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Personality, Nationalism, and Commitment

Professor Tucker's paper, like so much else of his writings, shows an exceptional ability not only to use his fine knowledge of the subject to make a persuasive (and most readable) case, but also to take a fresh and challenging look at the familiar and commonplace. Little purpose would be served in reciting the many areas of agreement between us. It may be more profitable to deal with a few questions on which we differ. These are, in essence, Stalin's own role; his Russian nationalism; and the extent of his commitment to the Soviet-German link.

Robert Tucker very astutely stresses Stalin's perception of historical parallels. But are they peculiarly Stalinist? There was a general Bolshevik tendency to see history as a unilinear process, inviting the search for compelling analogs. In the early years after the Revolution, Moscow was often misled by the search for the equivalent of, say, the July Days or Kornilov in Germany (and later, in China and elsewhere). In fact, this approach also quite logically allows being used to perceive Hitler as representing the highest, final, stage of capitalism and hence as a desirable stepping stone to proletarian revolution.¹

There is a similar (though less misplaced) logic in the mind-set which, given the weakness of the Soviet state, sought to postpone the "inevitable" clash with the class enemy because the historical process was an ally of progress and bound to strengthen the Communist cause (and the Soviet state). Again, the formula that "to gain time is to gain everything" was not Stalin's invention: it can be found in almost identical words in Lenin as well as in Khrushchev, too. These then are elements of logic, not pathology.

I would thus be inclined to see some of the features of Stalin's foreign policy orientation in less individual terms. This is not to say that there were not distinctly personal and pathological aspects of his behavior.² The characteristic most relevant to the Tucker discussion is Stalin's chronic unwillingness to recognize that he had made a miscalculation or mistake. Typically his stubborn persistence led him to dig himself in more deeply—and then required a sudden and drastic reversal of direction. This had been true of China in 1926–27; this was to be true of his view of Hitler's plans in 1941; and this was also true of Stalin's expecta-

1. This tendency is neither uniquely Stalinist nor even particularly Russian. The Chinese Communists, in a similar pursuit of mandatory historical parallels, discussed a few years ago whether or not Africa had reached the stage of "1911." But then, how different is this sort of dialectic from the argument that it is darkest before the dawn, or if winter is here, can spring be far behind? Acting on such banalities is another matter.

2. Some of these fall outside the topic or time-frame covered by the Tucker paper. I would, for instance, point to Stalin's tendency to leave alone areas where once he had burned his fingers (for example, China, Finland, Iran); his belief that foreign Communists were incapable of doing the job right without his active direction (for example, in Germany, China, the Balkans, France, and Italy); his need to operate within a synthetic world of make-believe (the confessions in the purge trials, the rewriting of history, the assumptions made concerning Nazi intentions in 1939–41).

tions for Germany in 1931–33; I believe Stalin underestimated Hitler and the effects of a Nazi takeover, at least at that time.

We may have a genuine difference of opinion concerning the switch from the “third” to the “fourth” period. I see December 1933 as marking a real change, at a time when (almost a year after Hitler’s accession to power—a monstrous time-lag, exceeded only by the far longer equivocation of some Western politicians) Stalin was apparently persuaded by a variety of Litvinovs that a basic reorientation was in order (an argument soon reinforced by the German-Polish accord). We do then see the dramatic shift from “ultra-left” to united front (over considerable opposition: if at one end of the spectrum the French Communists and a few Germans jumped the gun, others like Lozovskii held out against the abandonment of the third-period nonsense and even forced postponement of the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern from 1934 to 1935); a shift from the Rapallo orientation to the Soviet-French and Soviet-Czechoslovak accords, improved relations with the United Kingdom (and the United States), and Soviet entry into the League of Nations; and the end of anti-Versailles revisionism on the part of Moscow.

I see no reason to write off this period, as some writers have done, as hog-wash and deception. The view that Moscow was ostensibly merely marking time until the pact with Hitler could be concluded strikes me as a profound misconception: the case is overwhelming for taking this switch, much as the earlier “turning points” in Soviet strategy, seriously. But given Stalin’s suspicions and predispositions, it was not at all surprising that by 1938 he should have soured on his Western “allies”; there are suggestions, for example, that he saw French policy toward the Spanish civil war as a test case of “honorable intentions.” Never mind that Stalin was scarcely in a position to speak of any kind of honorable intentions—of all times—in 1937–38!

