

Molotov, the War and Soviet Government

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Introduction

This paper considers Molotov's domestic political role during the Great Patriotic War. Whilst his career as Commissar for Foreign Affairs was reaching a peak at the Moscow Foreign Ministers Conference, October 1943, and is well known, little attention has been devoted to the part he played during the war years as Stalin's leading lieutenant, Politburo member, GKO and Sovnarkom vice-chairman.

To establish Molotov's position on the outbreak of war his behaviour in the immediate pre-war period and the part he played in the initial response of Stalin and his lieutenants to the German attack is first examined. His place in the machinery of government established on the outbreak of war and his activities during the crucial first months of the war are then considered. The final sections of the paper are a preliminary attempt to consider Molotov's role in the wartime Party and government machine: the Politburo, the *Stavka*, GKO and Sovnarkom, using new archival evidence for GKO and Sovnarkom, although any conclusions drawn from this material must be considered very provisional.* They do, however, demonstrate that Molotov was exercising a wide-ranging role in addition to his diplomatic duties.

Several issues arise from this paper. To what extent did Molotov merely transfer his bureaucratic methods of the 1930s and as one of Stalin's instruments in applying terror to the wartime situation? What additional light does the evidence presented here throw on Molotov's relations with Stalin, and to what extent was Molotov's career, outside foreign policy, already past its peak?

* I would like to acknowledge the support of the AHRB for my project on Soviet government during the Great Patriotic War which has made possible the use of this material.

A. The Coming of War

The Last Months of Peace

Molotov was preoccupied with foreign affairs in early 1941.¹ He was particularly concerned in the negotiation of the ‘Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression,’ with Yugoslavia in April. Gabriel Gorodetsky claims that Molotov, in particular, pressed Stalin to sign the agreement as a deterrent to Hitler, as it was not a military alliance which the Germans were bound to see as a provocation.² At this time he established a pattern of dismissing the German threat as ‘only a bluff’ with Sir Stafford Cripps, the new British ambassador, and as late as June, although receiving warnings of an imminent German attack, including those from Dekanazov, the ambassador in Berlin,³ he was making the comment: ‘Only a fool would attack us!’⁴ It is therefore not surprising that in the early weeks of the war he appeared embarrassed when L. Steinhardt, the American ambassador, reminded him that he had dismissed warnings of a German attack as false rumours,⁵ but there can be little doubt that he was copying Stalin’s line.

Molotov was deeply involved in negotiations with Japan. He had made a cautious response to Japanese approaches for an improvement in relations in early 1940, but became more enthusiastic with the fall of France. Pressure was stepped up with the creation of the Axis and increasing tension in the Balkans in the autumn, and by November he was trying to negotiate a non-aggression pact, similar to the one that he had signed with Germany. These negotiations failed because of Soviet insistence on recognition of sovereignty over northern Sakhalin, reversing the humiliation of 1905, but Matsuoka, the Japanese Foreign Minister, revived the non-aggression proposal with Molotov, when he visited Moscow in March 1941 *en route* to Berlin. The fall of Yugoslavia produced a dramatic change in the Soviet outlook by the time of his return on 6 April, Matsuoka finding Molotov ‘considerably

¹ Gorodetsky, G., *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia*, New Haven, Yale U P, 1999, pp. 102-4; Sontag R.J. & Beddie J.S., *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941: Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office*, (hereinafter *Nazi-Soviet Relations*) Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1976, pp. 270-71, 274, 277-9.

² Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, pp. 144-150; McSherry, J. E., *Stalin, Hitler and Europe*, Vol. 2, *The Imbalance of Power 1939-1941*, Arlington: Open Door, 1968, pp. 209-211.

³ ‘Kanun voiny: preduprezhdeniya diplomatov,’ *Vestnik MID*, no. 8 (66) 30 April 1990, pp. 76-77.

⁴ Kuznetsov, N., ‘Voennoi-Morskoi Flot nakanune Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny,’ *Voenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal*, no. 9, 1965, p. 73.

⁵ Assarsen, V., ‘The Moscow Diplomatic Corps in 1941,’ *International Affairs*, July 1991, p. 127.

softer,' although his insistence on the return of southern Sakhalin initially led to deadlock in the negotiations. With Matsuoka planning to depart on the Trans-Siberian express, Stalin intervened and a neutrality pact was hastily signed on 13 April, followed by celebrations at the Kremlin. Stalin and Molotov appeared to say farewell to Matsuoka when he departed, the train having been delayed for him. Molotov apparently the least inebriated of both Japanese and Soviet representatives, 'kept saluting all the time, shouting: "I am a pioneer, I am ready!"'⁶

The growing crisis in relations with Germany was clear in late April when on 28, G. Berzheri, the new ambassador from Vichy France, presented his credentials to Molotov. He confined himself to a formal greeting and farewell, listening to Berzheri's statement about the purpose of his mission, the policies of Vichy France and the 'new Europe' with only one comment.⁷ On 5 May, Molotov was present when Stalin addressed the graduates from the Red Army military academy and at the banquet in the Kremlin that followed. According to one report, during these addresses, Stalin said:

The Soviet Government will try, by all the means at its disposal, to put off a German attack on the Soviet Union at least till the autumn. . . .⁸

Another source claims that he said:

If V.M. Molotov and the apparatus of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs is able to delay the start of war for 2-3 months, this'll be our good fortune.'⁹

A Politburo decree of the same date, 'strengthening the work of central Soviet and local organs' appointed Stalin as chairman of Sovnarkom. The decree noted the need to reinforce the 'authority of the Soviet organs in the present strained international situation' to strengthen the 'defence of the country.' By the same decree, Molotov became a deputy chairman, although not first deputy, and 'leader of the foreign policy of the USSR remaining

⁶ Chuev, F., *Molotov: poluderkhavnyu vlastelin*, M: Olma-press 2000, p. 39; Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, pp. 190-198; McSherry, *Stalin, Hitler and Europe*, vol. 2, pp. 214-218.

⁷ Mamedov, G.E., *et al.*, *Dokumenty Vneshnei politiki 1940- 22 iyunya 1941*, T. 23, Kn. 2, ch. 2, M: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya 1999, (hereinafter *DVP*) pp. 631-633.

⁸ Werth, A., *Russia at War 1941-1945*, London: Pan, 1965, p. 133; Nevezhin, V A., 'Stalin's 5 May Addresses: the Experience of Interpretation,' *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1998, pp. 116-146.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 137, quoting Lyashchenko, N G., 'S ognem i krov'uu popolam,' *Voенно-istoricheskii Zhurnal*, no. 2, 1995, pp. 22-8.

at the post of Commissar for Foreign Affairs.’¹⁰ The decree relieving Molotov of chairmanship referred to ‘repeated declarations that it was difficult for him to exercise the responsibility together with the executive responsibility of a commissar.’¹¹

Schulenburg, the German ambassador, whilst noting that in the Supreme Soviet decree of 6 May the reason given for Molotov’s replacement was pressure of work, commented that it meant an abridgement of his former authority, and speculated that the move was a response to the cooling of German-Soviet relations and Molotov’s obstinate negotiating tactics.¹² Molotov’s continuing responsibility for foreign policy, however, calls into question this observation, as do Stalin’s comments about Molotov delaying the German attack. If the purpose of the appointment was to relieve Molotov, with Stalin remaining as General Secretary to the Central Committee, even with A.A. Zhdanov appointed to assist him with certain of his party responsibilities by the same decree, his workload was now far in excess of that formerly carried by Molotov. This was to be added to when he assumed additional responsibilities during the early weeks of the war, and as this paper will show Molotov’s responsibilities increased.

In addition to a widespread re-organisation of Party-state responsibilities and machinery in the early months of 1941,¹³ Stalin’s prominence in the negotiations with Japan influenced the change. It allowed him, as head of state, to assume direct control over dealings with Germany in a crisis situation, after his experience of negotiating with Matsuoka. Press reports on the negotiation of the Neutrality Pact with Japan had stated that Stalin had a conversation with Matsuoka and only that ‘Molotov was present.’¹⁴

The Outbreak of War – Molotov’s Broadcast

Direct contact between Molotov and Schulenburg, the German Ambassador to the USSR, had been frequent until March 1941, and as late as 13 June 1941, following frequent British government warnings to Maisky, the Ambassador in Britain, Molotov passed Schulenburg press statements denying rumours of German demands and ‘an impending war

¹⁰ *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial’no-Politicheskoi Istorii* (hereinafter *RGAS-PI*), 17/3/1039, 10

¹¹ *Iz.*, 7 May 1941.

¹² Sontag and Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, p. 335.

