WHERE WILL STALIN STOP?

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A GREAT interrogation mark stretches over Europe and casts its shadow on Asia and America. Will Stalin halt his victorious armies on the confines of Russian soil, or will he march on to Berlin, as the Tsar Alexander in 1813 marched on Paris? In seeking an answer it will be profitable to turn to the pages of Professor Tarlé's book, *Napoleon's Invasion of Russia—1812*, recently translated into English (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1943), alike the most up-to-date and the most authoritative account of that fatal campaign.

Taking stock of ourselves in relation to these questions, it is a commonplace to say that many static-minded but yet sincere people fear Stalin will reach Berlin before the Western Allies, when under his shield a German Soviet might be set up. But forward-looking people, whose prime present concern is the winning of the war, and who deride the Bolshevik bogeyman, must hold a diametrically opposite opinion. For if Stalin stops at the Reich frontier, or short of it, then the burden of the physical conquering of Nazidom, the defeat and crushing in Western Europe of so many millions of brave and well-armed men, must fall mainly on the expeditionary forces of Britain and America.

That would suit Hitler well. For he would then have logical ground for entertaining the hope that the democratic peoples, aghast at the spectacle of the moats of his fortress brimming with the blood of their sons, might quail in their resolve for his total surrender, and accept a negotiated peace. But here are many imponderables: the offensive power of the risen nations; a break in the German will to fight it out; her military weakening through devastation from the skies.

Professor Tarlé is a Russian, in sympathy with the present regime, and so his view may approximate to that of Stalin himself. For time must unriddle that enigma—Stalin himself—before we can obtain an answer to these questions. So, in exploring them, we must bear in mind that Russian thought and political approach change but little from generation to generation; also, that this campaign of 1812, presenting so exciting a similitude to that now being waged in the marches of the Ukraine, cannot be far from Stalin's thought.

It will be well first to summarize the Russian political and military problem of 1812, and in doing that it will be necessary to take note of the old Field-Marshal, Kutuzov, the "Savior of Russia".

Napoleon crossed the Niemen to Russian soil on June 24. The defending but widely separated armies were under dual command. The right, or northern army, was under the German, Barclay de Tolly, a cautious leader who sought by successive retreats to draw Napoleon to his destruction in the fastnesses of the Steppes. The left, or southern army, was led by the heroic and impetuous Pyotr Ivanovich Bagration, who, like Foch in the last war, was passionately committed to the doctrine that to beat the enemy one must attack, and still attack. It was inevitable that these twin Commanders-in-Chief, so opposite in temperament, must dissipate much of their energy in recrimination and, disunited both physically and spiritually, suffer defeat after defeat as the Grand Army drove ahead through Vilna, Vitebsk and Smolensk, scene of a bloody battle, August 16-18.

This divided command spelt ruin, and under pressure of the nobility and the mass of the army, the Tsar Alexander—"too weak to rule and too strong to be ruled"—was forced on August 17 to call out of retreat the old Field-Marshal, Prince Kutuzov, who took over the command on August 28. Of him Tarlé writes:

> At the time of his appointment, Mikhail Illarionovich Golenischev-Kutuzov was 67 years old, and he had exactly nine months to live. In these months his name was to be associated for all time with one of the greatest events in Russian and world history. He will be remembered as the genuine representative of the Russian people in the most terrible moment of Russia's existence . . .
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> In 1805, Kutuzov was considered the Commander-in-Chief of the Austrian and Russian forces, and by all powers and means resisted Alexander's desire to fight a general engagement with Napoleon. The battle—at Austerlitz—was fought and lost. From that time on, Alexander felt a strong dislike for Kutuzov. . .
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> Kutuzov could be an adroit courtier; he had a good understanding of military intrigue and all other kinds of intrigue; he highly valued power, honors, lustre, success. He disliked Alexander, and had little respect for him. His patriotism was exceptionally deep. His strategic abilities were indisputable and universally recognized. He was also a remarkable diplomat, and had often rendered valuable services in this field . . .

