressions punished people for their past, which they could not change. It punished them for thoughts that they might or might not harbor. It punished petty theft and workplace violations that were so common that virtually the entire labor force was at risk. There was little ordinary people could do to avoid repression, other than to hope that their past would not come to the attention of authorities or that fellow workers would be punished, not they.

The extreme punishment of managerial and occupational mistakes took another toll. If honest mistakes were not to be distinguished from deliberate sabotage, managers were better off taking no risks at all. Trains or planes were not dispatched if the weather was threatening. Managers learned to build huge safety factors into plans. New technologies were avoided on the grounds that they would slow production.

In general, the optimal repression-avoidance strategy was reversion to the mean—trying not to stand out, to look like everyone else, to take no chances. It is remarkable the degree to which practices that were initiated under the extreme circumstances of Stalinist repression became a way of life after Stalin. Until the end of the Soviet Union, industrial managers fought for the “easy life” of low plan targets and avoided new technologies; plan failures, mistakes, and accidents still required scapegoats. Economic life became a routine based upon past experience. Industrial managers were given plans that were last year’s production plus some small increment. Economic life became frozen in the past.

Stalin’s greater terror also left behind a legacy that remains to be clarified. Despite high mortality rates, nearly a million survivors of Stalin’s terror remain alive today, although their numbers are diminishing rapidly. At the time of Stalin’s death, two and a half million persons were incarcerated in his Gulag and some twenty million had passed through it. Three-quarters of a million people had been executed between Stalin’s ascension to power and his death. As official state security statistics show, most of these victims were simple workers or peasants, most poorly educated, and young. Those who survived the Gulag did so by forming into self-protective gangs. Many were young, and they were placed in camps alongside hardened inmates. What was the effect on Soviet society of these millions of lost and damaged lives?

Stalin’s brutal repressions of hundreds of thousands and even millions of “enemies,” most of whom were ordinary people doing ordinary things, appears to defy logical explanation. Would not a rational dictator, even one whose goal is to maximize power, be more restrained? The test of the wisdom of repressive policies is not necessarily what actually happened in history but the probability that something quite different (“the outside option”) could have happened. From virtually any perspective, the Bolsheviks did have enemies. They could not stay in power by democratic vote; their only choice was to stay in power through the use of force. Conceptually, therefore, their enemies were those who, given a repression-free choice of Bolshevik rule or some other alternative, would have opted for the alternative. Measured by this standard, the enemies of Bolshevism would have numbered in the tens of millions or more.

It is another question, entirely, which of these tens of millions of enemies represented a danger to the dictator or the dictator’s regime once



he was ruling by force. Most enemies would have taken the path of least resistance and be passive towards the regime. One type of dictator may limit his enemies to those engaging in (or having a high probability of engaging in) active resistance. Another type of dictator may adopt an all-inclusive definition to include all those who might be “enemies” in a setting where there were no costs to opposition. Stalin adopted a position somewhere in between these minimal and maximal limits. We do not know where Lenin would have come down on this question. He lacked the power and the time to show his true colors. Stalin’s frightened successors, most of whom had narrowly escaped repression themselves, opted for a more moderate course. They ruled a population whose parents or grandparents had either been repressed themselves or had relatives or neighbors who had been repressed. The social compact that post-Stalinist rulers entered into agreed that “great” terror would remain a thing of the past.

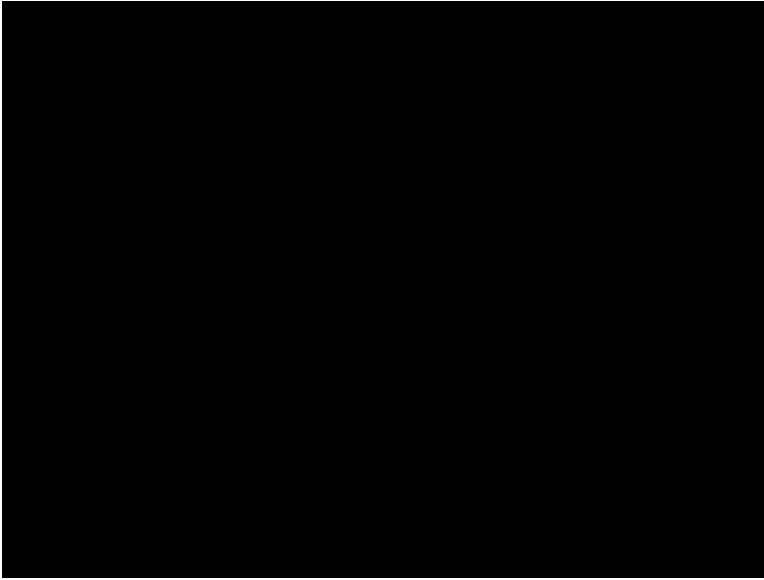
## Appendix 1

### The Power-Maximizing Dictator

In the Wintrobe model, power is produced by the dictator combining loyalty and repression. In Figure A.1, loyalty is labeled  $L$ , and repression  $R$ . Power ( $P$ ) is a positive function of  $R$  and  $L$ —the more  $L$  or  $R$ , the greater the  $P$ . An isopower line is one that shows the combinations of  $R$  and  $L$  that generate a constant amount of power. Because we assume that it becomes increasingly difficult to substitute  $R$  for  $L$  and vice versa, the isopower line is curved and convex to the origin. A power-maximizing dictator would therefore seek to be on the highest isopower line allowed by the supply of  $R$  and  $L$ .

The amount of  $L$  is assumed to be related to  $R$ . At low levels of  $R$ ,  $L$  increases with  $R$ , but at higher levels of  $R$ ,  $L$  increases at a slower rate and then decreases, for a backward-bending  $L$  supply curve, as shown in the curve labeled “Loyalty supply”.

The power-maximizing dictator’s highest level of power as measured by the set of isopower curves is that isopower curve that is tangent to the loyalty-supply curve. Note that in this case, maximum power occurs (at the tangency of the highest isopower curve and the loyalty-supply curve) after repression has increased to the point where loyalty is actually falling. If the dictator cannot keep repression under control and it continues beyond that point, there could be a sharp loss of loyalty.



*Figure A.1.* The Power-Maximizing Dictator

## Appendix 2

### The Organization of State Security

The following three tables provide background information for Chapter 3.

Table A.1 shows the size and organization of the NKVD's central headquarters under Yagoda in 1934 and then under Beria in 1940 after the firing of Yezhov. The relative sizes of each central administration differed markedly from overall employment in that administration (shown in Table A.2). Central office employment in "operations" rose from 17 percent under Yagoda to 44 percent under Beria, while accounting for only about 6 percent of total NKVD employment. The Moscow Gulag administration rose from 4 to 9 percent, while accounting for about half of total NKVD employment. This table shows a more than fourfold increase in employment in the NKVD's central office between 1934 and 1940, from 8,211 to 32,642. We use this increase in Moscow staff to calculate ranges for the size of the NKVD as a whole in the last line.

Table A.2 shows NKVD/MVD employment in 1945 and 1953. In both years it shows an organization that employed more than one million persons including special troops. Its numerically most important administrations were the Gulag and militia administrations. The Gulag administration increased from a quarter- to a half-million during this period. The key Operations Department, responsible for state security, employed almost 40,000 in 1945, accounting for 6 percent of the total.

Table A.3 shows the "operational departments" of the NKVD in 1938. Although the names and numerical designations of these departments changed over time, this table indicates the functions they performed: protection of leaders, counterintelligence, secret political intelligence, intelligence for transport, codes, records, and operational technology (which included poisons and chemical weapons).

Table A.I. Central Apparatus of the NKVD: Organization and Numbers Employed, 1934 and 1940

	1934 <i>Yagoda</i>	1940 <i>Beria</i>
1. Office of the Minister	92 (1.1) <sup>a</sup>	394 (1.2)
2. Administration of State Security (GUGB)	1,410 (17.2)	14,325 (43.9)
a. Operations (Operod, OP, Sledchast)	293	8,819
b. Special Department (OO, S/O)	255	3,320
c. Economic Department (EKO, GEU)	225	629
d. Secret Political Department (SPO)	196	257
e. Foreign Department (INO)	81	245
f. Transport Department (TO, GTU)	153	99
g. Statistical Department (USO)	107	—
h. Other	100	1,055
3. Administration of Internal and Border Guards (GUPVO, GUPV, GUKV, GUVS)	498 (6.1)	1,905 (5.8)
4. Administration of Militia (GURKM, UKMK, GUM)	336 (4.1)	2,509 (7.7)
5. Gulag	336 (4.1)	2,986 (9.2)
6. Administration of Fire Services (GUPO)	170 (3.0)	250 (0.8)
7. Administrative and Economic Department (AKhU), including prison administration and hospitals	4,688 (57.1)	5,591 (17.1)
8. Administration of Citizen Records (AOGS)	31 (0.3)	—
9. Archives Administration	—	233 (0.7)
10. Administration of Road Construction (GUSHOSDOR)	—	920 (2.8)
11. Miscellaneous	650 (7.9)	3,529 (10.8)
12 Total central apparatus employment	8,211 (100)	32,642 (100)
13. Estimate of total NKVD employment	82,000–117,000	325,000–466,000

Sources: A. I. Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, eds., *Lubianka. Organy VChk-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917–1991: Spravochnik dokumentov* (Moscow: Fond Demokratii, 2003), pp. 59–60, 604–606. Both sets of figures refer to authorized positions, not to actually filled positions. Due to name changes, we cannot be certain that we have matched exactly the departmental classifications in both years. The blanks indicate that a particular department was not identified in the organization chart of that year. We estimate total NKVD employment as follows. The ratio of OGPU central staff to total employment was approximately 7 percent in 1928 (*ibid.*, p. 46) and it was approximately 10 percent for the MVD in 1945 (*ibid.*, pp. 82, 86). Applying these two ratios to the 1934 and 1940 central staff figures gives the range of estimates of total NKVD employment for those years.

<sup>a</sup>Figures in parentheses are percentages of total central apparatus employment.

Table A.2. NKVD and (1953): Overall Organization and Numbers Employed, 1945 and 1953

	January 1945 NKVD	1953 MVD
Central administration	5,631 (0.8) <sup>a</sup>	
Militia organizations	202,191 (30.8)	
Gulag administration	273,608 (41.7)	445,693 (March)
Organs of fire brigades	72,383 (10.9)	
Prison administration	32,119 (4.9)	
Road construction administration	5,673 (0.8)	
Archives administration	4,383 (0.6)	
Children's colonies and reception centers	7,210 (1.1)	
Schools of NKVD and NKVD militias	4,500 (0.7)	
Operations (Battle against Banditry, ciphers, protection of state, etc.)	39,715 (6.1)	
Finance and other	8,040 (1.2)	
Total	655,452 (100)	
NKVD troops	655,370	
Total including troops	1,310,822	1,095,678 (May)

*Sources:* The breakdown of the 47,715 figure between operations and finance, based on 39,715 operational NKVD workers from N. V. Petrov, ed., *Karatel'naia sistema: Struktury i kadry*, Istoriiia Stalinskogo Gulaga, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 2 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), 266. In 1945, most state security activities had been transferred to the separate Ministry of State Security (MGB), but many were still listed under the NKVD; therefore we cannot provide a similar breakdown. On this, see *ibid.*, pp. 258, 453; and Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, pp. 86, 115.

<sup>a</sup>Figures in parentheses are percentages of total NKVD nonmilitary employment.

Table A.3. Operational Departments of the NKVD, September 1938

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Department for Protecting Leaders of the Party and State (First Department of Main Administration of State Security, GUGB)

Operational Department (Third Special Department, NKVD)

Counterintelligence Department (Third Department of Main Administration of State Security, GUGB)

Secret-political department (Third Department of Main Administration of State Security, GUGB)

Special Department (Fourth Department of Main Administration of State Security, GUGB)

Department of Transport and Communication (Main Transport Administration, NKVD)

Foreign Department (Fifth Department of Main Administration of State Security, GUGB)

Records-Registration Department (First Special Department, NKVD)

Special Department for Codes (Seventh Department Main Administration of State Security, GUGB)

Prison Department (Main Prison Administration, NKVD)

Department of Water and Road Transport and Communication (Second Department of Main Administration of Transport, NKVD)

Department of Operational Technology (Second Special Department, NKVD)

Department of Military Industry (Second Department of Main Economic Administration, NKVD)

Industrial Department (First Department of Main Economic Administration, NKVD)

Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Supplies (Third Department Main Economic Administration, NKVD)

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*Source:* Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, pp. 193–196.

## Appendix 3

### Repressed Residents of the Workers' Village of Mogochino, Tomsk Oblast

The following list of persons repressed in a single Siberian settlement illustrates the discussion of Stalin's enemies in Chapter 4. It includes only the first 50 of 113 names compiled by Tomsk researcher, V. Tolmachev in 1992. The list is posted on the Memorial Society website <http://memorial.ru/first.html>, under "Mogochino."