No doubt the memory of the earlier Soviet-German affinity lingered in Stalin’s mind. But I see no direct or necessary line from 1926 to 1939: the Nazi-Soviet Pact looms neither so desirable nor so inevitable as the Tucker presentation implies.

In a different domain, I detect an unfortunate tendency these days to explain too much of Soviet conduct as “Russian” or “Muscovite” (in essence, little more than a confession that all other primitive hypotheses, from Communist ideology to totalitarianism, have failed). Unwittingly, Professor Tucker may be reinforcing this new determinism when he describes Stalin as a Bolshevik of Great Russian nationalist outlook (presumably, already in the 1920s). Once again I suspect that the problem is more complex than that. In the first place, how do we tell whether Stalin’s use of “Russian” themes was manipulative or genuine? Elsewhere in his paper, Professor Tucker recognizes that Stalin’s attempt to use National Bolshevism in Germany was essentially tactical. Stalin’s view of “socialism in one country” likewise *began* as a tactically convenient club to use over his rivals’ heads. Similarly, the use of all-Slav themes was turned on and off, a few years later, at will. I would be inclined to argue that Stalin’s switch (on the Engels republication as well as the congruent shifts in Soviet historiography and the revival of terms like *rodina*) was not his alone, either: these changes dovetailed with something on the Soviet scene, in the new Soviet elite, as Stalin was still perceptive enough to note—and act upon.

More important perhaps, Stalin's "Great Russian" orientation must be seen not as a yes-or-no proposition but as a process. Stalin *began* using it quite manipulatively—and wound up identifying with it. What I miss is precisely this dynamic from instrumental to internalized "nationalism."³

We find then a congruence of (1) Stalin's personal predispositions; (2) the tendency to use "national" themes (as well as the war scare of 1927) in factional elite struggles; (3) his and his associates' perception or anticipation of effective mobilizing symbols; plus (4) "real" events in the external environment—all coming together to help explain policy formation. This suggests the possibility of fitting the evidence into a more rigorous paradigm, since there are here interesting parallels to other recent analytical frameworks (be it those stressing bureaucratic politics, à la Graham Allison or Morton Halperin, or images and perceptions, à la Robert Jervis, or more complex clusters of variables, à la Ole Holsti, Alexander George, or Michael Brecher).

If there is room to debate some aspects of the Tucker analysis—and a good deal else of what it contains has been widely accepted for some time—there is another direction in which he takes an important and welcome step. This is in showing the elements in Stalin's mind-set that included the expectation of a new war, and the expectation that a new war would produce new "revolutionary" gains. It is essential to avoid the simplicities of dichotomies like nationalist/revolutionary (a false dichotomy, in the first place), defense/offense, domestic/foreign, in Bolshevik perception and behavior: these and other pairs are organically and dynamically fused. And this is an important part of the background for the debate on Cold War revisionism which many American participants have ignored. These attitudes and images were bound to inform Stalin's perceptions and expectations, then and later, and it is healthy for those working in the Soviet vineyards to point this out to those who taste the wine without knowing where it was grown. After all, whatever the secular forces at work, there are instances in which individuals do make a crucial difference.⁴ Whatever one's quibbles, this is scarcely more true of anyone in this century than of Stalin:

3. It might also be argued that "nationalism" is a misnomer here, but there is little point in quibbling. The gradual internalization—in essence, means becoming ends (Tucker has elsewhere applied Anthony Wallace's proposition of the shift from goal culture to transfer culture)—also includes the gradual identification of the success of communism with the Soviet state (and communism's failure elsewhere); as well as the analogous shift from grassroots revolution to the imposition of "revolutionary" change from above.

4. Professor Tucker very aptly implies that this was not a systemic problem. A Trotsky could see nazism for what it was worth; and a Litvinov could later disagree with Stalin's and Zhdanov's assumption of inevitable war between the new superpowers.