¹³ Khlevnyuk, O.V., *Politbyuro: mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody*, M: 1996, pp 251-6.

between the USSR and Germany.¹⁵ Attempts were made to preserve an atmosphere of normality. With a great show of publicity, Stalin, Molotov and other important members of the Politburo attended a performance of *On the Steppes of the Ukraine* one or two days before the beginning of the war - perhaps indicating to Germany their interest in the Ukraine, and Molotov about this time dined with Schulenburg.¹⁶

On Saturday 21 June 1941, Molotov summoned the German ambassador at 9.30 p.m. to protest about increasing violations of Soviet airspace by German planes. He used this as an introduction to more general remarks about Soviet-German relations, saying that there were a number of indications that the German government was dissatisfied with its Soviet counterpart, that there were rumours of war, and that German businessmen and the wives and children of embassy staff had left the country. This left Schulenburg, who knew that Hitler planned to attack the USSR, in an untenable position. He could say only that he had no information from Berlin and mention the Soviet pact with Yugoslavia as a cause of Hitler's displeasure. Molotov then seems to have given up his efforts 'with a resigned shrug of the shoulders.'¹⁷ A desperate last effort to try to negotiate with Germany had failed.

German air attacks on Soviet forces began at 3.15 a.m. on 22 June. At 3.25 Marshal G.K. Zhukov, Chief of the General Staff, woke Stalin to report on the situation. Stalin then summoned Marshal S.K. Timoshenko, the Commissar for Defence, Beriya, Molotov, Malankov, and other members of the Politburo to the Kremlin. Having heard reports from the military leaders, Stalin told Molotov to telephone the German Embassy. Molotov found that the ambassador had requested an interview.¹⁸ He left the meeting at 5.30 a.m. to see Schulenburg who stated that during the night he had received telegrams from Berlin and was charged to deliver a note to Molotov. This stated that the German government could no longer tolerate the growing Soviet troop concentrations along its

¹⁴ Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, p. 211; Nekrich, A.M., *Pariahs, Partners, Predators, German-soviet Relations, 1922-1941*, New York: Columbia UP, 1997, p. 223

¹⁵ Sontag and Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, pp. 345-6; McSherry, *Stalin, Hitler and Europe*, vol. 2, p.233.

¹⁶ *The Times*, 20 June 1941; Dallin, D. J., *Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy, 1939-1942*, New Haven: Yale U.P. 1942, p. 375.

¹⁷ Hilger, G., and Meyer, A.G., *The Incompatible Allies: A Memoir History of German-Soviet Relation, 1938-1941*, London; Macmillan 1952, pp. 335-6; Sontag and Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*, pp. 355-6; *DVP*, pp. 751-2.

border and felt forced to take military countermeasures. Molotov, apparently looking tired and worn out, asked what was the meaning of the note and Schulenburg replied that in his opinion it was the beginning of war. Molotov denied the Soviet troop concentrations and protested against the German attack on a country with which it had a treaty of non-aggression and friendship. According to unofficial reports he called the German attack, 'a breach of confidence unprecedented in history,' and concluded the interview by saying 'surely we have not deserved that?' although in his memoirs he denied making this statement.¹⁹ Molotov now reported back to Stalin and his colleagues, saying 'The German government has declared war on us,' and about 6.a.m. was instructing A.I. Shakhurin, the Commissar of the Aviation Industry to go to his commissariat.²⁰ It was, however, only at 7.15 a.m., after devastating Soviet losses that Stalin authorised the issue of 'Directive no. 2,' ordering 'active offensive operations,' although Soviet troops were still ordered not to cross the frontier.²¹

Molotov was now given the task of announcing the outbreak of war to the country at noon. According to Mikoyan Stalin refused to speak because he believed that people would remember that he had denied there was going to be an invasion.²² In his memoirs Molotov excused Stalin because, as the political leader, he wished to obtain a clearer picture before he spoke. Molotov drafted the speech with Stalin's assistance, other members of the Politburo being involved in the final editing.²³ He was so distressed when he delivered the speech that his stammer re-appeared. Stating that Stalin and the Soviet government had instructed him to make the statement, he announced the German attack without a declaration of war and losses of 200. He called the German invasion 'an unparalleled act of perfidy in the history of civilised nations,' made despite the non-aggression treaty which had been scrupulously observed by the USSR, and without any

¹⁸ Gor'kov, Yu, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyayet (1941-1945) tsifry dokumenty*, M: Olma-press, 2002, p. 17; Zhukov, G.K., *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, T. 2, M: Novosti, 1990, pp. 8-10.

¹⁹ *DVP*, pp. 753-4; Hilger and Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, p. 336; Chuev, *Molotov*, p.58.

²⁰ A.I. Shakhurin, 'Aviatsionnaya promyshlennost' nakanune i v gody velikoi otechestvennoi gody,' in P.N. Pospelov, ed. *Sovetskii tyl v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, T. 2, M: 1974, p.77.

²¹ Erickson, J., *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany, Volume 1*, London: Panther, 1985, pp. 162-177, Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyayet*, p. 17; Zhukov, *Vospominaniya*, T. 2 p. 10.

²² 'Iz vospominanii o voennykh godakh,' *Politicheskoe obrazovnaie*, no.9, 1988, p. 74.

²³ Chuev, *Molotov*, p. 59; Marina, V.V., 'Dnevnik G. Dimitrova,' *Voprosy istorii*, no. 7, 2000, p. 43.

complaints by Germany. He described his interview with Schulenburg, denied an announcement over Romanian radio that morning that Soviet planes had bombed Romanian airfields and stated that Soviet forces had been ordered to repel the invader. He continued:

The war has not been inflicted upon us by the German people, or by the German workers, peasants and intellectuals. . . but by the clique of bloodthirsty fascists ruling Germany who have already enslaved the French, the Czechs, the Poles, the Serbs and the peoples of Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Greece and other countries.

He went on to say that he did not doubt that the Soviet armed forces would smash the aggressor and recalled Napoleon's invasion of Russia when the whole Russian people (*narod*) had responded with 'patriotic war' and defeated Napoleon. The same would happen to Hitler. Stressing duty, hard work, discipline, organising ability, selflessness and the need for unity, he called the Red Army and the whole nation to a 'victorious patriotic war for the motherland, for honour, for freedom.' He concluded

The Government calls upon you, men and women citizens of the Soviet Union, to rally even more closely round the glorious Bolshevik Party, around the Soviet government and our great leader comrade Stalin. Our cause is just. The enemy will be smashed. Victory will be ours.²⁴

The use of the term 'motherland' introduced a nationalistic element to the appeal from the first hours of the war and was a significant change. Listeners immediately commented on it.²⁵ The phrases 'patriotic war' and 'our cause is just' were to become much used slogans, but according to one contemporary observer, because of the general tone of the broadcast and because Molotov said that Germany had made no demands on the USSR it left a feeling of unease, almost of humiliation.²⁶ Stalin himself, apparently thought Molotov's performance 'lacking in lustre.'²⁷

²⁴ *DVP*, pp. 764-5. The figure of 200 for losses was clearly a deliberate underestimation. Molotov's halting delivery was commented on by a number of listeners. See for instance, Werth, A., *Russia at War* p. 162; Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*, p. 177.

²⁵ Assarsen, V., 'The Moscow Diplomatic Corps in 1941,' p. 126.

²⁶ Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*, p. 177.

²⁷ Overy, R., *Russia's War*, London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1997, p. 74; Radzinsky, E., *Stalin*, London: Hodder and Stoughton 1996, p. 447.

The Formation of GKO

For the first few days of the war Stalin concentrated on responding to the emergency situation, Molotov being with him in his office for much of the time from 23-28 June.²⁸ On 27 June he told Sir Stafford Cripps that

although Soviet military authorities had anticipated the possibility of war they had never expected it would come without any discussion or ultimatum.²⁹

There is no evidence to support the traditional story that Stalin was incapacitated for a period of two to three weeks at the beginning of the war. Mikoyan, in his memoirs, says that on 30 June Molotov told him that Stalin had been prostrate for two days, but Molotov himself in his conversations with Chuev claimed that Stalin was agitated, 'not quite himself,' but not incapacitated. Stalin's office diary shows that he continued to work and was extremely busy, although he had no appointments on 29 and 30 June and retired to his dacha.³⁰ The last event before Stalin's brief withdrawal was a visit made to the Defence Commissariat by Stalin, Molotov and Beriya on the night of 28 June, following the fall of Minsk, when Stalin supported by Beriya attacked Zhukov. He became emotional and was apparently comforted by Molotov.³¹ Up to this time Molotov had 'sat and listened' and 'never asked questions,' but during Stalin's brief absence he seemed willing to take responsibility,³² an indication, perhaps that he was second man in the state. It was during this period according to Sergo Beriya that S.K. Shcherbakov turned to Molotov and said 'Vyacheslav, be our leader!' In Mikoyan's unpublished memoirs this outburst is attributed to Voznesenskii.³³

On 30 June, Mikoyan was with Voznesenskii when Molotov telephoned and asked to see them. When they arrived, they found Malenkov, Voroshilov and Beriya with Molotov. They talked and Beriya said it was essential to form a State Defence Committee

²⁸ Korotkov, A.V. and Chernobaev, A.A. 'Posteteli kremlevskogo kabineta I.V. Stalina' (hereinafter 'Stalin's Office Diary') *Istoricheskiii Arkhiv*, no.2, 1996, 54.