Name	Birthdate		Specialty	Sentence (if prison, number of years)
1. Alishin, A. I.	1908	1937	lathe operator	10 years
2. Al'fer, K. A.	1896	1937	administrator, lumber factory	shot
3. Aniskevich, G. G.	1904	1938	black-market worker	shot
4. Antropov, S. A.	1889	1937	machinist	shot
5. Alulin, P. I.	1913	1938	saw-fitter	shot
6. Afanas'ev, V. P.	1890	1931		3 years
7. Afanas'ev, E. N.	1874	1937	guard	shot
8. Babeshkin, K. V.	1898	1937	fisherman	shot
9. Baranovsky, E. I.	1892	1938	sorting operator	shot
10. Barkovsky, F. M.	1897	1938	carpenter	shot
11. Belotelov, A. E.	1883	1937	carpenter	shot
12. Beresenvich, I. I.	1904	1937	salesperson	shot
13. Bol'shakov, S. Kh.	1894	1938	black-market worker	shot



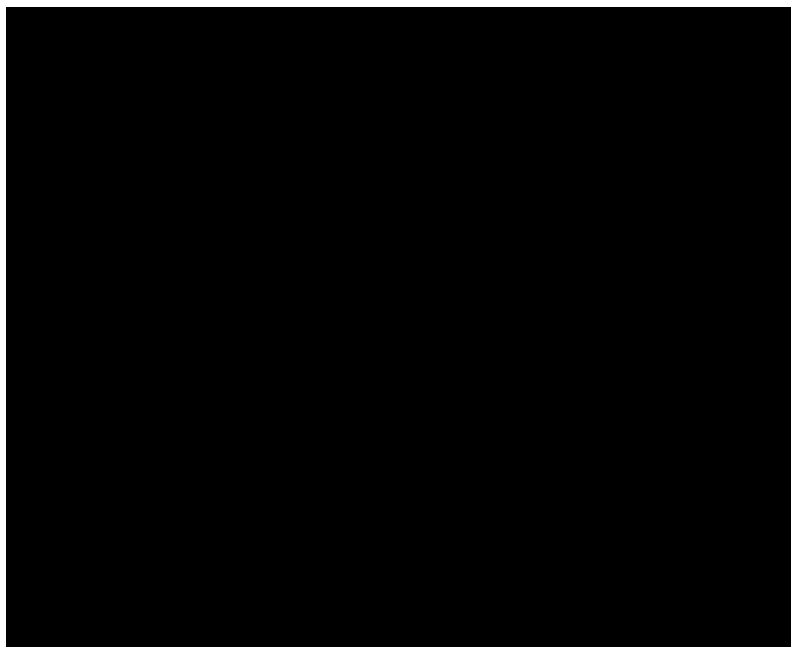
14. Borisov, I. Z.	1899	1937	manager of supply center	shot
15. Basiukevich, I. Iu.	1907	1938	packer of wood materials	shot
16. Belichkov, P. A.	1914	1938	instructor DSO	10 years
17. Veselovsky, A. V.	1890	1937	planner-economist	shot
18. Voznik, V. F.	1904	1937	foreman, lumber exchange	shot
19. Vorob'ev, G. I.	1894	1937	director, ambulance station	8 years
20. Voronov, A. A.	1914	1937	machinist, lumber factory	shot
21. Vyskrebentsev, I. A.	1895	1937	expeditor	shot
22. Glagolev, I. M.	1908	1937	teacher	shot
23. Glagolev, M. I.	1869	1937	former priest	shot
24. Golubenkov, N. F.	1887	1937	mechanic	shot
25. Gorbovsky, L. T.	1888	1938	wood sorter	shot
26. Zhab, T. N.	1908	1937	worked in government office	shot
27. Zhaltkovsky, A.	1898	1938	carpenter	shot
28. Zhaltkovsky, P. A.	1911	1938	carpenter	shot
29. Zhaltkovsky, P. A.	1904	1938	carpenter	shot
30. Zhaltkovsky, O. A.	1914	1938	carpenter	10 years
31. Zhebanovsky, I. S.	1886	1938	worker	shot
32. Zagari, G. A.	1896	1937	accountant	shot
33. Zaitsev, P. P.	1902	1937	private individual	shot
34. Zaria, I. M.	1877	1937	foreman of lumber exchange	shot
35. Kabachinsky, A. Iu.	1891	1937	stoker	shot
36. Kavetsky, A. V.	1892	1938	black-market worker	shot
37. Kandalov, M. V.	1895	1937	school administrator	shot
38. Koval', I. L.	1896	1937	caster	shot
39. Kozel'sky, L. D.	1899	1937	stockman	shot
40. Kolychev, N. V.	1886	1937	carpenter	shot
41. Konusov, T. L.	1886	1937	jurist	shot
42. Koniukhov, D. V.			blacksmith	shot
43. Koniaev, V. M.	1889	1937	commercial director of factory	shot
44. Kopytin, S. A.	1878	1937	black-market worker	shot
45. Koronotov, N. N.	1877	1937	watchman	shot
46. Korostin, I. E.	1881	1938	watchman	shot
47. Kotovich, A. S.	1889	1937	locomotive machinist	shot
48. Kremlev, V. F.	1910	1937	machinist	shot
49. Krukovsky, E.	1881	1938	carpenter	shot
50. Krylov, M. A.	1906	1937	carpenter	5 years

## Appendix 4

### Framing Enemies to Limit the Loss of Loyalty

This appendix provides a rational choice model of the framing of enemies discussed in Chapter 4. In Appendix 1, the dictator produced power by combining loyalty and repression as shown in Figure A.1. In Figure A.2, loyalty is labeled  $L$ , and repression  $R$ . Power ( $P$ ) is a positive function of  $R$  and  $L$ —the more  $L$  or  $R$ , the greater the  $P$ . The isopower line shows the combinations of  $R$  and  $L$  that generate a constant amount of power. Because we assume that it becomes increasingly difficult to substitute  $L$  or  $R$  and vice versa, the isopower line is curved and convex to the origin. A power-maximizing dictator would therefore seek to be on the highest isopower line allowed by the supply of  $R$  and  $L$ .

The amount of  $L$  is assumed to be related to  $R$ . At low levels of  $R$ ,  $L$  increases with  $R$ , but at higher levels of  $R$ ,  $L$  increases at a slower rate and then decreases, for a backward bending  $L$  supply curve, as shown in the curve labeled  $L$ . The power maximizing dictator's highest level of power is that isopower curve that is tangent to the  $L$  curve. Figure A.2 now shows the targeted effects of the dictator's framing of enemies on the repression-loyalty trade-off. The  $L_1$  curve shows the repression-loyalty trade-off when the public has full information about the nature of the dictator's enemies and his repression campaigns. With this loyalty supply curve, the maximum power is shown by the lower isopower line  $L_1$ . The  $L_2$  curve shows the desired effects of the dictator's program of show trials, confessions, propaganda, secrecy, and desensitization. If the dictator's efforts are successful, the loyalty curve shifts to the right and bends back at higher levels of re-



*Figure A.2.* The Power-Maximizing Dictator: Methods to Improve Loyalty

pression, and the dictator's power is less limited. As the diagram shows, a successful strategy places the dictator on a higher isopower curve,  $I_2$ .

Programs that exogenously increase loyalty would result in a rightward and upward shift in the loyalty supply curve, causing  $L$  to peak at a higher point and thus allowing the dictator to locate on a higher isopower curve.

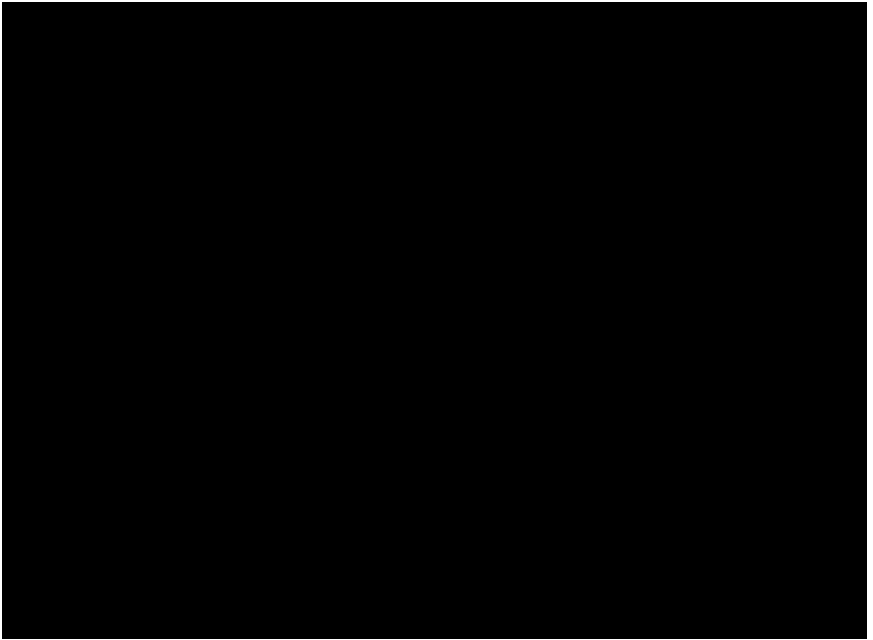
## Appendix 5

### A Selectorate Model of Soviet Succession Struggles

We begin with two rivals offering policies, with which they hope to attract a majority of the selectorate (the Politburo). They are the policy of the “Right” ( $P_r$ ) and the policy of the “Left” ( $P_l$ ). Each policy is proposed by a rival group and is supported by a certain number of selectorate members.  $P_l$  attracts  $q$  selectorate members and  $P_r$  attracts  $m$  members, which happens to be the majority. The total selectorate  $t$  equals  $m + q$  (selectorate members must choose one or the other policy). Any selectorate member who wishes to be in the governing majority, such as Stalin, must choose  $P_r$ . At this point Stalin is in the “ruling coalition” which constitutes the collective dictatorship, but is not himself the dictator. (For simplicity, we ignore the fact that the supporters of  $P_l$  would likely be removed at this point).

If Stalin now wishes to himself become dictator and adopt the “leftist” policy,  $P_l$ , he can attract a majority ( $m$ ) if he replaces  $m - q$  members of the selectorate who do not support  $P_l$  with supporters who do. With such a move, a majority of the selectorate now support  $P_l$ . A Stalin can now embark on the left program with a Politburo majority.

A Stalin with  $m$  supporters of  $P_l$  is still left with potential opposition ( $t - m$ ). These are Politburo members who are supporters of  $P_r$ . Stalin can establish himself as unquestioned dictator if he purges  $t - m$  Politburo members and replaces them with his own supporters who will accept any policy he chooses. At that point, he has full Politburo support for his leftist policy or for that matter any policy he desires.



*Figure A.3.* The Selectorate Model and Stalin's Victory in the Power Struggle

## Appendix 6

### A Dictatorial Eliminations Model

Let  $T(max)$  be the revolution constraint, defined as the maximum threat the dictator can tolerate but remain in power (or conversely as the minimum power the dictator requires to remain in power).  $T(actual)$  refers to the actual threat, and as long as:

$$T(actual) \leq T(max)$$

the dictator has enough power to stay in office.

$T(actual)$  depends on the enemy's "potency,"  $p$ , or the amount of danger enemies pose, and the current number of enemies,  $E$ . Thus

$$T(actual) = pE$$

$T(actual)$  in excess of  $T(max)$  can be caused by an increase in the number of enemies or in their potency or both, so that  $T$  can be approximately defined as the inverse of the isopower curves in Appendix 1, Figure A.1. As  $T$  increases, power declines.

The equilibrium formula for the equality between the actual and maximum tolerable threat levels is

$$T(max) = p [E(-1) + D - \sigma R]$$

where  $T(max)$  is the revolution constraint,  $p$  is the potency factor,  $E(-1)$  is the number of enemies in the previous period,  $D$  is the number of defectors to the enemy side in the current period,  $\sigma$  is the probability of detecting an enemy correctly, and  $R$  is the number of required eliminations.

This formula can be solved for  $R$ , which is the number of eliminations the dictator must plan in order to restore the actual threat level back to the maximum tolerable threat level:

$$R = 1/\sigma [E(-1) + D - 1/p T(max)].$$

According to this equation, the greater the potency level, the more numerous the defections, and the lower the probability of correctly identifying enemies, the higher the level of necessary eliminations.

## Appendix 7

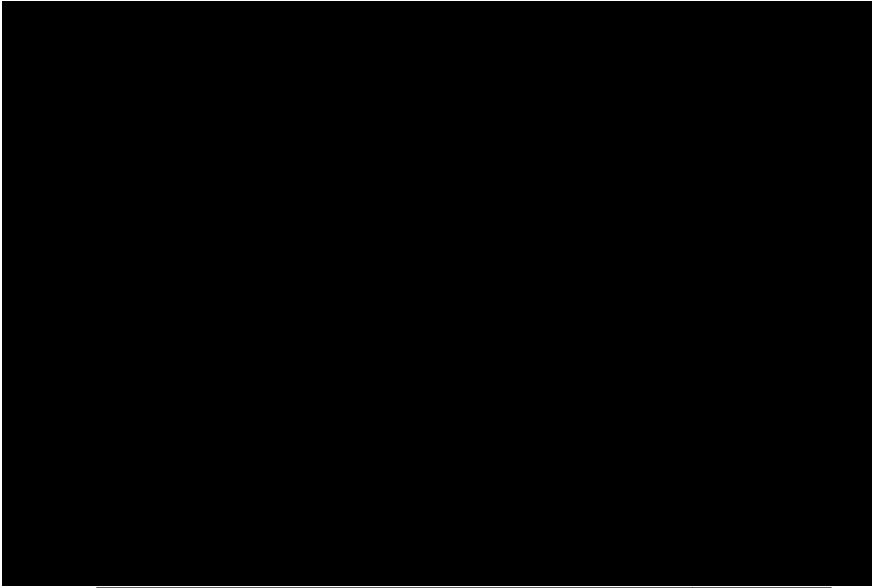
### Simplified Methods

The rational choice model of the dictator introduced in Appendix 1 analyzes a dictator seeking to maximize power. Other objectives are set aside in this model and the dictator's power is only constrained by limits on the supply of loyalty. We now consider a dictator who combines loyalty and repression to produce sufficient power to remain personally secure and in office. As in Appendices 2 and 4, different combinations of  $R$  and  $L$  produce a fixed amount of political power as shown by "isopower" lines. In this model, we examine how a dictator can raise the amount of power needed in the short run to accommodate an increase in the threat level. The model is presented in Figure A.4.

The stylized fact that repression returns to some "normal" (but high by international standards) rate suggests that the dictator, in the long run, combines loyalty and repression to produce "normal" power consistent with "normal" rates of repression and loyalty. We denote this "normal" rate of power  $P^*$ , which the dictator will produce by selecting the least-cost combination of repression and loyalty given their respective prices. Geometrically, the least-cost combination of repression and loyalty, denoted as  $R^*$  and  $L^*$ , occurs at the tangency of the budget line ( $ab$ ) with the isopower line  $P^*$ .