> His great strategic abilities, his calm, firm courage, his long military experience, his exceptionally wide popularity among the civil population and the army—all this placed the old general in an exceptional position . . .
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> The difference between Kutuzov and Barclay was that Kutuzov knew the vast expanses alone would not suffice to defeat Napoleon; equally essential was the scorched-earth policy of the Russian people. Barclay had based all his calculations on the supposition that Napoleon would weaken himself by excessively lengthening his line of communications. Kutuzov counted on the fact that the Russian peasant would sooner burn his grain and his hay and his house than sell provisions to the foe, that in this scorched wilderness the enemy was sure to perish . . .

When Kutuzov took over the command, he was old and tired and fond of his sleep. If memory serves aright, Tolstoy in his great fiction, *War and Peace*, tells the amusing story of how at a council-of-war, after Borodino, his generals argued hotly while he slept as to whether to fight again or retreat. When he woke, he settled the controversy simply: "Gentleman, we will evacuate Moscow." Bagration was killed at Borodino. Barclay continued an unwanted subordinate until after the burning of Moscow. For he intrigued against Kutuzov as he had against Bagration, being a favorite of the Tsar.

Kutuzov would have preferred to retreat, scorching the earth as he fell back. "But he knew that no one, including himself, would be allowed to yield Moscow without battle", writes Professor Tarlé, and goes on to quote the great military strategist and historian, Clausewitz, who fought under Kutuzov on this occasion: "Kutuzov, it is certain, would not have given battle at Borodino, where he obviously did not expect to win. But the voice of the Court, of the Army, of all Russia forced his hand. We must assume that he looked upon this engagement as an inevitable evil. He knew the Russians, and he knew how to deal with them."

If he did not win the battle, neither did he lose it. It was waged from dawn to dark of September 7, a day of carnage, a fierce assault opposed by a stubborn defence. We shall let Tarlé tell its story and that of its aftermath:

> History records few battles comparable to Borodino in bloodshed and fierceness. Its consequences were tremendous. Napoleon destroyed almost half the Russian army, and a few days later was in Moscow. Yet he failed to break the spirit of the Russian forces remaining after the battle, and failed to intimidate the Russian people, which, after Borodino and the loss of Moscow, resisted more fiercely than ever . . .

> The bloodiest of all Napoleon's previous battles had been Eylau on February 8, 1807 . . . But the following lines were written three days after Borodino: "Everyone says that the battle of Borodino cannot compare with Eylau because here the entire field was covered with corpses." Liprandi writes: "At Borodino the Russians lost about 58,000 men, half of the battling army . . . Some battalions and companies were destroyed almost to a man. There were whole divisions with only a few survivors. There were corps reduced to the size of battalions."
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> Yet despite all losses, the Russian army did not consider itself defeated. Nor did the Russian people feel defeated. In its memory Borodino lives not as a defeat, but as a symbol of determination and power to defend its national independence against the most overwhelming odds.
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> The French and Russian armies withdrew a short distance from the battlefield, and remained inactive for several hours while the results of the carnage were being computed . . .
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> On the morning of September 8 the Field-Marshal ordered his army to withdraw from Borodino on the direct road to Moscow. This was the beginning of the ingeniously conceived and brilliantly executed tactical march towards Tarutino, one of the Field-Marshal's greatest achievements . . .

There was then held the council-of-war alluded to above, when Kutuzov said: "As long as the army exists and is in condition to oppose the enemy, we preserve the hope of winning the war; but if the army is destroyed, Moscow and Russia will perish . . . You fear a retreat through Moscow, but I regard it as far-sighted, because it will save the army. Napoleon is like a stormy torrent which we are as yet unable to stop. Moscow will be the sponge that will suck him in . . . By the authority granted me by the Tsar and the Fatherland, I command retirement."