²⁹ *PRO FO* 371 /29466 N3231/3/38

³⁰ Chuev, *Molotov*, p. 59; Mikoyan, A.I., *Tak bylo: razmyshleniya o minuvshem*, M: Vagrius, p. 391. See Main, S.J., 'Stalin in June 1941: A Comment on Cynthia Roberts,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol 48, no. 5, 1996, pp. 837-9; Stalin's Office Diary, *Istoricheskiii Arkhiv*, no.2, 1996, 54.

³¹ Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, pp. 389-90; Chuev, *Molotov*, pp. 58-60; Radzinsky, *Stalin*, pp. 451-2, quoting Chadaev's manuscript diary. This incident is dated as 29 June by Mikoyan and 27 by Chadaev, but from 'Stalin's Office Diary' *Istoricheskiii Arkhiv*, no.2, 1996, p. 54, can be dated as the night of 28 June, i.e. very early on 29 June.

³² Radzinsky, *Stalin*, quoting Chadaev, pp. 451-4.

(*Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony* – GKO), which would have absolute power in the country, taking over the functions of the government, Supreme Soviet and Central Committee. Mikoyan and Voznesenskii supported the proposal and it was agreed to ask Stalin to head the body. They did not further discuss membership, believing that Stalin should have a major role in its formation because of his position and ‘reputation with the people,’ and that this would facilitate the centralisation and mobilisation of the war effort. It was at this point, that Molotov said that Stalin had been prostrate for two days. On Voznesenskii’s initiative, Molotov was delegated to lead the deputation to Stalin who was at his dacha near Moscow, the others promising their support, and saying that if Stalin was unfit to lead the body they would support Molotov,³⁴ another indication of his very senior position at this time.

When the group arrived at Stalin’s dacha they found him sitting in an armchair in his dining room. He appeared to be worried and asked them why they had come. Mikoyan believed that Stalin thought they had come to arrest him. Molotov, as spokesman, talked of the need to concentrate power to put the country on a war footing, and create GKO. Stalin asked who was to lead it, and Molotov said that Stalin should. Stalin looked astonished but then agreed, asking, according to one version of the report on the meeting: ‘Can I lead the country to final victory?’³⁵ They then discussed membership of the new body. Beriya suggested Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Malenkov and himself. Stalin added Mikoyan and Voznesenskii, but Beriya pointed out that this would mean that there was no one left to lead the regular government. It was therefore decided that Mikoyan and Voznesenskii should remain to work in Sovnarkom, Voznesenskii heading Gosplan. Beriya’s suggestion for membership was thus adopted, Molotov being appointed vice-chairman of GKO, a further indication of his position. To strengthen their authority, and perhaps as compensation, Voznesenskii having objected to not being included in GKO, Mikoyan and Voznesenskii were appointed as GKO plenipotentiaries, with the full authority of GKO members. The use of plenipotentiaries became a device widely employed by GKO.³⁶ Mikoyan was made

³³ Beria, S., *Beria, my Father: Inside Stalin’s Kremlin*, London: Duckworth, 1999, pp.70, 324.

³⁴ Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, pp. 391.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; Mikoyan, S., ‘Barbarossa and the Soviet Leadership,’ in Erickson, J. and Dilks, D. (eds.), *Barbarossa: the Axis and the Allies*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 1992, p. 128; Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 455.

³⁶ Gor’kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyaet*, p. 39; ‘Iz vospominanii o voennykh godakh,’ p. 76.

responsible for supplies to the front and Voznesenskii for the production of arms and ammunition,³⁷ although in his memoirs General A. Khrulev states that Voznesenskii was relieved from this responsibility in October for establishing impossible production plans which the factories were unable to fulfil.³⁸

The creation of GKO was confirmed by a Politburo decision, and Supreme Soviet Presidium, Sovnarkom and Central Committee decree of 30 June, the day of the meeting with Stalin. GKO was given wide powers. The decree stated that ‘the complete plenitude of power in the state’ was to be concentrated in the hands of GKO and that all citizens, party, state and military organisations were to unconditionally fulfil without question its decisions and directives which were given the status of laws.³⁹ In the emergency situation at the beginning of the war GKO often tended to act in place of the regular administrative machinery.⁴⁰ There were minor amendments to membership as the war proceeded. Mikoyan and Voznesenskii became members on 3 February 1942 and Kaganovich later in the month. N. A. Bulganin became a member in November 1944 when Voroshilov was dropped.⁴¹

The Stavka

On the outbreak of war, due to the reorganisations of the defence commissariats during the 1930s,⁴² no effective high command organisation existed. An attempt to remedy this situation was made on the day war broke out by a joint Central Committee and Sovnarkom decree, based on a draft provided by Timoshenko and other military leaders, which created the *Stavka* (*Stavka Glavnogo Komandovaniya* – high command headquarters). Membership consisted of Timoshenko, as chairman, Zhukov, Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Marshal S.M. Budennyi, and Admiral N.G. Kuznetsov, the

³⁷ Mikoyan, S., ‘Barbarossa and the Soviet Leadership,’ p. 128; Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, p. 392.

³⁸ Khrulev, A., ‘Stanovlenie strategicheskogo tyla v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine,’ *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 6, 1961, p. 66. This seems to be contradicted by another commissar’s view, see Goremykin, P.N., ‘O proizvodste vooruzheniya i boepripasov,’ in *Sovetskii tyl v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, t. 2, M: 1974, p. 122. See also Harrison, M., *N.A. Voznesensky: A Soviet Commander of the Economic Front*, Warwick Economic Research Papers no.242, (unpublished) 1983, p. 28. See also below p. 19.

³⁹ *RGAS-PI* 17/3/1041, no. 130; *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, no.31, 6 July 1941.

⁴⁰ Harrison, M., *Soviet Planning in Peace and War, 1938-1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985, p. 94.

⁴¹ Gor’kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyaet*, p. 31.

⁴² Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*, p. 191; Watson, *Molotov and Soviet Government, Sovnarkom 1930-41*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996, pp. 104-108.

Commissar for Naval Affairs. Before promulgation, the decree was approved by the Politburo, probably at a continuation of the meeting that Stalin held early on 22 June.⁴³ This was a provisional arrangement. The *Stavka* was a collegial body with Timoshenko as chairman.⁴⁴ By the decree he was the supreme commander of the forces, but in fact he could take no important decisions and the real commander was Stalin.⁴⁵ Stalin's inability to gain accurate information from this body occasioned the visit to the Commissariat of Defence on the night of 28 June.⁴⁶ Reorganisation therefore took place quickly with Stalin officially becoming Commander-in-Chief and the body being renamed *Stavka Verkhovnogo Komandovaniya* – (supreme command headquarters) on 10 July,⁴⁷ and then *Stavka Verkhovnogo Glavkomandovaniya* (supreme chief command headquarters) on 8 August, before which Stalin had been officially appointed Commissar for Defence on 19 July.⁴⁸ The *Stavka* gradually increased in size, a number of military commanders being appointed to it as the war progressed. Its executive apparatus was the Commissariat of Defence, the Commissariat of the Navy and the general staff.⁴⁹

Admiral Kuznetsov, who was appointed Deputy Commissar for the Navy, apparently on Stalin and Molotov's initiative at the XVIII Congress 1939, then rapidly promoted to commissar,⁵⁰ recorded that whilst Molotov remained chairman of Sovnarkom he found it difficult to obtain important decisions from him, since military questions were in reality decided by Stalin. He tried approaching Stalin who was at first sympathetic to a new commissar, but then became increasingly unapproachable. When Stalin took over the chairmanship of Sovnarkom things did not improve initially, as Molotov assisted by Zhdanov, as a Central committee secretary, retained control of naval affairs. He went on to say that, it was not the re-organisation carried out on the outbreak of war and Stalin's appointment as commissar for Defence and Supreme Commander which was important in

⁴³ Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyayet*, pp. 494-5. Zhukov, *Vospominaniya*, T. 2, p.12, 70.

⁴⁴ Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*, p. 191.

⁴⁵ Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, T. 2 , p. 70.

⁴⁶ 'Iz vospominanii o voennykh godakh,' p. 72.