Figure A.4 begins with the dictator at the natural rates of repression  $R^*$  and loyalty  $L^*$ . The dictator's demand for repression now increases from  $P^*$  to  $P'$ . If the dictator could expand both  $R$  and  $L$  at will, he would simply move to a new cost-minimizing equilibrium on the  $P'$  isopower line at





*Figure A.4.* Simplified Methods and Repression Efficiency

higher repression and loyalty. But the dictator's state security force cannot be expanded or contracted at will. Considerable time and care are required to recruit, vet, and train Chekists. The dictator also knows that any impending campaign will be of short duration; so why expand to a larger security force than he needs in the long run? Hence, the dictator must find ways to increase his power other than by expanding the ranks of the political police. He will encounter similar difficulties expanding loyalty.

Loyalty is a stock variable that is determined by past experiences, propaganda and education, the characteristics of the population, and material rewards. Hence, short-run loyalty is, for all practical purposes, fixed, so that loyalty is also not subject to substantial change in the short run. Hence, in the short run, the dictator cannot move to higher power by expanding either  $R$  or  $L$ .

Repression was, in practice, measured as the number of convictions (death, prison, or deportation) obtained by the political police. Repression,  $R$ , is therefore the product of the number of Chekists ( $C$ ) and their average productivity ( $\theta$ ), or  $R = \theta C$ .

How does the dictator move to the higher level of power,  $P'$ , with both  $C$

and  $L$  relatively fixed in the short run? The dictator's best hope is to raise the productivity of Chekists, the  $\theta$  term. Chapter 7 discusses how productivity can be raised by adopting simplified methods.

Figure A.4 shows the process of using simplified methods to increase power from  $P^*$  to  $P'$  with the short-term number of Chekists and loyalty fixed. If the dictator authorizes his Chekists to use simplified methods, the number of "effective" repressors increases (from  $R^*$  to  $R'$ ) as each becomes more efficient. The amount of repression for a given budget expenditure rises due to the increased productivity, as is reflected by the new budget line  $ac$ . As a consequence, the dictator can achieve a higher level of power without an increase in the number of repressors.

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## Notes

*Most archival documents cited are from RGASPI, the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History. Some are cited from RGANI, the Russian Government Archive of Contemporary History (former designation of RGASPI), and others are from GARE, the State Archive of the Russian Federation. Soviet-period archival documents are identified by the collection (Fond), record series (opis' or op.), file (delo or del.) or preservation unit (edinita khranenia or ed. khr.), and page (list or l.).*

*Many of the archival documents cited are from microfilm collections housed at the Hoover Institution Archives, Hoover Institution, Stanford University. These include: Fond 17, The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; Fond 89, The Communist Party on Trial; and Fond R09414, The Main Administration of the Places of Confinement of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs. The contents of Fond 89 are described in Lora Soroka, comp., Archives of the Communist Party and the Soviet State. Guide to the Microfilm Collection in the Hoover Institution Archives, Fond 89: Communist Party of the Soviet Union on Trial (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2001).*

*Archival documents published in documentary collections are also cited, especially those from closed archives such as APRE, the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation and TsAFSB, the Central Archive of the Federal Security Bureau.*

### INTRODUCTION. DICTATORS, THEIR ENEMIES, AND REPRESSION

1. Cheka denotes the Extraordinary Commission (1917 to 1922); OGPU, the United State Political Administration (1922 to 1934); NKVD, Peoples' Commissariat for Internal Affairs, which existed as the NKVD of the Russian Republic from

1917–1930 (NKVD RSFSR) and as a union ministry (NKVD USSR) from 1934 to 1946, when it was renamed the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or MVD. KGB denotes the Committee of State Security which was the dominant organ of state security in the post-Stalin era.

2. Iu. A. Poliakov et al., eds., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia. 1937 goda: Obshchie itogi* (Moscow: Rossphen, 1937), pp. 251, 313.

3. See for example the web site of the Library of Congress: [lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/gulag/gulag\\_page2.html](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/gulag/gulag_page2.html). See also [www.osa.ceu.hu/gulag/bibliography.htm](http://www.osa.ceu.hu/gulag/bibliography.htm).

4. The closest we have is the *Lubianka* series of documentary collections from security service files, the third volume of which describes the organizational histories of the various interior ministry and state security organizations from 1917 to 1991. On this, see: N. V. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i VChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD, ianvar' 1922–dekabr' 1936* (Moscow: Fond Demokratii, 2003); V. N. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937–1938* (Moscow: Fond Demokratii, 2004); and A. I. Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, eds., *Lubianka. Organy VChK-OGPU-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917–1991: Spravochnik dokumentov* (Moscow: Fond Demokratii, 2003); and V. N. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR "Smersh," 1939–mart 1946* (Moscow: Fond Demokratii, 2006). Also see Vladimir Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov: Istoriia NKVD-MVD ot A. I. Rykov do N. A. Shchelkova, 1917–1982* (Moscow: Versty, 1995) and N. V. Petrov and K. V. Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD, 1934–1941* (Moscow: Zvenia, 1999). Other works include: David Shearer, "Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD During the 1930's," *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, no. 42, nos. 2–4 (April–December 2001), pp. 505–534, and David Shearer, "Crime and Social Disorder in Stalin's Russia: A Reassessment of the Great Retreat and the Origins of Mass Repression," *ibid.*, 39, nos. 1–2 (January–June 1998), 119–148. Robert Conquest, *Inside Stalin's Secret Police: NKVD Politics, 1936–1939* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985) was one of the first efforts to engage in such an analysis, and Mark Jansen and Nikita Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner: Peoples' Commissar Nikolai Yezhov* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2002) is the authoritative account of the NKVD under Yezhov.

5. Conquest, *Inside Stalin's Secret Police*.

6. Ronald Hingley, *The Russian Secret Police: Muscovite, Imperial Russian and Soviet Political Security Operations, 1565–1970* (London: Hutchinson, 1970).

7. George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

8. Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, p. 413.

9. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov*, pp. 382–409.

10. Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, p. 461.

11. O. I. Cherdakov, *Formirovanie pravookhranitel'noi sistemy sovetskogo gosudarstva v 1917–1936 gg.* (Saratov: Izdatel'stvo Saratovskogo Universiteta, 2001), pp. 41, 45.

12. Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, p. 10.

13. In the jargon of Stalin's USSR, "repression" or "repressive policies" could refer to anything from mass executions to the criminalization of workplace violations.

The July 1937 order of the NKVD “About Repression of Former Kulaks, Convicts, and Other Anti-Soviet Elements” set quotas for extrajudicial executions of 70,000 victims. The hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, Poles, and Lithuanians deported to Central Asia and Siberia before, during, and after World War II were characterized in official documents as “repressed” national contingents. The 1940 decree that made unauthorized job changes a prison offense was a “repressive” measure. The term applied to individuals typically means that the “repressed” person was executed or at best imprisoned.

14. Quotations from Cherdakov, *Formirovanie pravookhranitel'noi sistemy sovetskogo gosudarstva*, pp. 18, 34.

15. Quoted in O. V. Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro: Mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody*, pp. 51–52.

16. G. M. Adibekov et al., eds., *Politbiuro TsK RKB(b)-VKB(b): Povestki dnia zasedanii, Katalog*, vol. 1: 1919–1929 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2000), p. 751; Iu. V. Goriachev, ed., *Tsentral'nyi komitet KPSS VKP(b)-RKP(b), RSDRP(b), 1917–1991* (Moscow: Parad, 2005), pp. 7, 11, 12.

17. G. M. Adibekov et al., eds., *Politbiuro TsK RKB(b)-VKB(b): Povestki dnia zasedanii, Katalog*, vol. 2: 1930–1939 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001), p. 1104; Goriachev, *Tsentral'nyi komitet*, pp. 20–22.

18. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 8, l. 114. Politburo meeting of March 11, 1930 (special file).

19. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 9, l. 120. Politburo meeting of January 7, 1931 (special file).

20. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 25, ll. 56, 73. Politburo meeting of January 17, 1939 (special file).

21. Colonel Pavlov, “Report about the Numbers of Those Sentenced According to Cases of Organs of the NKVD,” December 11, 1953. Cited in N. Vert and S. V. Mironenko, eds., *Massovyie repressii v SSSR, Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 1 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), pp. 608–609.

22. Mark Harrison, “The Rational–Choice Dictator: Reply,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58, no. 7 (2006), pp. 151–157.

23. Daniel Rancour-Lafferiere, “The Mind of Stalin Revisited,” paper presented at AAASS Annual Meeting, Boston, November 2004.

24. Jörg Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror: Die Geschichte des Stalinismus* (Munich: DVA, 2003), pp. 7–16.

25. Valery Lazarev and Paul Gregory, “Commissars and Cars: A Case Study in the Political Economy of Dictatorship,” *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 31, 1 (2003), pp. 1–19.

26. Harrison, “The Rational–Choice Dictator: Reply,” pp. 151–157.

27. Khaustov, Naumov, and Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR “Smersh,”* p. 71.

28. Jörg Baberowski, “Zivilisation der Gewalt: Die kulturellen Ursprünge des Stalinismus,” *Historische Zeitschrift*, 281 (2005), p. 98.

29. Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 75–79.

30. Boris Bazhanov, *Bazhanov and the Damnation of Stalin*, trans. David Doyle (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), p. 15.

31. Ronald Wintrobe, *The Political Economy of Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Ronald Wintrobe, “The Tinpot and the Totalitarian: The Theory of Dictatorship,” *American Political Science Review*, 84, 3 (September 1990), pp. 849–872; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003); Daren Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

32. Wintrobe. “The Tinpot and the Totalitarian,” p. 849.

33. In the language of economics, power is produced via a production function in which loyalty and repression or the two inputs.

34. Pavlov, “Report about the Numbers of Those Sentenced According to Cases of Organs of the NKVD,” pp. 608–609.

35. Leggett, *The Cheka*, Appendix C.

36. Pavlov, “Report about the Numbers of Those Sentenced According to Cases of Organs of the NKVD,” pp. 608–609.

37. Iu. A. Poliakov, ed., *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke: Istoricheskie ocherki*, vol. 2: 1940–1959 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001), p. 173.

38. Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, pp. 231, 248.

39. Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, p. 461.

40. O. B. Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii: Vnesudebnye polnomochiia organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti (1918–1953)* (Moscow-Zhukovsky: Kuchkovo pole, 2006), pp. 433–434.

41. Under foreigners, we include Poles, Germans, Romanians. Iranians, Afghans, Mongols, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Greeks, plus thirty-two other nationalities. Although Germans and Jews had their own autonomous republics, we include them as “foreign.” Although the Baltic states were incorporated into the USSR after World War II, we continue to include them as foreigners after the war. For categories of foreigners, see Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii*, pp. 411–412.

42. These figures are for the Russian republic for 1937, which should be roughly representative of the USSR. On this see, Poliakov, *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke*, 2:53, 90.

43. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treason](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treason).

44. [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWespionage.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWespionage.htm).

45. Katherine Herbig and Martin Wiskoff, *Espionage against the United States by American Citizens, 1947–2001*, Research Conducted by the Defense Personnel Security Research Center, Technical Report 02-05, July 2002.

46. *The Historical Statistics of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 422.

47. Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii*, p. 264.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 333–334.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 351.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 414.

51. The People’s Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) became a separate ministry in 1943 when it was split off from the Commissariat of Internal Affairs. The ministers and their deputies are included.

52. Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*. pp. 250–300.
53. Ibid., pp. 279, 288.
54. Ibid., pp. 14–146.
55. George Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 69.
56. Khaustov, Naumov, and Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD*, p. 209.
57. Sergei Khrushchev, ed., *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, vol. 2: *Reformer* (Providence: Brown University Press, 2006), p. 212.
58. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, p. 599.
59. N. V. Petrov, ed., *Karatel'naia sistema: Struktury i kadry*, in *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 2 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), Appendix 1.
60. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, l. 89. Politburo meeting of July 3, 1937 “About Anti-Soviet Elements” (special file).
61. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 389–510; Petrov, *Karatel'naia sistema*, p. 523.
62. Paul Gregory, *Lenin's Brain and Other Tales from the Secret Soviet Archives* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2007), pp. 80–89.
63. Leggett, *The Cheka*, Appendix C.
64. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, 606–607.

#### CHAPTER 1. STALIN'S PRAETORIANS

1. [www.unrv.com/military/praetorian-guard.php](http://www.unrv.com/military/praetorian-guard.php).
2. P. J. Boettke and G. Anderson, “Soviet Venality: A Rent-Seeking Model of the Communist State,” *Public Choice*, 93 (1997), pp. 37–53.
3. They were Genrykh Yagoda and Nikolai Yezhov, both heads of the NKVD. The third was Viktor Abakumov, head of the state security ministry.
4. Jörg Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror: Die Geschichte des Stalinismus* (Munich: DVA, 2003). See also Nikita Petrov, “Die Kaderpolitik des NKVD während der Massenrepressalien 1936–1939,” in *Stalinistischer Terror 1934–1941*, ed. Wladislaw Hederler (Berlin: BasisDruck, Berlin 2002), p. 24.
5. Georgy Egerov and Konstantin Sonin, “Dictators and Their Viziers: Endogenizing the Loyalty-Competence Tradeoff,” *NES, CEFIR, CEPR Working Paper*, May 2006.
6. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 59–60.
7. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 151–152.
8. Egorov and Sonin, “Dictators and Their Viziers.”
9. Paul Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Examples would be Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Georgy Piatakov, and Andrei Voznesensky.
10. A. I. Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, eds., *Lubianka. Organy VChK-OGPU-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917–1991: Spravochnik dokumentov* (Moscow: Fond Demokratiia, 2003), pp. 59–60.



11. Fond 89, op. 18, del. 25 gives figures supplied to Beria on March 24, 1953 on the Ninth Administration's costs of guarding and provisioning high government officials, broken down by apartment and dacha.

12. Sergei Khrushchev, ed., *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, vol. 2: *Reformer* (Providence: Brown University Press, 2006), pp. 138–139.