It was a sad day. The retreat began. But when Napoleon occupied Moscow, its populace destroyed it by fire. Bereft of his winter quarters, he had to retreat, and in that retreat the Grand Army was destroyed by famine and frost. Now we are beginning to read the Kutuzov enigma. Tarlé continues:

> Kutuzov's position had of course greatly improved since Tarutino and Maloyaroslavets, where minor defeats had been inflicted on the retreating and disordered enemy. The invading army had lost most of its strength, and was making every effort to leave Russia as fast as possible, to reach the frontier and escape destruction by hunger and cold. At the same time Kutuzov faced increasing difficulties in putting through his plan of seeing

Napoleon out of Russia without unnecessary battles. Kutuzov did not believe that Napoleon could retain his world empire after his defeat in Russia, and he refused to shed Russian blood to obtain a result that was inevitable in any case. It was becoming plainer and plainer that the Field-Marshal was following a preconceived plan . . .

Kutuzov's most influential enemy, to whom the Tsar listened with the greatest attention, was attached to Kutuzov's staff and had a mighty power behind him—the British Empire. This was General Sir Robert Wilson, the English Commissioner with the Russian army. For Wilson; for Lord Cathcart, British Ambassador in St. Petersburg, who supported Wilson; for the British Cabinet which supported Cathcart, the differences between Bennigsen—who had succeeded Barclay and wanted to attack—and Kutuzov were not a mere "Generals' quarrel". They realized before everyone else that Kutuzov's strategy went against the interests of Great Britain.

Wilson, who secretly watched Kutuzov and sent reports about him to the Tsar, enjoyed Alexander's confidence, all the more so because the Tsar disliked the old Field-Marshal for personal reasons, and was in full agreement with the English emissary.

Moreover, it would have been difficult for Alexander to quarrel with Wilson . . . From England came not only rifles but also gold pounds, and they came in generous amounts—the English have always been generous when trying to defeat a strong enemy with the help of a foreign army . . . Would the continental blockade, causing poverty and unemployment in England, remain in force? This was the Englishmen's greatest worry—if Napoleon were permitted to escape.

Here we are coming to the heart of the matter. Notwithstanding his terrific losses before, during and after the crossing of the Berezina, and up to the night of December 14—"when Marshal Ney, at the head of a few hundred soldiers in fighting condition and a few thousand disarmed, wounded and sick, crossed the Niemen," out of the Russian land—Napoleon did escape. And Kutuzov stubbornly persisted in refusing to attack this beaten enemy, leaving it to nature. He had good reason: "When the main Russian army reoccupied Vilna on December 10, it numbered 27,464 men and 200 guns; on the day of its departure from Tarutino on its march parallel to the retreating enemy, it had consisted of 97,112 men and 622 guns . . . In these conditions, Kutuzov could not regard Napoleon's capture as sure, and the Field-Marshal's tactics derived from his conviction that his soldiers' blood should not be shed without a definite reason."

But he was accused of having "built a golden bridge" for the enemy, and, by his failure to throw in his whole strength at the Berezina, of being the cause of all the woe that was to follow. Professor Tarlé thus quotes from a German memorial: "Berezina! Fateful name, fateful river where the misfortunes of mankind could have ended, but did not end, continuing for three more years! Fateful place where the most terrible blunder was made, a blunder for which Europe paid with hundreds of thousands of lives on the fields of Lutzen, Bautzen, Dresden, Kulm, Leipzig, Troyes, Ligny, Waterloo, with long years of devastation and war!"

The old Field-Marshal opposed a new war with Napoleon in 1813. He wanted to stop at the Russian frontier. But Alexander, who fancied himself both as a strategist and as the Saviour of Europe, overrode him.

"In April, 1813," says Tarlé, "Kutuzov was gravely ill in Bunzlau, Prussian Silesia. Napoleon, at the head of large forces, was marching on the Russians and Prussians, but Kutuzov was not fated to take part in the operations against him.

On April 27 he was near death. Alexander came to Bunzlau to make his farewells and said to him: 'Forgive me, Mikhail Illarionovich!'—'I forgive you, Sire, but Russia never will!' "

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What then is the answer to our question? There is no answer, save perhaps that there is much analogy between Kutuzov, the enigma of 1812, and Stalin, the enigma of to-day.