⁴⁷ Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyayet*, pp. 501-2, citing *RGAS-PI*, 644/2/3, 23-6.

⁴⁸ Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, T. 2 , p. 72.

⁴⁹ Petrov, Yu. P., 'KPSS – organizator i rukovoditel' pobedy sovetskogo naroda v Velikoi Otechstvennoi voine,' *voprosy istorii*, no. 5, 1970, pp. 12- 13.

⁵⁰ Kuznetsov, N.G., 'Pered voinoi,' *Oktyabr*, no. 9, 1965, pp. 174-82. although Kuznetsov misdates Stalin's appointment to 1940.

improving the central direction of military operations, but the experience Stalin gained during the early years of the war. It was therefore not for some time that the *Stavka* and GKO became really efficient bodies.⁵¹

Molotov's appointment to the *Stavka* at the time it was set up placed him at the centre of military strategic planning from the first day of the war. Zhukov records Molotov being present when the strategy for the attack on Berlin was formulated. In another place, he acknowledged that he was of great influence on Stalin being

almost always present when operative-strategic and other important questions were discussed. Differences and serious arguments quite often arose between them in the course of which correct decisions were formulated.⁵²

M.G. Pervukhin, records an instance in August 1941, when Molotov attacked him for delegating authority as deputy chair of the Committee for Evacuation, but when the *Stavka* met Stalin supported him.⁵³ If, however, Molotov was prepared to differ with Stalin, at times, his support of him seems to have outweighed any strategic sense he had. He is recorded as backing Stalin in putting pressure on Rokossovskii to abandon his plan for a two-pronged attack on Bobriusk in May 1944. Stalin told Rokossovskii to go out and think over his proposal for a single attack, Malenkov reminding Rokossovskii where he was and to whom he was talking. Molotov then said 'You'll have to agree Rokossovskii. Agree – that's all there is to it.' Stalin, however, eventually gave way to the intransigent Rokossovskii.⁵⁴ Molotov again supported Stalin against Zhukov and Rokossovski at the end of October 1944, when they called for a delay in the advance into eastern Europe to the Vistula to allow Soviet forces to regroup. Stalin ordered Zhukov to report and Molotov interrupted saying

Comrade Zhukov, you are proposing to end an attack then, when a defeated enemy is not in a condition to resist the pressure of our forces. Does your proposal make sense?

⁵¹ Kuznetsov, N.G., 'Voenno-Morskoi flot nakanune Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny,' *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 9, 1966, pp. 65–67; 'Iz vospominanii o voennykh godakh,' p. 73.

⁵² Zhukov, G.K., *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, M: 1990, T. 3, p. 214, T. 2, p. 112.

⁵³ 'Beseda professora G.A. Kumaneva s M.G. Pervukhinym,' *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya*, No. 5, 2003, p. 136.

⁵⁴ Nepomniashchii, K., *Polki idyut na zapad*, M: 1964, pp. 238-41,

In a replay of the of the earlier incident Zhukov and Rokossovski were sent away to think over the proposal, but Stalin gave way.⁵⁵

B. Molotov and GKO – the Early Months of the War

Among Molotov's first personal actions, as GKO vice-chairman, was signing the GKO decree ordering the making of 'Molotov cocktails.' These 'bottles filled with inflammable liquid ' used against German tanks were first manufactured by army units near the front, but the decree ordered factories, such as lemonade factories, and workshops of all kinds to produce them and supplies began to arrive at the front.⁵⁶ On 16 August, with Stalin and other members of the *Stavka* he signed the infamous Order 270 directing that any soldier taken prisoner was to be considered a traitor and enemy of the people and their families were also to be subject to repression.⁵⁷

On 26 August, Molotov, as deputy chairman GKO, led a group of six GKO plenipotentiaries, including Malenkov, Admiral Kuznetsov and Sovnarkom deputy chairman A.N.Kosygin, on a mission to Leningrad. They were charged with:

discussion and decision . . . of all questions concerned with the defence of Leningrad and the evacuation of establishments and the population of Leningrad.⁵⁸

Part of the task was strengthening the military element, charged with the defence of the city, alongside Zhdanov and the civilian party leaders. The mission travelled to Cherepovets by air, then by train to Mga, where finding the rail link cut they were forced to complete the journey by car. By the time they left, the city was completely besieged and the whole return journey was by air. On 27 August, Stalin wrote to Molotov and Malenkov:

I fear that Leningrad will be lost by foolish madness. What are Popov [the front commander] and Voroshilov doing? They don't even tell us of the measures they are taking against the danger. They are busy looking for lines of retreat. As far as I can see this is their only purpose. . . This is pure peasant fatalism. What people! I can't understand anything. Don't you think someone's opening the road to the Germans in this important direction? On purpose? Who is this man Popov? What is Voroshilov

⁵⁵ Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, T. 3 , pp. 170-173.

⁵⁶ Medvedev, R., *All Stalin's Men*, (transl. Shukman R.,) Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, p. 92; Zalesskii, K.A. *Imperiya Stalin: biograficheskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* M: Veche, 2000, p. 325.

⁵⁷ *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 9, 1988, pp. 26-28.

⁵⁸ *Izvestiya TsK*, no. 9, 1990, p.209.

doing? How is he helping Leningrad? I write this because I'm disturbed by the lack of activity of Leningrad's commander. . . . Return to Moscow. Don't be late.⁵⁹

The mission responded to Stalin's letter. Senior military officers were dismissed, the High Command structure re-organised, abolishing Voroshilov's position, although he remained in command until mid- September and Molotov did not dismiss him as he claimed in his memoirs. Voroshilov had apparently proposed to elect officers to the Military Soviet of the Leningrad Front. This was brought directly under GKO control, an arrangement unique to Leningrad.⁶⁰

On 29 August, Molotov, Malenkov, Kosygin and Zhdanov submitted to Stalin their plan for the evacuation some important Leningrad works within ten days. This needed 12,313 railway wagons. They also presented proposals for the evacuation of 91,000 of the population requiring a further 790 wagons.⁶¹ In addition they proposed to Stalin that the city and region should be cleansed of 96,000 people of German and Finnish origin. The following day Beriia sent a telegram ordering deportations, but these were interrupted by the encirclement of the city.⁶²

After the return of the mission to Moscow, Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov and Beriia telegraphed Voroshilov and Zhdanov, on 9 September, still angry at the unsatisfactory defence operations and demanding information on the state of the front and the measures taken.⁶³ This telegram prefaced Voroshilov's recall.

On 10 October, when the Germans had broken through at Vyaz'ma, and were threatening Gzhatsk and the Mozhaisk fortified line - Moscow's main defence, the capital was in great danger. Molotov, Malenkov, Voroshilov and Marshal A.M.Vasilevskii were sent on another GKO mission to assess the situations and recommend how to localise the German breakthrough. Molotov had orders to dismiss Marshall I.S. Konev, the commission recommending his replacement with Zhukov, but on the latter's personal protest to Stalin, Konev was retained as Zhukov's deputy. Medvedev criticises Molotov for not making

⁵⁹ *RGAS-PI*, 558/11/492, 29-33.

⁶⁰ Chuev, *Molotov*, p. 63; Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*, pp. 262-3; *Izvestiya TsK*, no. 9, 1990, p.209.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* pp. 211-12.

⁶² Courtois, S., Werth, N., *et al.*, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes Terror and Repression*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U P, 1999, p. 218.

⁶³ *Izvestiya TsK*, no. 10, 1990, p. 217.

concrete suggestions, but this is not surprising as he was not a military leader. The military leaders led by Vasilevskii put these forward.⁶⁴

Between these two missions Molotov took the chair at the ‘three-power conference:’ the visit of Beaverbrook and Harriman to Moscow, 29 September – 1 October 1941, where the ‘lend-lease’ scheme was extended and large quantities of aid promised to the USSR. Harriman found Molotov overbearing, lacking in humour and inflexible.⁶⁵ He had stayed in the background at the preliminary visit of Harry Hopkins at the end of July when the conference was arranged, typically making just one brief intervention to support Stalin at Hopkins’s initial meeting with Stalin. He then had one long meeting with Hopkins dominated by discussion of the Japanese threat to the USSR, Molotov suggesting that the USA gave Japan a warning about attacking the USSR.⁶⁶ an indication of how seriously Soviet political leaders still regarded the threat from Japan.

By 15 October the Germans had broken through the Mozhaisk line and GKO issued an urgent directive ordering the immediate evacuation of the government to Kuibyshev. Molotov was charged with notifying foreign missions, and as deputy chairman of Sovnarkom to go to Kuibyshev as head of government.⁶⁷ He summoned the British and American ambassadors at 12.30 p.m; Sir Stafford Cripps, the British ambassador, writing that he had never before looked

so tired and ill. . . he was deadly pale and his collar all awry where he is generally very neat and tidy.