13. Boris Bazhanov, *Bazhanov and the Damnation of Stalin*, trans. David Doyle (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), p. 101.

14. Vladimir Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov: Istoriia NKVD-MVD ot A. I. Rykova do N. A. Shchelkova, 1917–1982* (Moscow: Versty, 1995), pp. 382–409.

15. V. N. Khaustov and N. S. Plotnikova, "Mezhvoennye gody v kontekste obespecheniia gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti," in *Gosudarstvennaia bezopasnost' Rossii: Istoriia i sovremennost'*, ed. R. N. Vaiguzin (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005), p. 493 (emphasis added).

16. "Zaiavlenie byvshikh partiinykh rabotnikov Chitinskoi oblasti sekretariu Chitinskogo obkoma VKP(b) o fabrikatsii del rabotnikami Chitinskogo UNKVD," November 21, 1939. N. Vert and S. V. Mironenko, eds., *Massovye repressii v SSSR, Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 1 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), pp. 363–366.

17. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov*, p. 189.

18. V. N. Haustov, "Sovetskie organy gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti, 1917–1953," *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 42, nos. 2–4 (April–December 2001), p. 361.

19. Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, pp. 668–669.

20. Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 7.

21. Fond 89, op. 18, del. 27, l. 2–23 provides a July 1953 report from Kruglov and Serov to Malenkov on listening devices with reports of the bugging of Zhukov, Timoshenko, and Budenny on orders of Abakumov and Kobulovny.

22. V. N. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR "Smersh," 1939–mart 1946* (Moscow: Fond Demokratiia, 2006), p. 540.

23. Mikhail Shreider, *NKVD iznutri: Zapiski Chekista* (Moscow: Vosvrashchenie, 1995), p. 24.

24. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, l. 21.

25. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 19, l. 78. Politburo meeting of March 9, 1936. Question No. 155 "About the Case of the Group of Trotsky and Dvurush" (special file).

26. Fond 558, op. 11, del. 713, ll. 127–131. Letter of August 3, 1937 from Balashev personally to Stalin denouncing Kaganovich, sent by Stalin to Yezhov with Stalin's "resolution."

27. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2:188.

28. O. V. Khlevniuk, A. V. Kvashonkin, I. P. Kosheleva, and I. A. Rogovaia, *Stalinskoe Politbiuro v 30-e gody* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1995), pp. 21, 28, 29. Between January and September of 1932, the Politburo dispatched between 1,500 and 6,100 such documents each month.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 83–85.

30. Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, p. 436.

31. “Stenogramma iul’skogo (1957 g.) Plenuma TsK KPSS,” 2–7 July, 1953, in *Laurenty Beria 1953: Dokumenty*, ed. N. V. Naumov and Iu. Sigachev (Moscow: Demokratiia, 1999), p. 91.
32. Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner: People’s Commissar Nikolai Yezhov, 1895–1940* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2002).
33. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat’ “zheleznykh” narkomov*, p. 188.
34. Remarks of Roman Gul’, quoted *ibid.*, p. 164.
35. Gul’, quoted *ibid.*, pp. 188–189.
36. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner*, p. 198.
37. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2:170.
38. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat’ “zheleznykh” narkomov*, 249.
39. O. I. Cherdakov, *Formirovanie pravookhranitel’noi sistemy sovetskogo gosudarstva v 1917–1936 gg.* (Saratov: Izdatel’stvo Saratovskogo Universiteta, 2001), p. 43.
40. V. N. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937–1938* (Moscow: Fond Demokratiia, 2004), pp. 415–416.
41. V. C. Zhukovskii, *Lubianskaia imperiia NKVD, 1937–1939* (Moscow: Veche, 2001), p. 179.
42. Shreider, *NKVD iznutri*, p. 63.
43. Fond 89, op. 75, del. 5, ll. 1–3.
44. Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, pp. 174–175.
45. Janson and Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner*, pp. 19–20.
46. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat’ “zheleznykh” narkomov*, p. 190.
47. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner*, p. 110.
48. Iu. N. Bogdanov, *Strogo sekretno: 30 let v OGPU-NKVD-MVD* (Moscow: Veche, 2002), p. 147.
49. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat’ “zheleznykh” narkomov*, pp. 188–189.
50. Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming), chap. 4.
51. N. V. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i VChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD, ianvar’ 1922–dekabr’ 1936* (Moscow: Fond Demokratiia, 2003), p. 447.
52. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 8, l. 5. Politburo meeting of November 19, 1929. Question No. 35, “Question by Yagoda.”
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60. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov*, pp. 166–168.
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63. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov*, p. 222.
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66. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov*, p. 168.
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69. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov*, p. 214.
70. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2:161.
71. "Report of L. P. Beria to J. V. Stalin and V. M. Molotov about the Course of Operations on the Deportation of Crimean Tatars," top secret. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 499–500.
72. Lars Lih, Oleg Naumov, and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Stalin's Letters to Molotov, 1925–1936* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 239.
73. O. V. Khlevniuk, A. V. Kvashonkin, L. P. Kosheleva, and L. A. Rogovaia, *Stalinskoe Politbiuro v 30-e gody* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1995), pp. 129, 142.
74. Shreider, *NKVD iznutri*, p. 23.
75. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2:36.
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77. Shreider, *NKVD iznutri*, pp. 64–65.
78. O. V. Khlevniuk, R. Davies, L. P. Kosheleva, E. A. Rees, and L. A. Rogovaia, *Stalin i Kaganovich: Perepiski, 1931–1936 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001), p. 683.
79. Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*.
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87. Haustov, "Sovetskie organy gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti," pp. 359–360.
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89. Bazhanov, *Bazhanov and the Damnation of Stalin*, p. 149.
90. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov*, pp. 168, 182.

91. Kokorin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, pp. 672–676.
92. Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Czar*.
93. Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
94. Remark of Stalin in October 1951, N. Petrov, *Pervyi predsedatel' KGB Ivan Serov* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), p. 106.
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97. Khaustov, Naumov, and Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i VChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD*, pp. 757–758.
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99. *Khrushchev vspominaet* (Moscow, 1971), pp. 84–85, quoted in Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov*, p. 204.
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66. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

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5. Paul Gregory, Philipp Schroder, and Konstantin Sonin, "Dictators, Repression, and the Median Citizen: An 'Eliminations Model' of Stalin's Terror (Data from the NKVD Archives)," papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\_id=948667.
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7. The formula is  $T(max) = pE(-1) + D - \sigma R$ , where  $T(max)$  is the revolution constraint,  $p$  is the potency factor,  $E(-1)$  is the number of enemies in the previous period,  $D$  is the number of defectors to the enemy side in the current period,  $\sigma$  is the probability of detecting an enemy correctly, and  $R$  is the number of eliminations.
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20. "About Measures for the Liquidation of Kulak Households in the Regions of Continuous Collectivization," January 30, 1930. Appendix No. 2 to Protocol of the Politburo No. 116. Ivinskii, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, pp. 126–130.
21. According to Yagoda's operational decree, deportees were allowed to take with them "only the most essential household articles, some elementary means of production, and a minimum of supplies." Their savings were to be confiscated, with the exception of small sums for travel and setting up at the new locations. See OGPU

Operational Directive No. 44/21 “About the Liquidation of the Kulaks as a Class,” cited in N. Vert and S. V. Mironenko, eds., *Massovye repressii v SSSR, Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 1 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), pp. 94–104.

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23. See internal OGPU memos of January 11, 18, and 23 cited in Ivnitskii, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, 2:16.

24. Paul Gregory, “Introduction: The Politburo’s Role as Revealed by the ‘Lost’ Transcripts,” in *The Lost Politburo Transcripts: From Collective Rule to Stalin’s Dictatorship*, ed. Paul Gregory and Norman Naimark (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

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26. As shown in documents *ibid.*, pp. 103–126, early drafts called for the deportation of 100,000 kulak households, a figure that was later doubled to 210,000. The January 23 draft differentiated between the most dangerous kulaks, who were to be sent to concentration camps or executed, and other active kulaks, who were to be deported, in an operation to be completed by April 1, 1930. The penultimate draft three days later called for concentration camp sentences or execution for 60,000 first-category kulaks and the deportation of 150,000 second-category kulaks and their families, with half of the operation to be completed within a month and a half (by March 15). and a dekulakization control figure of 3–5 percent was established as the ultimate goal.

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29. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 8, l. 80. Politburo meeting of February 15, 1930 “About the Publication in the Local and Central press of the Execution of Kulak Elements.”

30. See above, Chapter 4, note 41.

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32. Report of the PP OGPU Urals to SOU OGPU about measures for mass deportation or resettlement of kulaks of the Urals region, January 25, 1930, *ibid.*, p. 144.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 169–170.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

35. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 9, l. 38. Politburo meeting of September 25, 1930.

36. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 8, l. 82. Politburo meeting of February 25, 1930.

37. Ivnitskii, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, 2:131.

38. R. W. Davies and Stephen Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2004), p. 45.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 489.

40. OGPU records show that troikas handed down 18,966 death sentences and 99,319 concentration camp sentences for the entire year of 1930 (Ivnitskii, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, 2:809). (These figures are more than 25,000 lower than

the more complete Pavlov figures released in 1953.) We distribute these sentences throughout the year in accordance with the pattern of arrests from Berelovich and Danilov, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChk-OGPU-NKVD*, 1:484.

41. Regions that “accepted” incoming “special settlers” were burdened with preparing housing and food, even though the settlers may have been welcomed as workers. Remote regions, in fact, resisted OGPU plans to take in special settlers. The Northern Region, for example, countered the OGPU’s request to take 100,000 families with an offer of 50,000 which they later raised to 70,000 under pressure. Importing regions demanded more funds to handle the influx and were particularly reluctant to send their own deportees to remote regions without supplies and infrastructure. On this, see *Ibid.*, pp. 412–417.

42. Davies and Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger*, p. 489.

43. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 175–178.

44. N. A. Ivnikitskii, *Sud’ba raskulachennykh v SSSR* (Moscow: Sobranie, 2004), p. 75. The figure is as of January 1, 1933.

45. The December 27, 1932 Decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars “About the Creation of a Unified Passport System for the USSR and the Obligatory Registration of Passports” was implemented by the Order of the OGPU No. 009 “About Chekist Measures for the Introduction of a Passport System in the USSR.” Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, p. 149.

46. “Report of the OGPU to the Central Committee of the VKP(b) about the Results of the Work of the OGPU for the Protection of Socialist Property from January 1 1933 to January 1 1934. No. 50048,” *ibid.*, pp. 147–148.

47. This conclusion is drawn by comparing terror plan fulfillment with the fulfillment of five year and annual plans from this period. The data on plan fulfillment is from Eugene Zaleski, *Stalinist Planning for Economic Growth 1933–1952* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 130, 136, 154, 157.

48. From the speech of J. V. Stalin to the expanded council of the military council, June 2, 1937. V. N. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937–1938* (Moscow: Fond Demokratiia, 2004), pp. 202–209.

49. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, l. 88.

50. David Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism: Social Order and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union, 1928–1953* (forthcoming), chap. 11.

51. *Ibid.*

52. O. L. Leibovich, ed., “Vkliuchen v operatsiiu”: *Massovyi terror v Prikam’e 1937–38 gg.* (Perm: Permskii Gosudarstvennyi Tekhnicheskii Universitet, 2006), p. 26.

53. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, l. 9. Politburo meeting of March 19–September 9, 1937, “Question from NKO.”

54. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, l. 45. Politburo meeting of April 22, 1937, “Question from NKVD.”

55. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, l. 89.

56. Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*.

57. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, l. 96.

58. Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism*.
59. [www.melgrosh.unimelb.edu.au/index.php?section=pol&page=home](http://www.melgrosh.unimelb.edu.au/index.php?section=pol&page=home).
60. Leibovich, "Vkliuchen v operatsiiu", pp. 20–25.
61. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, ll. 95, 96–97, 98–99. Politburo meeting of March 17, 1937, "About Anti-Soviet Elements."
62. Memo of M. I. Frinovsky to the Politburo with inclusion of Operational Order of the NKVD USSR No. 00447, cited in Khaustov, Naumov, and Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937–1938*, p. 273.
63. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, p. 269.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., pp. 269–274.
66. Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism*, chap. 11.
67. Iunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim"*, p. 226.
68. Ibid., pp. 222–227.
69. Ibid., pp. 44–48.
70. Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism*.
71. Leibovich, "Vkliuchen v operatsiiu", pp. 33–34.
72. "Decree of the SNK USSR and TsK about Arrests, Procurator's Oversight, and the Conduct of Investigations," November 17, 1938. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 305–308.
73. Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*.
74. "Decree of the SNK USSR and TsK about Arrests, Procurator's Oversight, and the Conduct of Investigations," November 17, 1938. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 305–308.
75. J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933–1938* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
76. Iunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim"*, p. 217.
77. Ibid., p. 229.
78. V. N. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR "Smersh," 1939–mart 1946* (Moscow: Fond Demokratiia, 2006), p. 49.
79. [www.melgrosh.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.melgrosh.unimelb.edu.au).
80. Decree of the Council of People's Commissars and Central Committee "About Arrests, Procuratorial Oversight, and the Conduct of Investigations," November 17, 1938. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 305–308.
81. Operational Order of the NKVD USSR No. 00439 "About Operations for the Repression of German Subjects Suspected of Espionage Against the USSR," July 25, 1937. Ibid., pp. 267–268.
82. Operational Order of the NKVD No. 00485 "About the Operation for the Repression of Members of Polish Military organizations in the USSR," August 11, 1937. Ibid., pp. 275–276.
83. Operational Order of the NKVD USSR No. 00593 "About Operations for the Repression of Former Employees of the Chinese-Eastern Railroad and Reimmigrants, September 20, 1937," Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 281–283.
84. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, l. 157.

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86. Ibid., p. 74.

