

**THE SOVIET UNION'S ROLE IN THE SLOVAK NATIONAL UPRISING
THE TALSKÝ AFFAIR: INCOMPETENT, TRAITOR OR PAWN?**

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There are now two great nations in the world, which starting from different points, seem to be advancing toward the same goal: the Russians and the Anglo-Americans.... Each seems called by some secret design of Providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world.

Alexis de Tocqueville 1835¹

Who rules Bohemia, rules Europe.

Otto von Bismarck "The Iron Chancellor of Prussia" (1815-1898)

I

Much has been written about the Slovak National Uprising of 1944 in the decades following the Second World War. However, the vast majority of Slovak history regarding the uprising and the events in Slovakia during the turbulent decade of 1938 – 1948 is written in Czech, Slovak or Russian and primarily by two opposing factions—the fascists that managed to escape Slovakia after the fall of the Tiso regime and the Moscow-loyal communists that forced their way into power in 1948 and proceeded to re-engineer all of Czech and Slovak politics, economics, education, culture, literature and historiography. Very little Slovak history of this time period and its analysis is found in English, and even less is found written by the democrats who were primarily responsible for envisioning and planning a revolt against the fascist Tiso regime. At the center of the ongoing debate over the meaning of the Slovak National Uprising (SNU) is the role that the Soviet Union played in the uprising. To date, substantial controversy persists over

¹ de Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969, pages 412-13.

Stalin's true intentions in the SNU. Since the uprising meant the end of the first ever modern Slovak nation, Slovak nationalists have often regarded it as a foreign-inspired act of treason against a legitimate Slovak state. Communist interpreters have hailed the SNU as a socialist victory against the evil of Nazism and fascism that led straight to the "Victorious February 1948" communist takeover of Czechoslovakia. Slovak Democrats—comprised of Social Democrat, Agrarian and National Socialist political parties, the Lutheran (Evangelical) church and other non-Catholic religious groups, trade unions, sports and social organizations, former Legionnaires and many Slovak Army officers—formed the primary core of resistance to the fascist Slovak regime. Their goal was the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic with equal rights and recognition for Slovakia. They have viewed the SNU as the brightest moment in modern Slovak history. The meaning of the SNU has not yet been resolved by Slovak historians, whether they are nationalists, democrats or ex-Marxists. All sides are driven by rival ideologies rather than by an objective search for the truth. We may have to wait yet another generation, when passions have cooled and more secret Soviet-era archives, particularly those of the NKVD, are declassified, to get a truly objective treatment of the role the Soviet Union played in the SNU. What we do have, however, is the testimony of numerous eye-witnesses and high-level participants in the military and political events of that time. From their testimony and the recently declassified archives in Europe and the former republics of the Soviet Union we can crystallize a new understanding of Stalin's National-Front strategy and how it played out in Slovakia during and after the SNU.

As Hitler's *Drang Nach Osten* and the Germanic people's desire for greater *Lebensraum* (or more fundamentally, Hitler's disdain for the Slavic and Jewish peoples of Europe) were known to be among the central pillars of his political and military aspirations in Europe², the manifesto of the Soviet Comintern (Communist International) and later the Cominform long epitomized Stalin's National-Front strategy for dominating Central and Eastern Europe (and beyond). Before Hitler and Stalin, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck insightfully opined that "who rules Bohemia, rules Europe." In 1938, democratic Czechoslovakia held the unfortunate position of being a fledgling nation geographically caught between two tyrannical powers set to face each other in battle and determined to dominate this small, yet historically strategic land.

To date, many political historians have interpreted Stalin's actions in Central and Eastern Europe during and after the Second World War as a direct reaction to American and Western hegemony that he viewed as threatening the Soviet Union. Until recent declassification of secret Soviet-era archives, these historians fervently believed Stalin had no particular political strategy for Central and Eastern Europe. They often employ this viewpoint when mitigating Roosevelt's and Churchill's negotiations with Stalin regarding the Soviet "sphere of influence" in Europe at the Teheran and Yalta conferences. Moreover, these same historians cite America's victory in the race for the atomic bomb as further basis to Stalin's "reaction" in Central and Eastern Europe and the beginning of the Cold War.^A The recently released state archives, however, have shaken the *terra firma* upon which these historians have for 60 years stood regarding Stalin and shed new light on his *modus cogitandi et operandi*. No longer is there universal belief

² Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Books, 1998, pages 140-42.

that Stalin's National-Front strategy (later known as *Narodniya demokratiya* or Popular Democracy) was *ad hoc* and opportunistic. Modern scholarship is now turning to the viewpoint that the Soviet leader did pursue a conscious strategy and approached foreign affairs deliberately and comprehensively.³