He told the ambassadors that the military situation was so grave that the whole diplomatic corps had to leave for Kuibyshev that evening. Pressed by Cripps and Steinhardt, the American ambassador, on whether the Soviet government intended to go or remain in Moscow, he eventually admitted that the government would not depart that evening. He assured them, however, that he would leave by air very shortly and would almost certainly be in Kuibyshev before them. In fact, Molotov did not arrive in Kuibyshev until 22

⁶⁴ Medvedev, *All Stalin’s Men*, p. 92; Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*, pp. 306-8; Zhukov, K., ‘Vospominaniya komanduyushchego frontom,’ in *Bitva za Moskvu*, M: 1966, pp. 55-77.

⁶⁵ See my ‘Molotov, the Making of the Grand Alliance and the Second Front, 1939 – 1942,’ *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 54, no.1, 2002, p.56

⁶⁶ Sherwood, R.E., *The White House Papers of Harry Hopkins*, vol. 1, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1948, pp 328 – 334.

⁶⁷ *Iz. TsK*, 1990, no. 12, p. 217. An indication of the size of the task is that it involved evacuating 89 people from the British embassy alone.

October.⁶⁸ Later on 15 October Molotov summoned the people's commissars to the Kremlin and ordered them to leave Moscow at once.⁶⁹

On 19 October, when GKO took the crucial decision to defend the capital, Molotov was strongest in support of a decision to which Beriya was opposed, telling Molotov and Malenkov as they entered Stalin's office:

Moscow is not the Soviet Union. Defending Moscow is useless. Staying in Moscow is dangerous, they will shoot us like sitting ducks.⁷⁰

It may have been at this point, if the incident occurred at all, that Stalin considered making peace with Germany on very humiliating terms which Molotov is said to have described as a 'second Brest.'⁷¹

Soon after his arrival in Kuibyshev on 22 October Molotov saw S. Kot, the ambassador for the Polish government-in-exile. Kot described him as 'incredibly overworked, obsessed with the seriousness of the situation, but endeavouring nevertheless to master his exhaustion.'⁷² Cripps's interview with Molotov on 23 October in Kuibyshev, when W. Citrine was visiting with a British trade union delegation, degenerated into little more than a squabble, with Molotov accusing the British of avoiding their military responsibilities, and not replying to requests for military assistance. Cripps denied this, saying that the USSR had not responded to questions as to where the troops should be deployed.⁷³ Citrine was impressed with the grandeur of Molotov's office in Kuibyshev and noted only that Molotov was pale, gesticulating with his hands as he spoke in short sharp

⁶⁸ PRO FO 181/962/3; 371/29558, 123, quoted Gorodetsky, *Sir Stafford Cripps Mission to Moscow, 1940-1942*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 1984, p. 251; Shakhurin, 'Aviatsionnaya promyshlennost' nakanune i v gody velikoi otechestvennoi gody,' p. 86.

⁶⁹ *Neizvestnaya Rossiya XX vek*, T. III, M: 1993, p. 177; Shakhurin, 'Aviatsionnaya promyshlennost' nakanune i v gody velikoi otechestvennoi gody,' p. 83; Barber, J., 'The Moscow Crisis of October 1941,' in Cooper, J., Perrie M., and Rees, E.A., *Soviet History, 1917-1953, Essays in Honour of R.W. Davies*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, p. 206

⁷⁰ *Neizvestnaya Rossiya XX vek*, T. III, p. 178; *Iz. TsK*, 1991, no. 4, p. 218; Barber, J., 'The Moscow Crisis of October 1941,' p.212. See 'Stalin's Office Diary' *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no.2, 1996, p. 68 for 19 October 1941 for Molotov's presence in Moscow on this date.

⁷¹ Barber, J. & Harrison, M., *The Soviet Home Front, 1941-1945*, London: Longman, 1991, pp. 54-55; Volkogonov, D., *Triumf i tragediya: politicheskii portret I.V. Stalina*, M: Novosti, 1989Kn. 2, ch. 1, pp. 172-3.

⁷² S. Kot, *Conversations with the Kremlin and Dispatches from Russia*, London: Oxford UP, 1963, p. 71.

⁷³ Eden Papers, Birmingham University Library, AP33/9/1, vol. 24, ff. 455-59; Miner, S.M., *Between Churchill and Stalin: the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the Origins of the Grand Alliance*, Chapel Hill: N. Carolina UP, 1988, p. 171.

sentences. The sympathetic Citrine did not report the altercation with Cripps in the account of his visit to the USSR.⁷⁴

Molotov had told Kot that he anticipated visits to Moscow and that Vyshinskii, a deputy commissar for foreign affairs, would deputise for him in Kuibyshev. He flew back to Moscow on 23 October⁷⁵ and seems to have remained there, especially during the crucial period that followed, although making occasional visits to Kuibyshev. In Kuibyshev, Voznesenskii was assigned chief responsibility for Sovnarkom, and charged with oversight of the evacuation of the factories controlled by the various commissariats to the east.⁷⁶ These duties may have made it impossible for him to discharge his GKO responsibility with regard to ammunition production and led to him being relieved.⁷⁷ The evacuation to Kuibyshev left Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov, Beriia, a small group of general staff officers led by Vasilevskii, and certain key Commissars who were recalled to or remained in the capital, in control of the government in Moscow during the crucial period of the German assault. GKO had virtually become the government and was completely preoccupied with the defence of Moscow. For part of the time Molotov was assigned as head of a GKO commission to the western front. This spent time looking for scapegoats, Molotov warning Zhukov that if he did not halt the German advance he would be shot.⁷⁸ Asked later by the novelist I. Stadnyuk what would have happened if Stalin had left Moscow at this time, Molotov replied that 'Moscow would have burned:' the Germans would have taken the city, the Soviet Union would have collapsed and this would have led to the break-up of the anti-Hitlerite coalition.⁷⁹

On 14 November, Molotov was with Stalin in the Kremlin and saw Kot. It was a difficult interview. Kot pressed for the release of imprisoned Polish officers, Stalin telephoning the NKVD and being assured they had all been released. Molotov then

⁷⁴ W. Citrine, *In Russia Now*, London: 1942, p. 91

⁷⁵ Kot, *Conversations with the Kremlin*, pp. 76, 79.

⁷⁶ Petrov, Yu. P., 'KPSS – organizator i rukovoditel' pobedy,' p. 21. The headquarters of government remained in Kuibyshev only until December 1941. The commissariats were in fact divided between a number of centres, e.g. Narkomfin was in Kazan, Gosplan in Tomsk, Narkomzem in Omsk. See Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyaet*, p.56.

⁷⁷ See above p. 11.

⁷⁸ This was the third visit to the front 'to spur on Zhukov' Molotov referred to in his memoirs, Chuev, *Molotov*, p. 63.

⁷⁹ Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyaet*, pp. 90-95, quoting Stadnyuk, I., *Ispoved' kommunista*, M: 1993, p. 346.

deliberately misread a document to restrict the size of the Polish army in exile, Kot seizing the document to correct him. Molotov's behaviour angered Stalin. Kot concluded the interview by congratulating Stalin in having the 'aureole' of the defender of Moscow, and on the next day when Kot saw Molotov he said that the 'military situation of Moscow had changed for the better.'⁸⁰

GKO and the Politburo

Stalin's position, now not only General Secretary, but Chairman of Sovnarkom, Chairman of GKO, Commissar for Defence, Supreme Commander and Chairman of *Stavka*, and the overlapping membership, with his senior lieutenants such as Molotov members of the Politburo, GKO, the Stavka, and Sovnarkom, gave him great power. It facilitated centralised direction, and the continuation of the system which had developed in the years before the war. During the later 1930s the number of formal sessions of the Politburo had declined rapidly. There were only 6 in 1938, 2 in 1939, and 2 in 1940. The key factor in this decline seems to be the establishment in 1937 of two standing commissions of the Politburo in April 1937, one for foreign affairs chaired by Stalin, with Molotov Voroshilov, Kaganovich and Ezhov as members and one for economic affairs, chaired by Molotov, with Stalin, Chubar', Mikoyan and Kaganovich as members. From this time matters were no longer referred to individual members for a decision by *opros*, but were decided by an inner group and reported as decisions of the Politburo.⁸¹ The power of this inner group was further strengthened in March 1941 with the reorganisation of the government apparatus and the establishment of the Bureau of Sovnarkom dominated by Politburo members.⁸² This domination by Stalin's closest associates continued on the outbreak of war. It was acknowledged by Mikoyan in his manuscript memoirs where he writes of a nucleus of five, later six, of Stalin's leading supporters meeting, often in Stalin's office, on a daily basis, with an *ad hoc* agenda.