87. Leibovich, “*Vkliuchen v operatsiiu*,” p. 52.

88. A. Iu. Vatlin, *Terror raionnogo masshtaba* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), p. 43.

89. Valerii Vasiliev, “The Great Terror in the Ukraine, 1936–1938,” in *Stalin’s Terror Revisited*, ed. Melanie Ilic (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006), p. 151.

90. Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, chap. 5.

91. Khaustov, Naumov, and Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR “Smersh,”* pp. 279, 311, 413, 432.

92. These figures are from Tsarevskaia-Diakina, *Spetsprezentsy v SSSR*, pp. 714–715.

93. Transcript of a telephone communication about mass uprisings and rebellions in Tul’chinsky district, March 16, 1930, 1800 hours, cited in Berelovich and Danilov, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChk-OGPU-NKVD, 1918–1939*, 1:221–222.

94. Ibid., p. 484.

95. Iu. N. Bogdanov, *Strogo sekretno: 30 let v OGPU-NKVD-MVD* (Moscow: Veche, 2002), p. 136.

96. Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 45.

97. David Shearer, “Elements Near and Alien: Passportization, Policing, and Identity in the Stalinist State, 1932–1952,” *Journal of Modern History*, 76 (December 2004), p. 846.

98. Ibid.

99. Khaustov, Naumov, and Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR “Smersh,”* p. 312 (emphasis added).

100. Ibid., pp. 430–431 (emphasis added).

101. Ibid., p. 413.

102. Jörg Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror: Die Geschichte des Stalinismus* (Munich: DVA, 2003), pp. 174–175.

103. Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Phoenix, 2004), p. 194.

104. Ivnitskii, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, 2:223.

105. Ibid., p. 303.

106. Ibid., p. 312.

107. Ibid., p. 349.

108. Letter of A. Ya. Vyshinsky to V. M. Molotov about the organization of work on the examination of complaints of convicted persons to the prosecutor of the RSFSR, January 15, 1939, Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, p. 327.

109. Viola, “The Role of the OGPU in Dekulakization, Mass Deportations, and Special Resettlement in 1930,” p. 34.

110. Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism*, pp. 93–106.

111. Lunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal “bol’shim,”* pp. 156–163.

112. Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin’s Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 166.

113. Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*.



114. Fond 17, op. 162, del. 21, l. 96; Fond 558, op. 11, del. 57, ll. 113–114.
115. Leibovich, “*Vkliuchen v operatsiiu*”, p. 7.
116. Khaustov, Naumov, and Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937–1938*, p. 207.
117. Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror: Die Geschichte des Stalinismus*, pp. 175–177.
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120. Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*; Mark Harrison, ed., *Guns and Rubles: The Defense Industry in the Stalinist State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming), chap. 1.
121. V. S. Khristoforov et al., eds., “*Sovershenno sekretno*”: *Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922–1934)*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Institut Rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2003), p. 413.
122. Iury Brodskii, *Solovki: Dvadsat’ let osobogo naznacheniiia* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2002), p. 472.
123. Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, chap. 4.
124. Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 2005), pp. 414–415.

## CHAPTER 7. SIMPLIFIED METHODS

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2. N. Vert and S. V. Mironenko, eds., *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 1 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), pp. 147–148.
3. Note of Deputy Minister of Justice of the USSR R. I. Kudriavtsev “About the Work of Judicial Organs on the Application of the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of June 4, 1947,” September 9, 1948 (secret). *Ibid.*, pp. 560–562.
4. Report of the Head of the Criminal Justice Department M. F. Zolotov and Farkin to the USSR Procurator V. M. Bochkov “About Judicial Repression According to the Decree of June 26, 1940” (written no earlier than April 1941). *Ibid.*, pp. 416–423.
5. Memo of Dzerzhinsky to the Politburo “About Not Separating Investigation and Interrogation,” 1921. A. I. Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, eds., *Lubianka: Organy VChK-OGPU-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917–1991: Spravochnik* (Moscow: Fond Demokratiia, 2003), pp. 413–414.
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7. Fond 82 (Molotov), op. 2, del. 897, ll. 3–6.
8. Fond 82 (Molotov), op. 2, del. 897, l. 28.
9. Fond 82 (Molotov), op. 2, del. 897, l. 28.
10. O. I. Cherdakov, *Formirovanie pravookhranitel’noi sistemy sovetskogo go-*



*sudarstva v 1917–1936 gg.* (Saratov: Izdatel'stvo Saratovskogo Universiteta, 2001), pp. 39–41.

11. Directive of the OGPU, No. 44/21 “About the Liquidation of the Kulaks as a Class,” February 2, 1930. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 94–104.

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25. A. Iu. Vatlin, *Terror raionnogo masshtaba* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), p. 31.

26. Leibovich, “Vkliuchen v operatsiiu,” pp. 44–45.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–54.

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29. Khaustov, Naumov, and Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i VChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD*, p. 191.

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34. Viola, “The Role of the OGPU in Dekulakization, Mass Deportations, and Special Resettlement in 1930,” p. 63.
35. Statement of head of NKVD Transport Department at a meeting of the operational group in Zhmerinsky, cited in Valerii Vasiliev, “The Great Terror in the Ukraine, 1936–1938,” in *Stalin’s Terror Revisited*, ed. Melanie Ilic (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 140–162.
36. Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro*, p. 209.
37. Ibid., p. 214.
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39. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, p. 269.
40. Mozokhin, “Polnomochie na repressii.”
41. Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, p. 566.
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43. Ibid., p. 155.
44. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 305–308.
45. “Decree of the Council of Peoples Commissars and the Central Executive Committee About Arrests, Prosecutor Oversight, and the Conduct of Investigations,” November 17, 1938. Ibid., pp. 305–308.
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51. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner*, p. 109.
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55. V. S. Zhukovskii, *Lubianskaia imperiia NKVD 1937–1938* (Moscow: Veche, 2001), p. 65.
56. Bol’shakova, 1936–1937 gg., p. 24.
57. Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, chap. 11.

## CHAPTER 8. THE REPRESSORS’ DILEMMA

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3. O. L. Leibovich, ed., *“Vkliuchen v operatsiiu”: Massovy terror v Prikam’e 1937–38 gg.* (Perm: Permskii Gosudarstvennyi Tekhnicheskii Universitet, 2006), pp. 18, 19, 22, 28, 39, 43, 52.
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6. Valerii Vasiliev, “The Great Terror in the Ukraine, 1936–1938,” in *Stalin’s Terror Revisited*, ed. Melanie Ilic (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 140–162.
7. David Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism: Social Order and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union, 1928–1953* (forthcoming), chap. 11.
8. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner*, p. 83.
9. Of these persons, the editors were able to establish that nine were executed during the Great Terror. Bol’shakova, 1936–1937 gg., pp. 145–149.
10. V. S. Zhukovskii, *Lubianskaia imperiia NKVD 1937–1938* (Moscow: Veche, 2001), p. 56.
11. Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, chap. 11.
12. Vasiliev, “The Great Terror in the Ukraine,” pp. 140–162.
13. Iunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal “bol’shim,”* chap. 3.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
15. The highest bidders (on a per capita basis) were Chechnya, Mariiskaia Autonomous Republic and Moscow province. The low bidders were Moldavia, Kirov province, and Karelia.
16. Bogdanov, *Strogo sekretno*, p. 123.
17. N. Vert and S. V. Mironenko, eds., *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, Istoriiia Stalin-skogo Gulaga, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 1 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), p. 272.
18. “Protocol No. 51, September 2, 1937: To change the July 10 1937 decision of the Central Committee to allow the Kirov Municipal Committee to raise the number of persons to be repressed in the first category [execution] up to 900 persons,” or Protocol No. 54 of October 8, 1937: “To approve the proposal of the Gorky Oblast Committee to raise the number to be repressed in the first category by 1000 persons.” Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 290–292. These are excerpts from the protocols of meetings of the Politburo on the questions of the raising of limits of repressed according to NKVD Order No. 00447, September 2–August 29, 1937.
19. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner*, p. 92.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
21. Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, chap. 11.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner*, p. 113.
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25. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
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27. Bogdanov, *Strogo sekretno*, p. 148.
28. Bystroletov, *Pir bessmertnykh*, pp. 68–69.
29. “Lenskii rastrel,” [www.memorial.ru](http://www.memorial.ru).
30. Fond 17, op. 2, del. 602, l. 104.

31. "Letter of the Secretary of the Novosibirsk Obkom Alekseev to J. V. Stalin about the Repression of Party Workers in Novosibirsk Province," September 4, 1938. Vert and Mironenko, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 302–303.
32. "Report of the Secretary of Sverdlovsk Obkom Valukhin about an Increase in the Limit of Repressions in Accordance with Order No. 00447," September 27, 1938. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
33. Vasiliev, "The Great Terror in the Ukraine," pp. 148–150.
34. Bol'shakova, 1936–1937 gg., pp. 298–299.
35. N. V. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i VChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD, ianvar' 1922–dekabr' 1936* (Moscow: Fond Demokraciia, 2003), pp. 764–765.
36. We can only approximate the number of convictions by regions at the end of 1938 from the number of arrests by applying conviction-to-arrest ratios for each year. The aggregate figures will be accurate but the regional figures may be a little off due to different conviction-to-arrest rates by regions.
37. Insofar as the fifty-two regions account for 96 percent of the population, we adjust the figures upward by 4 percent to allow for the missing regions.
38. Iunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim,"* p. 217.
39. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, pp. 90–91.
40. Leibovich, "Vkliuchen v operatsiiu," pp. 45–56.
41. V. Petrov and K. V. Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD, 1934–1941* (Moscow: Zvenia, 1999), pp. 450–451.
42. N. V. Petrov, ed., *Karatel'naia sistema: Struktury i kadry, Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, ed. V. P. Kozlov, vol. 2 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), pp. 173–177. The data are for March 23, 1940.
43. Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, pp. 495, 499.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 492–493.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–79.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–464.
47. Among these. see Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming); and Khlevniuk, *Stalin's Party Secretaries* (forthcoming).
48. Jörg Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror: Die Geschichte des Stalinismus* (Munich: DVA, 2003), p. 157.
49. Khlevniuk, *Stalin's Party Secretaries*.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, pp. 166–171.
52. Fond 558, op. 11, del. 65, ll. 34–35. Telegram from Andreev to Stalin reporting on Sverdlovsk city party conference, May 31, 1935.
53. James Harris, *The Great Urals: Regionalism and the Evolution of the Soviet System* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); pp. 162–163.
54. Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 166.
55. Iunge and Binner, *Kak terror stal "bol'shim,"* p. 226.
56. Oleg Khlevnyuk, "Economic Officials in the Great Terror, 1936–1938," in Ilic, *Stalin's Terror Revisited*, p. 59.
57. V. V. Denisov et al., *TsK VKP(b) i regional'nye partiinye komitety 1945–1953* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), p. 8.

58. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, p. 149.
59. Ibid., p. 91.
60. Leibovich, "Vkliuchen v operatsiui", chap. 6.
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# Index

*Figures and tables are indicated by f and t following the page numbers.*

- Abakumov, Viktor, 54, 56, 91–92, 93, 271  
 Active resisters, 111, 138, 194, 257–58, 268, 270  
 Age as repression factor, 129–30, 130f, 139  
 Agency chains and state security, 9, 83–85, 86, 96–97, 104, 274–75  
 Agitation, 113, 126, 263–64. *See also* Pro-paganda  
 Agranov, Ia. S., 93  
 Alcohol and alcoholism, 47, 71, 273, 278  
 Andreev, Andrei, 84, 247  
 Andropov, Yury, 65, 252  
 Anti-Semitism, 53, 265  
 Antitheft laws, 178, 204. *See also* Criminals and crime  
 Arson. *See* Wreckers and wrecking  
 Article 58 of Russian Federation Criminal Code: and cadres, 121–22; counter-revolutionary crimes under, 112–14, 125; political crimes under, 127, 262, 264; pro-paganda under, 263  
 Atomic bombs, 48, 83  
 Augustus Caesar, 33–34, 95  
 Banned parties: arrest of members of, 110; convictions for belonging to, 262; hiring of members of, 75; under Lenin, 108; NKVD leadership in, 64, 64t; removal from office, 197  
 Bazhanov, Boris, 82  
 Beloborodov, A. G., 160  
 Berdiaev, Nikolai, 69  
 Beria, Lavrenty: and agency chains, 83, 84, 85; brutality of, 44, 273; as Chekist, 41, 42; and choice of subordinates, 79, 80; and clan loyalties, 76; compromised background of, 46–47, 59; education of, 66; and Gulag, 96; and independent power, 42–43, 50, 59; Khrushchev on, 39, 40–41, 43, 47–48, 56–57, 162–63, 271; material rewards enjoyed by, 53; meetings with Stalin, 101, 102f, 103; and MVD, 92–93; and national operations, 192; in NKVD leadership, 90, 91, 283, 284t; and number of convictions, 233; organizational skills of, 48; and Politburo, 51, 68, 160–64; and regional party committees, 52; removal of, 25, 41, 54, 57–58, 141, 271; as scapegoat, 277; and state security, 40, 77, 104; surviving Stalin years, 56–57, 59, 247–48  
 Berman, Matvei, 62  
 Betrayal, 35, 36–37