Stalin did not convene official sessions of GKO. As questions arose they were decided on an 'operative' basis by the inner group, full meetings being very rare. Members

⁸⁰ Kot, *Conversations with the Kremlin*, pp. xviii, 106 - 116.

⁸¹ *RGAS-PI*, 17/3/986, 16-17; Rees, E.A. 'Stalin as Leader 1924-1937: From Oligarch to Dictator,' unpublished paper presented to the XXIX conference of the Study Group on the Russian Revolution, January 2003, p. 6

⁸² Khlevnyuk, *Politbyuro: mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody*, p. 253. See below p. 28.

of GKO reported on draft resolutions in the areas for which they had responsibility and had free access to Stalin, but the group did not normally work in this way; views and conclusions being formed and changing during discussion.⁸³ If GKO was the key organ, the Politburo continued to be the dominant institution because the inner circle of Stalin's closest associates were members and occupied important positions in such bodies as GKO the *Stavka* and Sovnarkom. When GKO was established Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov and Mikoyan were full Politburo members. Beriia had been appointed a candidate member in March 1939 and Voznesenskii and Malenkov in February 1941.⁸⁴ With no party congresses, conferences and only one Central Committee plenum during the war this situation did not change, but Mikoyan states the after Voroshilov was dismissed from GKO he was no longer invited to Politburo meetings and that Stalin was on particularly close terms with Malenkov.⁸⁵

With the lack of archive evidence to support them, claims in Soviet sources of more than 200 meetings of the Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat to take decisions on foreign policy, economic and strategic questions must be taken to refer to the meetings focused on this inner group.⁸⁶ The sole Central Committee plenum held during the war years, in January 1944, was originally scheduled for 10 October 1941, but was deferred by a Politburo resolution of 9 October, initially for a month in view of the critical military situation, and no plenum was held until January 1944. Stalin did not attend but Molotov was present, presumably as one item of business was the proposal to form commissariats of foreign affairs in each of the republics.⁸⁷

In meetings, the distinction between Politburo, GKO and *Stavka* often cannot have been clear, particularly as GKO did not have its own apparatus but used that of Central Committee, Sovnarkom or the Commissariats, to execute its decisions, whichever was considered most appropriate. Commissars, party secretaries, military commanders and others might be summoned to meetings and they could bring urgent problems to the attention

⁸³ Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyayet*, pp. 45-46; Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, p. 463; Khrulev, 'Stanovlenie strategicheskogo tyla v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine,' p. 66, quoted Bialer, S., *Stalin and his Generals*, p. 370.

⁸⁴ Adibekov, G.M., Anderson, K.M. *et al.*, *Polityburo TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b): povestki dnya zasedanii, T. III. 1940-1952, katalog*, M: Rosspen 2001, p. 930.

⁸⁵ Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, p. 463

⁸⁶ Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, T.2, pp. 78-9; Petrov, Yu. P., 'KPSS – organizator i rukovoditel' pobedy,' p. 14.

⁸⁷ 'Materialy plenuma TsK VKP(b) (1944g.),' *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no. 1, 1992, pp. 61-65. This proposal was being pursued with a view to giving the USSR a number of votes when UNO was formed

of GKO members. The presence of commissars was particularly important when resources were needed for a particular purpose.⁸⁸ On 15 July 1941 when GKO discussed tank production problems, V.A. Malyshev, the Commissar of Medium Engineering, responsible for tank production, D. F. Ustinov, the Commissar for the Armaments Industry, I. F. Tevosyan the Commissar for Ferrous Metallurgy and Voznesenskii, as chairman of Gosplan, attended. On 28 July Voznesenskii was again present as chairman of Gosplan, with Ustinov, P. N. Goremykin, the Commissar for the Ammunition Industry, and N.D. Yakovlev, a Red Army artillery representative, to discuss arms and ammunition production. On occasions like these, those concerned would attend with draft proposals for next month's production, details of plan fulfilment for the preceding month and notes on relevant factors.⁸⁹ At the crucial meeting of GKO held on 14 October to discuss the evacuation of Moscow, its defence industries and the government, Moscow party representatives, N. M. Shvernik, the Chairman of the Council for Evacuation, A.N. Kosygin, N.M. Pervukhin, deputy chairmen of Sovnarkom, A.I. Shakhurin the Commissar of the Aviation Industry and Malyshev were present.⁹⁰ Later in the war, at a key meeting held in December 1943 where strategy for 1944 was decided, military leaders made statements, and Voznesenskii gave a report on the economy.⁹¹

Zhukov claimed that there were sharp differences of opinion at meetings and if agreement could not be reached a commission would be formed with representatives of opposing points of view charged with reporting to the next session.⁹² Decisions and decrees were formulated as necessary, presented to Stalin for signature and issued in the name of the institution thought to be most appropriate. Sometimes Stalin would personally dictate the decree, using Molotov as an amanuensis.⁹³ In his published memoirs, Mikoyan recorded that when he went to see Stalin he usually found Molotov there, and that he was party to

⁸⁸ Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, T.2, p.71; Petrov, Yu. P., 'KPSS – organizator i rukovoditel' pobedy,' p. 14; Khrulev, A., 'Stanovlenie strategicheskogo tyla v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine,' p.66.

⁸⁹ Belikov, A. M., 'Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony i problemy sozdaniya slazhennoi voennoi ekonomiki,' in *Sovetskii tyl v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, T. 1, M: 1974, pp. 72-74, cited Harrison, *Soviet Planning in Peace and War*, p. 95.

⁹⁰ Belikov, A. M., 'Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony i problemy sozdaniya slazhennoi voennoi ekonomiki,' p. 73. Pervukhin was also deputy chair of the Committee for Evacuation.

⁹¹ Petrov, Yu. P., 'KPSS – organizator i rukovoditel' pobedy,' pp. 25-6; Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, T. 2, pp. 92-93.

⁹² Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, T.2, p.71;

conversations and reports when he was present. He claimed, however, that foreign affairs were Molotov's special preserve, and that Stalin kept other matters from him and did not really trust him, suggesting that this was because Stalin considered to be the second man in the state.⁹⁴

Molotov remained a member and vice-chairman of GKO throughout the life of the institution. One authority claims that the members of GKO worked for the entire war period without leave.⁹⁵ Decrees could be issued by telegram, telephone or by personal contact. Among Molotov's early responsibilities was overseeing the work of the GKO Committee for Evacuation, (*Komitet po evakuatsii*) responsible for transferring industrial enterprises to the east where they were out of reach of the German invasion. On 16 July, GKO reformed the SNK Council for Evacuation (*Sovet po evakuatsii pri SNK SSSR*) formed on 24 June 1941, as a GKO committee. Kaganovich had been appointed as chairman of the Sovnarkom body because it had been believed that the chief difficulties were those of transport. He was now replaced Shvernik, an acknowledgement of the prime importance of labour in the evacuated industries. GKO also formed an Administration for Evacuation of the Population, (*Upravlenie po evakuatsii naseliniya*) headed by K. D. Panfilov, who reported to Molotov.⁹⁶

In February 1942, members of GKO were formally assigned areas of responsibility in which they monitored the implementation of GKO decisions and reported on the fulfilment of production plans. They also headed a working group for their area. This confirmed a distribution of responsibilities made by Stalin during the early days of the war.⁹⁷ Molotov was given responsibility for tank production and related questions, including metallurgy and chemistry related to the war, which may have been why he was initially responsible for the development of atomic weapons.⁹⁸ Stalin intervened personally in shortfalls and difficulties in

⁹³ Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, p. 464; Khrulev, A., 'Stanovlenie strategicheskogo tyla v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine,' pp. 68- 69.

⁹⁴ Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, p. 463

⁹⁵ Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyaet*, p. 48.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* pp 33-4, 69; Tsikulin, V.A., *Istoriya gosudarstvennykh uchrezhdenii SSSR, 1936-1965gg.*, M: 1968, p. 69.

⁹⁷ 'Iz vospominanii o voennykh godakh,' p. 74; 'Beseda professora G.A. Kumaneva s M.G. Pervukhinym,' p. 127.