- Bids and bidding, 224–30, 226–27*t*, 229*f*, 238, 246
- Binner, Rolf, 189, 228, 236
- Bogdanov, Iu. N., 223
- Bolsheviks and Bolshevik Party: education of, 65; enemies of, 279; and independent thinkers, 119; and innocent victims, 28; Old Bolsheviks, 67–68, 80, 139, 160, 248, 264; and political models, 255–56; power of, 108; public opinion of, 111; society vs. individuals, 107; and treason charges, 112
- Breakthrough. *See* Great Breakthrough program
- Brezhnev, Leonid, 248
- Bukharin, Nikolai: charges against, 150; on communist human material, 107; deportation of wife of, 125; favor for, 152; intimidation of, 150; and Kirov assassination, 54; and kulaks, 118; as Politburo member, 145, 148; and “rightist” platform, 146; and soft-heartedness, 272; trial of, 133, 157, 160, 180; victims under, 257; on Yezhov, 44
- Butovsky Polygon (Moscow killing field), 273
- Buzdes, Abram, 62
- Cadet Party, 46
- Cadres (economic administrators), 121–24, 126–27, 138, 209, 262
- Camp administration. *See* Gulag
- Capital punishment: and Beria, 58, 164; harshness of, 269–70; and kulaks, 181; model for, 14; number of victims, 20*f*, 21; and troikas, 206; in tsarist Russia, 29. *See also* Executions
- Central Committee: and Beria’s indictment, 57, 163; and control of Politburo proceedings, 144; and dekulakization, 175, 178; and end of Great Terror, 214; execution of members, 154; under Lenin, 6–7; and mass operations, 182; and OGPU, 211; and planning of mass repressions, 171; secrecy of, 40–41; and Stalin’s calculation of enemy numbers, 169; and Tomsky’s dismissal, 151; and United Opposition, 147. *See also* Politburo
- Central Control Commission, 51, 141
- Challengers, political. *See* Incumbents and challengers, political
- Charisma, 38, 42–43
- Cheka and Chekists (state security organization), 60–80; Cheka decree (1919), 115; clans among, 74–76; and compromised hierarchies, 61–65, 80; and contract commitment problem, 34, 35; and control of repression cycle, 205; and economic rewards, 72–74, 80; education of, 65–67, 66*t*, 80; and ideology, 67–72, 80; leadership choice among, 41–53, 58, 272; loyalty of, 296–97; and mass operations, 185, 186; and moral qualms, 43–45; and nationality, 25, 61–65, 62*t*, 272–73; and nominations, 79; party membership, 67–72, 68*t*; power of, 39–40; Stalin’s “two paths” for, 54–58; and state security, 76–79, 80, 93–95, 273–77; threat to Stalin from, 38–41; titles for, 53. *See also* Operational workers; Praetorian Guard; State security
- Children. *See* Family members, repression of Chubar, V. Ia., 148, 156
- Civil liberties, 114, 198
- Civil police: function of, 89; and Gulag, 95–96, 104; in internal affairs, 5; number of, 94*t*, 96; and OGPU, 87, 273; power of, 274
- Civil War (1918–1921), 3, 16, 29, 86, 197
- Clans, 74–76
- Class origins: and compromised hierarchies, 61–65, 62*t*; as factor in persecutions, 130–31, 131*f*, 138, 139; in Marxist theory, 264. *See also* Nationalities
- Codified laws, 111–14, 138, 267. *See also* Criminals and crime
- Collectivization: opposition to, 16, 118, 172, 194, 197; success of, 175–76, 180, 210
- Committee for State Security. *See* KGB
- Communication, Ministry of, 49–50
- Compromised hierarchies, 61–65, 80
- Confessions: by Beria, 163; Chekist access to, 40; fabrication of, 215–16, 223–24; and framing enemies, 289; importance of, 155, 267; in prisoners’ dilemma, 220, 234–35; and productivity problem, 202, 203, 207–9, 216, 218; as repression technique, 132, 133–34, 139, 207–9; at show trials, 156–57, 159–60, 165, 223, 270. *See also* Denunciations; Interrogations
- Conquest, Robert, 2
- Constantine (Roman emperor), 33
- Contract commitment problems, 34–35

- Convictions: for "counterrevolutionary agitation," 263; for espionage, 262, 263; extrajudicial, 15–16, 15*f*, 22, 23*f*; and extraordinary measures, 223–24; number of, 15*f*, 126–27, 187, 222, 223*f*, 236, 237*f*, 296; per operational worker, 203, 217, 217*f*; and political crimes, 262; by troikas, 235–36, 235*f*; for wrecking, 127, 262
- Corrective labor, 21, 87
- Council of People's Commissars, 25, 214
- Counterintelligence Administration (GUKR), 5
- Counterrevolutionary activities. *See* Treason
- Coups, 35–36, 36–37
- Courts, 21–23, 23*f*, 204–5, 208, 213. *See also* Extrajudicial tribunals; Show trials; Troikas
- Crimean Tartars, 48
- Criminals and crime: arrests for political crimes, 17, 18*f*, 261–64; cadres as, 122, 123; codified criminal law, 107, 110, 111–14, 138, 267; common, 121, 138, 261; criminal procedure, 28, 204; extraordinary measures, 114–17; kulaks as, 118–19; and political enemies, 109–11; political vs. economic crimes, 14, 127, 128*f*, 263; repression of, 258. *See also* Antitheft laws; Article 58 of Russian Federation Criminal Code; Political enemies
- Cyclicity, 14, 15–17, 15*f*, 259–61
- Death penalty. *See* Capital punishment
- Defense of the Revolutionary Order decree (1923), 115
- Deich, Iakov, 62
- Dekulakization: and age of victims, 130; decree announcing, 118–19, 124; and enemies, 194, 196, 197, 199, 201; under Evdokimov, 69; fulfillment of, 254, 260; and Gulag, 273–74; as mass repression, 172–80, 177*t*, 179*t*, 193; and operational workers, 94, 104, 212–13, 217–18; quotas for, 177*t*, 179*t*, 184–85, 188; and scapegoating, 210; and social class, 83, 111, 138; as terror campaign, 166; and troikas, 205–6, 266; under Yagoda, 87. *See also* Kulaks; Peasants
- Democracies: arrests in, 254; ethnic minorities in, 264; killing of own citizens, 252–53, 253*t*; objective of law in, 107; political enemies in, 3–4; punishment in, 269; trials in, 204
- Democratic centralism, 143
- Denunciations, 40, 158–59, 194. *See also* Confessions
- Deportations: under Beria, 48; of ethnic populations, 42, 192, 267; under Evdokimov, 69; and mass operations, 187; in 1940s, 16–17; numbers of, 176, 178–79, 179*t*; of peasants, 167–68, 172–73, 267; secrecy of, 136; under Yagoda, 45, 47, 71. *See also* Resettlements
- Desensitization, 132, 135, 289
- Dictators and dictatorship: absolute dictatorship, 151–53, 164; and contract commitment problem, 34–35; definition of, 32; execution of own citizens, 252–53, 253*t*; models of, 11–14; nested dictatorship, 60–61; and political enemies, 257–58, 279–80; in principal-agent problems, 6–8; and punishment, 269
- Dissidents, 278
- Diversionist-terrorist groups, 215, 224
- Dmitriev, Dmitry, 238–39
- Drunkenness. *See* Alcohol and alcoholism
- Duranty, William, 133
- Dzerzhinsky, Feliks: in Chekist leadership, 4, 39, 273; on common criminals, 121; on control of repression cycle, 205; death from natural causes, 24; and education, 65, 67; independent power of, 42; on innocent victims, 28, 268; and Lenin, 85, 275; nationality of, 63; in OGPU, 53, 86, 145; Politburo membership, 51, 68–69, 80; on political enemies, 258; and punitive organs, 41; and purge of intellectuals, 120; and Red Terror, 110
- Economic administrators. *See* Cadres
- Economic rewards, 72–74, 80
- Economy. *See* Political economies
- Education, 66*t*, 80, 127–29, 129*f*, 139, 296
- Egorov, Georgy, 38
- Eikhe, Robert, 246–47, 248
- Eliminations model, 166–71, 193–201, 260, 268, 293–94
- Elites. *See* Party membership and party elite
- Enemies of state. *See* Political enemies
- Errors. *See* Mistakes
- Espionage: and Article 58, 113; prosecution and conviction for, 200, 262, 263; and purge of party elite, 180–81; and treason in U.S., 21, 112

- Espionage Act of 1919 (U.S.), 21
- Ethnic groups. *See* Minorities; Nationalities; National operations
- Evdokimov, Efimm, 69–71, 75, 80, 270
- Excesses, cost of, 222–24, 223*f*
- Executions: bids for, 226–27*t*, 228; and Law of December 1 (1934), 155; lists of persons, 101, 287–88; and NKVD, 71–72; numbers killed by political system, 16, 252–53, 253*t*; of party members, 154; and troikas, 207; Ukrainian involvement in, 72; for wrecking, 45, 116, 210, 212
- Extrajudicial tribunals: and dekulakization, 118; disagreement over, 205; limits on, 213; and mass repressions, 115–17, 266–67; in 1930s, 166; and number of convictions, 15–16, 15*f*, 21–23, 23*f*, 236. *See also* Courts; Show trials; Troikas
- Extraordinary measures, 5, 114–17, 138, 240, 267
- Factionalism, 150
- Facts. *See* Stylized facts
- Family members, repression of, 11, 124–25, 137. *See also* Women
- Famines, 45, 152, 266
- Federal Security Service (FSB), 3
- “Foreign base” conspiracy (*inobaz*), 238
- Foreign intelligence. *See* Smersh
- “Former people,” 108, 135
- Frinovsky, M. P., 93, 183, 190
- Gaevsky, Alexander, 137
- Game theory, 220–23, 224. *See also* Prisoners’ dilemma
- Genocide, 253
- Georgians, 50, 64, 246, 249
- Germany and Germans: civil servants in, 34; and “German operations,” 224; in leadership roles, 25; and national operations, 191, 192–93; number of enemies among, 198–99; as operational workers, 244*t*, 245, 249; U.S. treatment of, during World War II, 3, 21
- Gorky, Maxim, 119
- Great Breakthrough program, 117, 149, 152, 197
- Great Terror: end of, 187, 214; and Evdokimov, 70; execution during, 16; and extrajudicial troikas, 115–16; and GUGB, 94–95, 103; and nationality of NKVD leadership, 64; and Old Bolsheviks, 68, 80; and prisoners’ dilemma, 220; regional party influence, 188; repression of managers, 124; under Yezhov, 41–42, 55. *See also* Lesser terror; Mass repressions; Terror, planning of; Yezhovshchina (1937–1938)
- GUGB (Main Directorate of State Security), 88–90, 93, 94–95, 103, 185, 186
- Guiding Principles of Criminal Law of 1919, 109
- GUKR (Counterintelligence Administration), 5
- Gulag (Main Administration of Camps): and civil police, 95–96, 104; and cost of incarceration, 269; and dekulakization, 273–74; family members sent to, 125; function of, 89–90; length of sentences, 21; and mass operations, 184, 187; and OGPU, 87; organization and size of, 2, 279, 283, 285*t*; rape in, 74; and rumors of war, 199; under Yagoda, 41, 47
- Gypsies, 125–26
- “Harvest of sorrow” (1931–1932), 266
- Hayek, F. A., 37–38, 59
- Hierarchs. *See* Compromised hierarchs
- Highest measure of punishment. *See* Capital punishment
- Historical facts. *See* Stylized facts
- Hitler, Adolf, 126
- Households. *See* Family members, repression of
- Hungarian Revolution (1956), 277
- Iakir, Ion, 180
- Iakovlev, M. N., 235
- Ideology: and dictatorship, 82; and party membership, 67–72; and state security, 79, 80
- Ignatiev, S., 213
- Incumbents and challengers, political, 142–43, 164
- Independent power, 42–43, 50, 58, 59
- Independent thinkers, 119–20, 139. *See also* Intellectuals and intelligentsia
- Industrialization. *See* Superindustrialization
- Informants, 39, 117, 152, 169, 195, 258
- Initial limits. *See* Bids and bidding
- Innocent victims, 8, 28, 268–69
- Inobaz* (“Foreign base” conspiracy), 238
- Intellectuals and intelligentsia, 29, 35, 65, 71, 85, 119–20. *See also* Independent thinkers

- Intelligence. *See* Espionage; GUKR; Smersh
- Intelligentsia. *See* Intellectuals and intelligentsia
- Internal affairs, 5, 90–93, 274
- Internal affairs, ministry for. *See* MVD
- Internal affairs, people's commissariat for. *See* NKVD
- Interrogations, 156, 157–58, 160, 208–9, 235–36. *See also* Confessions
- Intoxication. *See* Alcohol and alcoholism
- Iran, dictatorship in, 12, 258
- Israel, intelligence agencies in, 3
- Japan and Japanese, 3, 21, 34
- Jewish Autonomous Republic, 56
- Jews: anti-Semitism, 53, 265; in leadership roles, 25, 62, 63–64, 264–65; and national operations, 192; as operational workers, 244*t*, 245, 249; Yagoda's background, 46, 53
- Journeymen, 244*t*, 245
- Junge, Mark, 189, 228, 236
- Justice systems. *See* Courts; Extrajudicial tribunals; Show trials; Troikas
- Kaganovich, Lazar: brother's suicide, 111; denunciation of, 40; and filling state security positions, 77; and mass operations, 182; as Politburo member, 148; on political enemies, 138; public humiliation by Stalin, 48; and regional parties, 49, 84; surviving purges, 160; and troikas, 207
- Kalinin, Mikhail I., 111, 107, 148, 149, 152
- Kamenev, Lev: confessions of, 208; and Kirov assassination, 45, 54, 155; nationality of, 63; as Politburo member, 144–45, 148; power of, 52; trial of, 133, 157, 160; and United Opposition, 146
- Kaminsky, Grisha, 47
- Karatel'nye organy*. *See* Organs
- Katyn Affair, 206, 267
- Kazakhstan, 97, 184, 193
- Kedrov, Maizel, 43–44
- KGB (Committee for State Security), 3, 93. *See also* MGB
- Khlevniuk, Oleg, 212
- Khopersk affair, 45
- Khrushchev, Nikita: on Beria, 39, 40–41, 43, 47–48, 56–57, 162–63, 271; dismissal of Kruglov, 92; on “lucky tickets,” 243, 272; and NKVD role, 55; ordering death sentences, 212; organizational skills of, 161; as party secretary, 248; personnel changes under, 77; and regional party bosses, 49; removal of, 164; secret speech of, 28, 136, 188, 277; on Stalin, 38–39, 49, 50; as Stalin's dinner guest, 43
- Killings. *See* Executions
- Kirov, Sergei, 45, 46, 54–55, 114, 140, 148
- Kondratiev, N. D., 120, 150
- Koreans, 110, 114, 191
- Kosior, S. V., 52, 148
- “Kremlin Affair,” 45, 155
- Kremlin politics, 140–65, 256; and absolute dictatorship, 151–53, 164; Beria vs. Politburo, 160–64, 165; elimination of United Opposition, 148–49; and NKVD, 154–56; and purge of party elite, 154–56; and right opposition, 148–51; selectorate theory, 142–45, 146–47, 149, 164, 291–92, 292*f*; and show trials, 156–60, 165; and United Opposition, 145–47
- “Kremlin ration,” 72, 73
- Krestinsky, Nikolai, 160
- Kruglov, S. N., 28, 49, 91–92, 96, 162, 164
- Krylenko, Nikolai, 52, 112, 122, 174, 205
- Kuibyshev, V. V., 148
- Kulaks (village leaders): deportation of, 16, 69; as political enemies, 108, 110, 115, 117–19; sympathy for, 135. *See also* Dekulakization; Peasants
- Labor. *See* Corrective labor
- Lamenev, Lev, 45
- Latvians in national operations, 191
- Law of December 1 (1934), 155, 207–8
- Lenin, Vladimir: and agency chains, 85; and Council of People's Commissars, 25; on dictatorship, 6; and Dzerzhinsky, 85, 275; executions under, 29, 273; and intellectuals, 85, 119–20; organs under, 2; and Politburo, 6–7, 144; and political enemies, 108, 135, 138, 280; and productivity problem, 202–3; succession of, 140, 141, 164, 165, 257; on treason, 112–13
- Leningrad, repressions in, 97
- Lenin Prize, 59
- Leplevsky, I. M., 233–34
- Lesser terror, 105, 256, 277, 278. *See also* Great Terror
- Limits. *See* Quotas
- Loyalty: and compromising information, 45; and dictatorship, 35–36, 81, 259; and economic rents, 72, 80, 296; and education,