⁹⁸ Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyaet*, pp. 55, 70. Beriia was made responsible for arms production, Malenkov for aircraft production Mikoyan for a general working group and supply of. Provisions and equipment to the army and Voznesenskii for ammunition production.

tank production and other key areas,⁹⁹ and the importance of tank production may be why this area was assigned to his leading lieutenant. In September 1941, the All-Union Commissariat of the Tank Industry (*Narkomat tankovoi promyshlennosti SSSR*) had been formed to bring together the tank factories evacuated from western areas with factories in the east making machinery.¹⁰⁰ Malyshev was appointed to head the new commissariat. With the loss of Kharkov, and the sieges of Leningrad and Stalingrad, pre-war plants, often former tractor factories, were lost, and it was essential to re-organise production. Malyshev, an able engineer and good organiser, appears to have shown considerable initiative in this sphere. On 1 July 1942, Stalin attacked him for failing to fulfil the quarterly production plan for T-34 tanks, and a half hour later Molotov telephoned dismissing him. The next day, however, Stalin ordered him to assist Molotov with his responsibility for tanks because of his knowledge.¹⁰¹

Each member of GKO was assigned deputies for the sectors of industry for which he was made responsible, P.M. Chernov being assigned to Molotov as his deputy for the tank industry. In addition, Molotov's working group of specialists, up to 75 in number, included experts in motors, armaments and tank chassis. He regularly received reports on the output of tanks and self-propelled guns, the fulfilment of production plans, and numbers of tanks manufactured by individual factories from three specially appointed officials.¹⁰² Molotov retained the responsibility for tank production for the whole of the war, being awarded the decoration of 'Hero of Socialist Labour' for his efforts in October 1943¹⁰³ and his contribution to increasing tank production, assisted by Malyshev, is generally acknowledged.¹⁰⁴ In his published memoirs Mikoyan claimed that in 1942 Stalin questioned Molotov's performance in increasing tank production, and Beriya said that Molotov did not have links with the factories, did not direct the strategy, did not investigate production problems. When Malyshev, or others, raised problems he just called a large meeting, discussed the matter for hours and formulated a resolution which was of little use. Mikoyan

⁹⁹ 'Beseda professora G.A. Kumaneva s M.G. Pervukhinym,' p. 128. For Stalin's intervention in tank production in the early days of the war see *RGAS-PI*, 558/11/151, 44-5, 53-4, and during 1943 and 1944 see 'Dnevnik narkoma,' *Istochnik*, no. 5, 1997, pp. 121 – 125.

¹⁰⁰ Tsikulin, *Istoriya gosudarstvennykh uchrezhdenii SSSR*, p. 69

¹⁰¹ 'Dnevnik narkoma,' pp. 116, 119. Malyshev was reappointed as Commissar in June 1943.

¹⁰² Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyaet*, pp. 72-3, 122.

¹⁰³ *P.*, 1 October 1943.

¹⁰⁴ Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyaet*, p. 101, 176.

claimed that the responsibility for tank production was passed to Beriya who was efficient in supporting Malyshev.¹⁰⁵ If, however, Stalin was dissatisfied with Molotov's performance at one point, Beriya did not officially replace him and a particular context for the incident seems to be presented in Mikoyan's manuscript memoirs.¹⁰⁶

As Deputy chairman of GKO Molotov signed more than half of the 9971 decrees issued by the institution, especially those not concerned with military matters and branches of industry not linked with defence. His workload increased in December 1942 with the creation of the GKO Operative Bureau (*Operativnoe byuro GOKO*). This body was given direction and oversight of the defence industry commissariats which GKO now took under its control, removing the responsibility from Sovnarkom. Similarly it was responsible for the commissariats of communications, power stations, coal, oil, and petrol industries, ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy. It was charged with formulating and overseeing the execution of production and supply plans for the industries for which it was responsible. The original membership consisted of Molotov (chairman), Beriya, Malenkov and Mikoyan, all members except the chairman being assigned responsibility for particular branches of industry.¹⁰⁷

Meetings and Attendance at GKO Operative Bureau 1943 - 1945

Year	No. Meetings	Members and number of Meetings attended								
		Molotov	Mikoyan	Beriya	Malenkov	Voznesenskii*	Voroshilov ^	Kosygin +	Kaganovich +	Bulganin #
1943	21	21(ch)	21	19	20	20				
1944	61	13(ch)	59 (1ch)	61 (47ch)	57	58	46	14	2	4
1945	46 to 28 August		44	41(ch)	46	46(5 ch)		19	34	37

* Although a GKO member from February 1942 attended as Gosplan chairman

^ Ceased to be a GKO member November 1944

+ Attended as Sovnarkom vice-chairman

Became GKO member November 1944

(ch) chairman

¹⁰⁵ Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, p. 425.

¹⁰⁶ See below p. 27.

¹⁰⁷ RGAS-PI 644/2/116, 56-57; Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyaet* pp. 31, 36, 80, 101; Petrov, Yu. P., 'KPSS – organizator i rukovoditel' pobedy,' p. 13.

During 1943 Molotov chaired all twenty-one meetings of the Operative Bureau, and thirteen out of 14 of the meetings up to mid-May 1944, when Beriya took over the chairmanship and he ceased to attend. During his period, as chairman, Molotov acted as executive officer of the Bureau.¹⁰⁸ The negative side to Molotov's activities is that he seems to have transferred his pre-war bureaucratic methods of working as chairman of Sovnarkom to his position in GKO. He formed commissions, and on at least one occasion he circulated a draft resolution he had written to ten people asking their opinion. This included Malyshev, although the resolution did not concern the tank industry. Mikoyan recorded one meeting chaired by Molotov during the very early days of the war, called to discuss questions raised by Malyshev at which twenty persons were present including commissars, deputy commissars and members of the Gosplan *kollegiya*. Molotov did not allow free discussion, but invited people to present different points. He contributed nothing to the discussion of the questions personally and had a strange manner. Mikoyan concluded that the meeting was not useful and the whole thing could have been settled by telephone.¹⁰⁹

The reasons for Molotov's replacement by Beriya as chairman of the GKO Operative Bureau are not clear. Perhaps it is an indication that Stalin was dissatisfied with his bureaucratic methods and/or of Beriya's growing power, and as one authority suggests that Molotov's position as Stalin's first lieutenant was being challenged during the later stages of the war.¹¹⁰

Sovnarkom

On 21 March 1941 the Bureau of Sovnarkom had been formed. This body was an amalgamation of two former bodies: the Defence Committee (*Komitet oborony*) and Economic Council (*Ekonsovet*) formed in 1937, although the Defence Committee continued to exist with a membership of five, focusing on more specialised military matters. The seven-man Sovnarkom Bureau was entrusted with the powers of the full Sovnarkom and was charged with meeting at least once a week. Molotov was the original chairman.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ RGAS-PI, 644/3/1-6.

¹⁰⁹ Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyayet*, pp. 102-103, quoting archive version of Mikoyan's memoirs.

¹¹⁰ Gor'kov, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovlyayet*, pp. 101, 110.

¹¹¹ Khlevnyuk, *Politbyuro: mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody*, pp 251-3. The other members were Voznesenskii, Mikoyan, Bulganin, Beriya, Kaganovich and Andreev.

When Stalin replaced him as Sovnarkom chairman in May 1941, the size of the Bureau was increased to thirteen, the number of Sovnarkom deputy chairmen to fifteen and a Sovnarkom decree of 8 May distributed duties between the Sovnarkom chairman and his deputies.¹¹² As Sovnarkom chairman, Stalin presided over two or three meetings of the Bureau before the outbreak of war, but it seems then to have immediately stopped functioning.¹¹³ On 1 July, Stalin signed an unpublished Sovnarkom decree devolving increased responsibility on the individual commissars and their staffs, allowing them to decide urgent operative problems in implementing directives.¹¹⁴

On 23 June 1941, the same day as the *Stavka* was established, a permanent standing commission, the Commission of the Bureau of Sovnarkom USSR for Current Business (*Komissiya byuro Sovnarkoma SSSR po tekushchi delam*) was formed. It met for the first time on the day after it was created.¹¹⁵ In December 1942 this commission was reformed as the Bureau of Sovnarkom USSR (*Byuro Sovnarkoma SSSR*). The Commission was charged with discussing urgent problems caused by the war situation at a daily meeting, but after the first three days of its existence daily meetings were rare. In January 1942 the Commission agreed to meet weekly on Tuesday, with a further meeting on a Friday if there was essential business. The original membership was Voznesenskii, (chairman), Mikoyan and Bulganin, but after the first four meetings Bulganin did not attend again.¹¹⁶

In the crisis when it was created, the commission was primarily concerned with matters connected with the war, but as it became established assumed the functions which the Sovnarkom had fulfilled at its plenary sessions during the 1930s. Annual and quarterly plans occurred on its agenda in the same way as they had occurred on the agendas of plenary sessions of Sovnarkom in the 1930s. The Commission concerned itself particularly with economic business including planning, the budget, and agriculture, but also with social questions. Initially, only a small group of core members attended, but increasingly from July

¹¹² Khlevnyuk, *Politbyuro: mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody*, p. 255.

¹¹³ 'Beseda professora G.A. Kumaneva s M.G. Pervukhinym,' p. 131. For the lack of meetings during the war see 'Dnevnik narkoma,' p. 131.