Loyalty (*continued*)

- 67; framing enemies to maintain, 132–37, 289–90, 290*f*; and interpersonal skills, 48; and power-maximizing dictatorship model, 104, 139, 281–82, 282*f*; and Praetorians, 37; in regional clans, 75–76; and repression, 12–14, 106, 132, 139, 203, 253; of selectorate, 142; and simplified methods, 295–97, 296*f*; to Stalin, 42
- Main Administration of Camps. *See* Gulag
- Main Directorate of State Security. *See* GUGB
- Malenkov, Georgy, 43, 56, 57, 83, 123, 161
- Mao Zedong, 277
- Marginals, 35, 125–26, 178
- Martial law, 114, 266
- Mass repressions, 166, 180–90, 187*t*, 193, 274; appointments during, 243–45, 244*t*; and civil police, 96; cyclicity of, 29–31, 30–31*t*, 85, 259–61; enemies in, 83, 194–95, 199; extrajudicial tribunals during, 266–67; fulfillment of, 188–90, 189*t*, 234–46, 254; as glue or fatal virus, 277–80; and misinterpretation of instructions, 212–13; NKVD blame for, 211–12; number of victims, 16, 167, 255–59; procedures for planning, 171–72; quotas for, 186, 188, 189*t*; secrecy of, 136; of “specialists,” 65; working arrangements of, 32. *See also* Great Terror; National operations
- Measures. *See* Simplified measures
- Media. *See* Press
- Meetings, 98–103, 100*f*, 102*f*, 104–5
- Mekhlis, L. Z., 84
- Mensheviks and Menshevik Party, 8, 46, 110, 117, 195
- Menzhinsky, V. P., 24, 53, 87, 173–74, 175, 211
- Merkulov, V. N., 54, 62, 90, 91–92, 93
- Mesquita, Bueno de, 142
- MGB (Ministry of State Security), 91, 93, 97. *See also* KGB; NKGB
- Mikoyan, Anastas, 48, 144, 160
- Ministry of Communications, 49–50
- Ministry of State Security. *See* MGB
- Minorities, 52–53, 62–63, 80, 264–66, 268. *See also* Nationalities
- Mironov, S. N., 181, 225
- Mistakes: attributed to party, 276; blame for, 209, 262; and crime, 123–24; dictatorship compromised by, 251; and scapegoating, 279
- Mogochino (village), 287–88
- Molotov, V. M.: and Beria’s indictment, 57; and dekulakization, 174; interpretation of instructions, 213; and planning of mass repressions, 171; in Politburo, 148; and Stalin, 43, 48, 53, 100–101; surviving purges, 160; and troikas, 207; wife’s arrest, 11
- Morality, 10–11, 43–45
- Moscow: and regional administrations, 97–98; show trials in, 156–60
- Moscow Counterrevolutionary Center, 55
- MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs): arrests for political crimes, 17, 18*f*; under Beria, 57, 92–93, 161–64; and Gulag, 21; number of convictions, 15, 15*f*; protecting Stalin, 38; salary of, 72–73; successor to NKVD, 91. *See also* NKVD
- Nationalities: as enemies of state, 17, 19, 19*f*; identification of, 195; of NKVD leadership, 25, 26*f*, 62–63, 63*t*; number of enemies among, 198–99; of operational workers, 244*t*, 245–46. *See also* Class origins; Minorities
- National operations: and identification of enemies, 194, 195, 196; as mass repression, 166, 190–93, 192*t*; and number of convictions, 236; quotas for, 191–92; and use of troikas, 266. *See also* Mass repressions
- Nazis, 2, 12
- Newspapers. *See* Press
- NKGB (People’s Commissariat for State Security), 90–91, 92*f*, 93, 103. *See also* MGB
- NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs): arrests for political crimes, 17, 18*f*; banned party membership, 64, 64*t*; bidding and initial limits, 225; and clan loyalties, 75; and class origins, 130, 131*f*; and confessions, 208, 270; criticism of, 214–15; economic position of, 73–74; education of, 66–67, 66*t*; execution of members, 40, 239; and executions, 71; and extrajudicial procedures, 205; and filling state security positions, 25–27, 27*f*, 77–78; and identification of enemies, 195; and limits, 230–31, 234–35; and marginals,

- 126; and mass operations, 182–86, 187*t*, 188–90, 211–12; model for state security, 88–90, 89*f*, 91, 92*f*, 104; and nationality, 25, 26*f*, 62–63, 63*t*; and national operations, 190–92; number of convictions, 15, 15*f*, 16; organization and size of, 74–75, 97, 283, 284–86*t*; party membership of, 68, 68*t*; power of, 39, 55, 248; productivity of, 217; protecting Stalin, 38; and purge of party elite, 145, 154–56, 165; and rumors of war, 199; and scapegoating, 211–12, 249, 271, 276; and show trials, 156; social origins of, 61–62, 62*t*; study of, 2–3; survival rate among, 24–25, 24*f*, 239–46, 241*t*, 244*t*, 249, 271; as terror managers, 219. *See also* MVD
- Nominations, 79, 150–51
- OGPU (State Political Directorate): age as repression factor, 129–30, 130*f*; and agency chains, 85; and cadres, 122–23; and class origins, 130, 131*f*; and dekulakization, 117, 172–75, 178–79, 194; and marginals, 126; model for state security, 86–88, 88*f*, 104; number of convictions, 15, 15*f*, 16; operational workers employed, 67, 94*t*; organization of, 74, 97; and political enemies, 4, 17, 18*f*, 108–9; power of, 39, 45, 52–53; and productivity problem, 203; protection of, 210–11, 276; and purge of party elite, 145, 154–56, 165; and repression of intellectuals, 120; and rumors of war, 199; and scapegoating, 210–11; and troikas, 206; and uprisings in Ukraine, 95
- Okhrana (tsarist secret police), 46, 125
- Operational workers: and case reviews, 216; and confessions, 223–24; and dekulakization, 87, 104, 212–13; education of, 67; employment of, 94, 94*t*; function of, 85, 93, 274; and misinterpretation of instructions, 212–13, 262–63; nationality of, 244*t*, 254; numbers of, 78; and principal-agent problem, 7; productivity of, 203, 217–18, 217*f*; and regional administrations, 98; salaries of, 72; and scapegoating, 242. *See also* Cheka and Chekists
- Order of the Red Banner, 210
- Ordzhonikidze, Sergo: brother's arrest, 11, 52; communications with Stalin, 100–101; as Politburo member, 148; suicide of, 38, 145, 148; on Syrtsov's denunciation, 152–53; victims under, 257
- Organs (*karatel'nye organy*): arrests for political crimes, 17; filling positions in, 76–78, 80; and limits, 254; survival of members, 249; working arrangements of, 1–2, 5. *See also* KGB; MVD; NKVD; OGPU
- Outlawed parties. *See* Banned parties
- Overfulfillment, 189–90, 220, 234–46, 254
- Overthrow, dictatorial. *See* Coups
- Pankratiev, M. P., 205
- Party Control Commission, 38, 61, 76, 156
- Party membership and party elite: dictatorship of, 255–56; and ideology, 67–72; length of membership, 68, 68*t*; purge of, 154–56, 165, 180–81, 235, 247–48, 250; survival rates of party secretaries, 246–48, 250
- Passportization campaign (1933), 96, 178–79, 206
- Peasants: class origins of, 130–31, 131*f*, 196; and collectivization, 172; deportation of, 167–68, 172–73, 178; and mass starvation, 45; repression of, 35; worker-peasant state, 106–8. *See also* Dekulakization; Kulaks
- People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. *See* NKVD
- People's Commissariat for State Security. *See* NKGB
- Poles: and assassination of Soviet ambassador, 205; in leadership roles, 25, 264–65; and national operations, 191–92; number of enemies among, 198–99; as operational workers, 244*t*, 245, 249
- Politburo: ban on private meetings, 51, 150; and Beria, 160–64; and dekulakization, 173–74, 176, 178; and foreign citizens, 112; and mass operations, 182, 184, 189–90; members of, 50, 148–49, 154; and national operations, 191, 192; on peasants and workers, 106, 107; planning of mass repressions, 171–72; repression by, 120, 141, 145, 234, 236; and selectorate theory, 143–45, 161, 291, 292*f*; Stalin's domination of, 151–53; and state security positions, 40, 77, 79; and troikas, 207; and United Opposition, 145–47, 148. *See also* Central Committee
- Political directorate. *See* OGPU

- Political economies, 5–11, 32
- Political enemies, 106–39, 256–58, 279–80; and Article 58, 112–14, 121–22, 125, 127; cadres as, 121–24, 126–27, 138, 262; and codified laws, 111–14, 138, 267; and confessions, 133–34, 139; criminals as, 121, 138; defining, 108–11, 117–19, 139; and desensitization, 135; extraordinary measures, 114–17, 138; family members as, 124–25, 137; image vs. reality, 126–31, 128*f*, 129*f*, 130*f*; independent thinkers as, 119–20, 139; kulaks as, 117–19; and loyalty, 132–37, 289–90, 290*f*; marginals as, 125–26; numbers in Siberian settlement, 287–88; and principal-agent problem, 7–8; and secrecy, 136–37, 139; and show trials, 133–34, 139; in states generally, 3–5; and worker-peasant state, 106–8. *See also* Criminals and crime
- Politics. *See* Kremlin politics
- Poskrebyshv, A. N., 11
- Post-Stalin leadership, 29, 278
- Postyshev, P. P., 155–56
- Potency factor, 168–70, 193, 199–200, 293
- Power. *See* Independent power; Power-maximizing dictatorship model
- Power-maximizing dictatorship model: definition of, 13–14, 281–82, 282*f*; and dictatorial eliminations model, 168; and filling of leadership positions, 42, 76, 81, 166; and framing enemies, 132, 289; and loyalty, 104, 139, 281–82, 282*f*; and rational choice model, 9, 32, 295; and repression, 126, 260, 264; and selectorate theory, 142
- Praetorian Guard, 33–59; and charisma, 42–43; and Chekist leadership choice, 41–53, 58; and Chekist threat, 38–41; compromised backgrounds of, 45–47, 58, 59, 272, 273; contract commitment problem, 34–35; and independent power, 42–43, 58, 59; minorities as segregating factor, 52–53; and moral qualms, 43–45; organizational skills of, 47–48; segregation of Chekist leaders, 51–52; Stalin factor, 48–52, 58; Stalin's model of, 35–38, 203, 270–72; success of, 252; “two paths” for Chekists, 54–58. *See also* Cheka and Chekists
- Press: control by dictator, 132; control by party, 265; and dekulakization, 174; outlawing of, 114; and secrecy, 136; and show trials, 133, 156
- Principal-agents, 6–9, 81–82
- Print media. *See* Press
- Prison administration. *See* Gulag
- Prisoners' dilemma, 220, 224, 230, 234, 243, 248, 249. *See also* Game theory; Repressors' dilemma
- Productivity problems, 202–18, 217*f*; and confessions, 202, 203, 207–9, 216, 218; and mass operations, 211–12; and misinterpretation of instructions, 212–13; model for, 203, 297; and NKVD, 211–12; OGPU protection, 210–11; and scapegoating, 209–16; and troikas, 204–7, 216, 267. *See also* Simplified measures
- Propaganda: antireligious, 119; under Article 58, 113, 263; control by party, 265; convictions for, 262; and framing enemies, 289; and loyalty, 13, 296; and political enemies, 132, 135. *See also* Agitation
- Property rights under dictatorships, 35
- Punishment. *See* Capital punishment; Deportations; Executions; Resettlements
- Punitive organs. *See* Organs (*karatel'nye organy*)
- Purges: of intellectuals, 119–20; of party elite, 154–56, 180–81, 235, 247–48, 250; of regional party bosses, 49; of selectorates, 142–43; of specialists, 197
- Putin, Vladimir, 65, 253
- Puznitsky, S. V., 158–59
- Quotas: and arrests, 224; and dekulakization, 184–85; fulfillment and overfulfillment, 234–46; increase in, 230–34, 232*f*, 238, 249, 254–55; and initial bidding, 224–30, 226–27*t*, 229*f*; and mass operations, 186, 188, 189*t*; and national operations, 191–92; and planning of repression, 254; and rational choice theory, 9; in regions, 84, 175, 183, 184; and repression performance, 239, 241*t*
- Rape, 74, 273
- Rational choice model: and dictatorial eliminations model, 166–68, 170–71; of framing enemies, 289–90, 290*f*; and power-maximizing dictatorship model, 32, 295; and quotas, 9; and rationality of dictatorial



- actions, 10, 254; repressions explained by, 9–10, 58–59, 252. *See also* Rationality
- Rationality, 10–11, 254. *See also* Rational choice model
- Rations. *See* “Kremlin ration”
- Red Army, 86, 103, 135, 146, 174, 175
- Redens, S. F., 98
- Red Terror decree (1918), 4, 29, 109–10, 115, 121, 205
- Regions and regional administrations: and clans, 75; competition among, 238; fate of NKVD leaders, 239–46, 241*t*, 244*t*, 249, 271; fate of party leaders, 246–48; and game theory model, 220–21, 222–23; and number of convictions, 236, 237*f*; party committees, 49, 52, 56, 175; quotas in, 84, 175, 183, 184, 224–30, 226–27*t*, 230–34, 232*f*; and repressors’ dilemma, 271; and state security organization, 96–98, 104; and terror managers, 219
- Rents, economic, 12, 72, 80, 296
- Repression: definition of, 5; performance, 239–40, 241*f*, 242. *See also* Mass repressions; Repressors’ dilemma; *specific government leaders*
- Repression of Wives decree (1937), 125
- Repressors’ dilemma, 219, 220–22, 221*f*, 238–39, 240, 260, 271. *See also* Prisoners’ dilemma; Terror managers
- Resettlements, 176, 178, 187, 195. *See also* Deportations
- Resisters. *See* Active resisters
- Revolutionary Tribunal, 116
- Revolution constraints, 168, 170–71, 260, 293
- Rewards. *See* Economic rewards
- Right Deviationists, 54, 140–41, 148–51, 155, 247
- Riutin, M. I., 140
- Rivals, political. *See* Incumbents and challengers, political
- Roman emperors, 33–34
- Rudenko, Roman, 28
- Rudzutak, Ya. E., 148
- Rukhimovich, M. L., 160
- Rule of law, 34–35
- Rykov, Aleksei: charges against, 150; and dekulakization, 118, 174; execution of wife of, 125; favor for, 152; as Politburo member, 144–45, 148, 151; on public speeches, 153; as Right Deviationist, 54, 146; trial of, 133, 157–58, 160, 180
- Sabotage. *See* Wreckers and wrecking
- Sadists and sadism, 11, 44, 70, 74, 272, 273. *See also* Torture
- Scapegoating, 209–16, 242, 249, 271, 276–77, 279
- Secrecy, 2, 132, 136–37, 139, 206, 289
- Secret Operational Department, 69
- Secret police. *See* KGB; Okhrana
- Secret workers, 86
- Security. *See* State security
- Selectorate theory and maintaining power, 142–53, 291–92, 292*f*; and anti-Beria coalition, 163; Politburo as, 143–45, 149, 161, 164
- Shakhty affair, 45, 116, 210, 211
- Shlenov, Dmitry, 238–39
- Sholokhov, Mikhail, 119
- Show trials: and confessions, 208, 223, 270; Dmitriev’s request for, 238; of Estonians, 112; and framing enemies, 289; in Moscow, 156–60; as repression technique, 132, 133–34, 139. *See also* Courts; Extra-judicial tribunals
- Simplified measures, 4, 202–18, 217*f*, 222, 223*f*, 295–97, 296*f*. *See also* Productivity problems
- Sinel’nikov, Vasily, 116
- SLON (Solovetsky Camp of Special Designation), 87
- Smersh (foreign intelligence organization), 5, 91
- Smirnov, A. P., 51, 153, 198
- Social class. *See* Class origins
- Socialist legality, 204, 206, 207, 271
- Socialist Revolutionary Party, 69, 117
- Socially dangerous acts and groups. *See* Criminals and crime
- Solovetsky Camp of Special Designation (SLON), 87
- Sonin, Konstantin, 38
- Specialists: as enemies of state, 108; executions of, 167; purge of, 197; repression of, 35, 65, 71, 210
- Spies. *See* Espionage
- Stalin, Joseph: and Chekists, 41–42, 51–52, 54–58, 72–74; and compromised subordinates, 45–47; and contract commitment problems, 35; interpersonal skills of, 48–



- Stalin, Joseph (*continued*)  
 52; and Kremlin politics, 140–65; and meetings, 98–103, 100*f*, 102*f*, 104–5; and party secretaries, 246–48; and planning terror, 166–201; and political enemies, 106–39, 256, 280; and Praetorian Guards, 33–59; and principal-agent problems, 82; and productivity problem, 202–18; and selectorate model, 291, 292*f*; and show trials, 133–34; and torture, 218, 250, 271, 273. *See also specific names of other persons and agencies for relationships with Stalin*
- Starvation. *See* Famines
- State Planning Commission, 65
- State Political Directorate. *See* OGPU
- State security, 81–105; and agency chains, 9, 83–85, 86, 96–97, 104, 274–75; and Chekist core, 32, 93–95, 94*t*, 274; and civil police, 95–96, 104; filling positions in, 25–27, 27*f*, 76–79, 270–72; and Gulag, 95–96, 104; and internal affairs, 90–93, 261–62, 274; and meetings, 98–103, 100*f*, 102*f*, 104–5; NKVD model, 88–90, 89*f*, 91, 92*f*, 104; OGPU model, 86–88, 88*f*, 104; organizational models of, 86–93, 283–86, 284*t*, 285*t*, 286*t*; organizing related security services, 85–86; principal-agent problems, 6–9, 81–82; and regional administrations, 96–98, 104; and survival rates, 244*t*, 245, 246; working arrangements of, 1–2, 251–52. *See also* Cheka and Chekists
- State Security, Ministry of. *See* MGB
- State Security Directorate. *See* GUGB
- Statistics on enemies, 126–27, 128–29
- Stepanovich, Mikhailov Aleksandr, 231
- Stylized facts, 14–31, 32, 193, 199, 254, 255–77
- Suicide: of Kaganovich's brother, 111; of Ordzhonikidze, 38, 145, 148; of persons in leadership positions, 24, 61, 74, 133, 136, 211; of Yezhov's wife, 11
- Superindustrialization, 144, 149
- Survival rates, 24–25, 24*f*, 238–48, 241*t*, 249, 271
- Suslov, M. A., 248
- Syrtsov, S. I., 152–53
- Tal', B. M., 123
- Tartars, 48
- Tataria troika, 235–36, 235*f*
- Terror, definition of, 6
- Terror, planning of, 166–201, 254; dekulakization, 172–80, 177*t*, 179*t*, 201; eliminations model, 166–71, 193–201, 260, 268, 293–94; information and labeling, 193–96, 200; mass repressions, 171–72, 180–90, 187*t*, 189*t*; national operations, 190–93, 192*t*; number of enemies, 197–99; and potency factor, 199–200; and three repressions, 193–200. *See also* Great Terror
- Terror managers, 219–50; and cost of excesses, 222–24; fulfillment and overfulfillment, 234–46, 235*f*, 237*f*; and increasing limits, 230–34, 232*f*, 249, 254–55; limits and initial bidding, 224–30, 226–27*t*, 229*f*; and Stalin's party secretaries, 246–48, 250; and survivors, 238–46, 241*t*, 244*t*, 249; and systematic factors, 243–46, 244*t*, 249, 272–73. *See also* Repressors' dilemma
- Theft. *See* Antitheft laws
- Thought crimes, 153
- Tomsk Oblast (region), repressed persons in, 287–88
- Tomsky, Mikhail: charges against, 150–51; as Politburo member, 144–45, 148, 149; as Right Deviationist, 54, 146; and Yenukidze, 157, 158
- Torture: accusations of unlawful, 214–15; and Beria, 78; of Bukharin, 44; and confessions, 157, 160, 208–9; of Evdokimov, 70; prohibition of, 204; repercussions for use of, 223; Stalin on, 218, 250, 271, 273; and thought control, 137; and Yezhov's orders, 213. *See also* Sadists and sadism
- Totalitarianism, 1, 3–4, 32, 252–53, 253*t*, 258–59
- Treason: arrests for, 8, 16; under Article 58, 121, 262; convictions for, 15, 15*f*, 263; and dekulakization, 173; family members punished for, 125; and Russian criminal code, 112–14, 115
- Troikas: and case reviews, 216; and confessions, 208; conviction rates, 235–36, 235*f*; and dekulakization, 172, 173–74, 175, 181; and extraordinary measures, 115–16; and mass repressions, 182, 185–86, 187, 266–67; and national operations, 191; NKVD domination of, 219; and productivity problem, 202, 203–7, 216; and propa-

- ganda, 135; secrecy of, 136; and simplified procedures, 204–7; Tataria troika, 235–36, 235*f*. *See also* Courts; Extrajudicial tribunals
- Trotsky, Leon: evidence against, 40; nationality of, 63; and overthrow of state, 270; as Politburo member, 144–45, 148, 150; replacement of, 39; and state security, 86; and United Opposition, 146, 147
- Tsarist regimes, 29
- Tukhachevsky, Mikhail, 180–81
- Ubolevich, Ieronym, 180
- Ukraine and Ukrainians: and executions, 72; and national operations, 192; in NKVD leadership, 62, 63–64; and number of victims, 233, 236; as operational workers, 244*t*, 245; and regional administrations, 97–98; regional administrations in, 97; repression of, 265–66
- United Opposition, 145–47, 148–49
- United States: civil liberties in, 114; civil servants and change of administrations in, 34; and Marine recruitment, 42; and political enemies, 3; and treason, 21, 112
- Uprisings. *See* Coups
- Uspensky, A. I., 47, 234
- Varga, Eugen, 112
- Victims. *See* Innocent victims
- Village leaders. *See* Kulaks
- Virus, repression as, 277–80
- Vodka. *See* Alcohol and alcoholism
- Voroshilov, K. E.: intimidation of, 149; as Politburo member, 148, 152; and purging of regional party bosses, 49; on softness as fatal weakness, 272; as Stalin's dinner guest, 43; as Trotsky's replacement, 39
- Voznesensky, Andrei, 38, 161
- Vyshinsky, Andrei: compromised background of, 46; and confessions, 155; escape of, 214; and execution orders, 111, 207, 242; and extrajudicial tribunals, 205; and propaganda, 135; and Stalin's control of information, 40; and troikas, 115, 206, 215
- Whistle blowers, 78
- White Guards, 111–12, 121
- White movement, 64
- Wintrobe model, 12, 281
- Wives. *See* Family members, repression of
- Women, 74, 127. *See also* Family members, repression of
- Worker-Peasant Militia. *See* Civil police
- Worker-peasant state, 5, 6, 106–8
- Working arrangements of security agencies, 2, 5, 32, 251
- Wreckers and wrecking: and cadres, 122–24; in collective farms, 181, 198; convictions for, 127, 262; execution for, 45, 116, 210, 212; and limits, 233; and OGPU, 211; show trials of, 134, 159
- Yagoda, Genrykh: and agency chains, 84; appointments under, 79, 80, 243, 244*t*, 246; brutality of, 45, 272–73; and clan loyalties, 75–76; communications with Stalin, 99–100, 101; compromised background of, 46; and dekulakization, 173–75, 176; deportations under, 45, 47, 71; and desensitization, 135; economic position of, 73; and education, 65–66, 67; Evdokimov's opinion of, 69, 70; execution of family members of, 125; and Gulag, 41, 96; and independent power, 42–43; Jewish background of, 46, 53; and Kirov assassination, 54–55, 159, 259; and NKVD leadership, 62, 63, 88, 283, 284*t*; in OGPU leadership, 53, 87, 149; organizational skills of, 47; on organized crime, 121; Politburo membership of, 51, 68; removal of, 25, 49–50, 54–55, 59, 249, 271; and Right Deviationists, 140–41; and scapegoating, 214; trial of, 133, 157, 158–59; and troikas, 206; on wrecking cases, 122
- Yakovlev, Ia. A., 125
- Yenukidze, A. S., 85, 133, 157–58
- Yezhov, Nikolai: and agency chains, 84–85; appointments under, 79, 80, 243, 244*t*, 246; and arrests, 155, 187; and Beria's arrest orders, 247–48; brutality of and torture, 44, 208, 273; on Chekist power, 39–40; and clan loyalties, 75, 76; communications with Stalin, 99–101, 275; compromised background of, 46, 53, 59, 62; and compromised hierarchs, 61; on confessions, 216; and education, 66, 67; examination of diplomatic mail, 40; and Great Terror, 41–42; and Gulag, 96; and identification of enemies, 194–95, 196; and independent power, 42–43; on innocent victims, 196, 268; and interpretation of

Yezhov, Nikolai (*continued*)

instructions, 213; and limits, 225, 230–31, 233–34, 238, 249; and mass operations, 16, 183, 184–85, 188, 190, 191; in NKVD leadership, 70, 90, 95, 211–12, 272; organizational skills of, 47–48; Politburo membership, 51; and regional administrations, 97, 98, 219; removal and trial of, 25, 50, 54–56, 59, 133, 271; salaries under, 73; as scapegoat, 211–12; and scapegoating, 214–16; and troikas, 207; wife's suicide, 11; and Zhukovsky appointment, 76. *See also* Yezhovshchina (1937–1938)

Yezhovshchina (1937–1938), 16, 212, 259, 274. *See also* Great Terror

Zhdanov, Andrei, 161

Zhukov, Georgy, 162, 233

Zhukovsky, S. B., 61, 76

Zinoviev, Grigory: confessions of, 208; on dictatorship, 6; and Kirov assassination, 45, 54–55, 155; and loyalty to Stalin, 209; nationality of, 63; as Politburo member, 52, 144–45, 148, 150; trial of, 133, 157; and United Opposition, 146, 147; victims under, 257