¹¹⁴ *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsiii, R-5446* decree no. 1795.

¹¹⁵ Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, p. 389.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*; A small number of the Protokols are available among Molotov's papers, *RGAS-PI*, 82/2/392, but I am indebted to Dr. Oleg Khlevnyuk for providing me with a computerised listing of a full set from documents yet to be catalogued. See also 'Iz vospominanii o voennykh godakh,' p. 74.

1941 commissars, their deputies, members of the commissariats and other officials were summoned to meetings. At the meeting in January 1942, which arranged a weekly meeting, Voznesenskii introduced a proposal, to be approved by Stalin, distributing responsibilities between the Sovnarkom chairman (Stalin) and his deputies, but there is no further reference to this in the protocols.

In accordance with the decision when GKO was formed, that Mikoyan and Voznesenskii, who had been appointed first vice-chairman in March 1941,¹¹⁷ should concentrate on work in Sovnarkom, they initially played the major roles in the Commission. Molotov, although a Sovnarkom vice-chairman, attended and chaired only one from 42 meetings from June until December 1941. This meeting took place on 22 October, the day of his arrival in Kuibyshev, and was presumably held there. Six of the seven items on the agenda were concerned with the evacuation of the government to Kuibyshev, a matter for which Stalin had made Molotov responsible.

In 1942, Molotov attended 41 from 55 meetings taking over the chairmanship of the Commission in August, when he was appointed 'first deputy chairman of Sovnarkom for all questions of the work of Sovnarkom USSR.'¹¹⁸ He chaired 22 meetings in 1942 and continued as chair of the body when it was reformed as the Bureau of Sovnarkom. By 1942, there seems no distinction between the business of the Commission and that of its replacement, the Sovnarkom Bureau. In 1943 the Bureau met only five times and Molotov chaired all five meetings. This reduction in the number of meetings was probably caused by the establishment of the GKO Operative Bureau which Molotov also chaired up to May 1944,¹¹⁹ particularly as the Operative Bureau had taken control of the vital commissariats concerned with defence. The brief given to the Operative Bureau meant, in effect, that Sovnarkom's work was divided between two committees, Molotov overseeing both until Beriia took over chairmanship of the GKO Operative Bureau.

The work of the Sovnarkom Bureau and Molotov's role in its proceedings increased in 1944. There were 31 meetings, Molotov attending and chairing 28, including two joint meetings of the Sovnarkom Bureau and the GKO Operative Bureau, held in June and October. The focus of Molotov's administrative work in the Commission may support

¹¹⁷ *Iz.*, 11 March 1941.

¹¹⁸ *P.*, 17 August 1942; Chuev, *Molotov*, p. 62.

the argument that in domestic politics he was being relegated to more routine business and that Beriya, who had taken over the chairmanship of the GKO Operative Bureau, was increasing in power. In 1945, up to the end of August, the Bureau met 36 times, but Molotov attended only nine of these meetings all of which he chaired.¹²⁰ This fall in attendance can, however, be explained by his preoccupation with international affairs.

Meetings and Regular Attendance at the Sovnarkom Commission for Current Business/Sovnarkom Bureau.

Year	No. Meetings	Regular Members and number of Meetings Attended						
		Molotov	Voznesenskii	Mikoyan	Pervukhin	Shvernik*	Andreev	Kosygin
1941 24/6/41- 31/12/41	42 [^]	1 (ch)	27 (ch)	30 [12(ch)]	11 [1 (ch)]	7	0	0
1942	55	41 [19(ch)]	43 [36(ch)]	46	41	37	32	28
1943	5	5(ch)	5	5	0	4	3	0
1944	31	28(ch)	29 [3(ch)]	29	0	28	29	24
1945 (to 30/8/45)	36	10(ch)	35 [26(ch)]	36	0	34	23	30

(ch) chairman

*Shvernik held the position of Chairman of the Sovnarkom Committee for Registration and Allocation of the Workforce (*Komiteta po uchety i raspredeleniyu rabochei sily pri Sovnarkome SSSR*) – the Manpower Committee.¹²¹

[^] One meeting in October, presumably held in Kuibyshev was chaired by Vyshinskii.

¹¹⁹ See above p. 26.

¹²⁰ See Protokols of the Commission.

¹²¹ See Harrison, *Soviet Planning*, pp. 94, 190.

Conclusion

Attendance of GKO Members in Stalin's Office during the War¹²²

	Molotov	Beriya	Malenkov	Voroshilov	Mikoyan	Voznesenski i	Kaganovich	Bulganin
1941								
June	20	22	17	14	15	0	11	2
July	20	13	13	5	6	0	5	3
August	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
September	19	21	21	4	6	0	2	0
October	13	11	11	2	6	0	0	0
November	4	3	3	0	6	0	0	1
December	9	3	3	2	2	0	0	1
Total 1941	86	74	69	27	41	1	18	6
1942								
January	9	15	15	6	6	6	2	1
February	13	13	15	6	13	6	5	0
March	19	14	14	5	9	5	1	0
April	13	11	21	3	4	3	1	0
May	15	20	23	1	3	1	0	5
June	11	21	20	0	3	0	0	2
July	25	29	28	1	6	1	0	3
August	22	15	13	0	6	0	0	2
September	17	9	0	1	6	1	0	3
October	21	22	18	1	8	1	0	1
November	17	20	23	0	5	0	0	1
December	16	12	11	0	6	0	0	2
Total 1942	198	201	201	24	75	24	9	20
1943								
January	24	25	25	0	4	0	0	0
February	16	18	12	0	8	0	3	1
March	16	4	5	0	9	0	5	1
April	26	22	23	9	8	1	2	2
May	18	16	18	9	11	0	1	0
June	22	14	14	8	12	0	0	0
July	9	10	11	5	2	0	0	0
August	10	11	10	6	2	0	1	1
September	17	17	16	12	5	0	0	0
October	15	15	15	9	6	0	0	0
November	10	6	8	5	2	0	1	0
December	8	7	6	0	1	0	0	0
Total 1943	191	165	163	63	70	1	12	5

¹²² Compiled from 'Stalin's Office Diary,' *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no.2, 1996, pp. 3-72, no. 7, 1996, pp. 4- 85, no. 8, 1996, pp. 66-110.

1944								
January	7	6	7	0	5	0	0	0
February	12	4	12	3	12	0	0	0
March	15	11	13	8	11	0	0	1
April	10	13	17	0	8	0	0	1
May	16	16	17	0	13	0	0	2
June	12	13	9	0	5	0	0	1
July	11	8	7	0	4	0	0	0
August	14	9	10	0	3	0	0	3
September	4	3	3	0	0	0	0	2
October	10	3	3	0	1	0	0	1
November	15	10	9	0	2	0	0	6
December	8	13	12	0	3	0	0	9
Total 1944	134	109	119	11	67	0	0	26
1945								
January	10	5	8	0	2	0	0	4
February	5	4	4	0	2	0	1	4
March	14	9	12	0	6	0	0	3
April	14	18	15	0	8	0	0	10
May	13	19	21	1	10	0	2	9
June	21	12	13	1	10	2	0	8
July	9	6	6	0	5	0	0	2
August	16	9	9	0	6	0	1	6
Total 1945	102	82	88	2	49	2	2	46

The attendance of Molotov in Stalin's office during the war years demonstrates his prominence during this period. Only in 1942 did Beriya and Malenkov attend more often, and this may easily be accounted for by Molotov's visit to Great Britain and the USA in May and June. It is not clear if the heavy attendance of Beriya and Malenkov indicates their growing power, unless one assumes that Molotov's presence was necessitated by his role in foreign relations on more occasions than the positions held by Beriya and Malenkov. This table and the evidence presented about the roles of these three in GKO and Sovnarkom demonstrate that they were Stalin's leading supporters in government during the war.

Other evidence presented in this paper suggests that during the war Molotov's political behaviour continued as in the 1930s. There is no evidence that he changed his bureaucratic methods. If he differed with Stalin, and the evidence about this is slim, he clearly knew when to support him and was willing to act as his agent in applying terror, as in the 1930s.

Molotov's work as chairman of the GKO Operative bureau and SNK Commission and Bureau, in addition to his contribution to GKO and the *Stavka* makes clear that he was

playing a major role in domestic government during the war besides his work as Commissar for Foreign Affairs. To assist him as Sovnarkom deputy chairman he had a secretariat of six officials and nine more assistants him in his work as commissar for foreign Affairs.¹²³ This was the largest support group of any of the Sovnarkom vice-chairmen.

¹²³ *GARF*, R-5446/133/3, 8. Of the other SNK deputy chairmen only Mikoyan had more helpers (9), Voznesenskii had 2 secretaries and Kosygin 3.