Although in the 1930s Stalin disavowed Trotskyism and turned his energies and focus to within the Soviet Union, the Comintern continued its mission to “Bolshevize” and “liberate” the working class of Europe and the rest of the world. What Stalin really did in the late 1920s was to drop Lenin's prediction that revolutions would arise spontaneously in other advanced industrial countries; instead he came to see the Soviet Union itself as the center from which socialism would spread and eventually defeat capitalism.⁴ The effect was to switch the principal instrument for advancing revolution from Marx's idea of a historically determined class struggle to a process of territorial acquisition Stalin could control. “The idea of propagating world Communist revolution was an ideological screen to hide our desire for world domination,” one of his secret agents recalled decades later.⁵ “This war is not as in the past,” Stalin himself explained to the Yugoslav communist Milovan Djilas in 1945: “whoever occupies a territory also imposes his own social system.... It cannot be otherwise.”⁶ Since Soviet-era archives were unlocked in the 1990s new evidence has begun to emerge shedding greater light on Stalin's intentions

³ Mark, Eduard. *Revolution by Degrees: Stalin's National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941-1947*, Working Paper No. 31, Cold War International History Project. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, February 2001 (hereafter *Revolution by Degrees* 2001).

⁴ Gaddis, John Lewis. *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, pages 13-14.

⁵ Sudoplatov, Pavel, Sudoplatov, Anatoli, *et al.* *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness—A Soviet Spymaster*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1994, page 102.

⁶ Djilas, Milovan. *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962, page 114.

when he dissolved the Comintern in 1943 that debunks previous scholarship that argued Stalin had no intention to spread Bolshevism beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. Recently released documents from Soviet archives indicate the deceptive plan Stalin and the Comintern executed to mislead the West regarding the Soviet “sphere of influence” in Central and Eastern Europe between 1943 and 1948. Previous arguments, based on alleged evidence that Stalin ceased the policies and activities of the Comintern in 1943 when he dissolved the international communist organization as proof Stalin had no intention to bring Central and Eastern Europe under Soviet domination, have proven false.

Specifically, the newly available information establishes that the dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943 was entirely a deception. As the Russian editors of an exceptionally valuable collection of documents relating to the work of the Comintern and its successor note, “It is obvious that the activity the Comintern conducted until May 1943 was not only not broken off thereafter but became still more extensive.”⁷ Interpretations of Soviet foreign policy must now take this fact fully into consideration.

The activities and directives of the Comintern and its successor, the Department of International Information (*Otdel Myezhdunarodnoi Informatzii, OMI*), taken in concert with the public actions of the Soviet government and the private utterances of Stalin and other prominent Communists show that Stalin had a highly developed political strategy for liberated countries throughout Europe. During World War II, as several of the Kremlin’s directives to the national parties indicated at the time, the strategy was to be realized through the establishment of national fronts somewhat resembling the so-called popular fronts pushed by the Kremlin in the 1930s.

Beyond the reach of the Red Army and the NKVD the object of the national front strategy was in the shorter term to consolidate the war-enhanced political positions of communist parties by establishing them as responsible parties of good government committed to “bourgeois democracy” and cooperation with other parties of the Left. The purpose

⁷ Institute of General History, Russian Academy of Sciences, *Komintern i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina*, 2, *Posle 22 Iyunia 1941 g.* [The Comintern and the Second World War After 22 June 1941, Part 2.] Moscow: Pamyatniki Istoricheskoi Myicli, 1998, page 89.

was to create the capacity to exploit future opportunities for political advances while (as in Eastern Europe) avoiding premature conflict with the United States and Great Britain.

To ask whether Stalin pursued communist revolution in Europe *or* continued cooperation with his allies is to pose a false antinomy. He wanted *both*, and the strategy of the national front was the vehicle for temporarily harmonizing goals that were ultimately in conflict. Stalin did not adopt this course merely because he wished to avoid the adverse consequences of an early break with the Western powers: He *needed* the United States and Britain if he was to achieve, in the shorter term, certain important goals of his foreign policy.

Stalin's program took shape sufficiently early in the war that it cannot be construed as a defensive response to Western pressures on the Soviet Union in regard to Eastern Europe, for at the time of its inception the policies of both the United States and Great Britain toward the region deferred to Soviet predominance. Neither was the program for the ultimate sovietization of Eastern Europe a response to the putatively "anti-Soviet" sentiments of the peoples of Eastern Europe. On the contrary, the national-front strategy supposed that the communist-dominated regimes could win wide support and even establish themselves through free elections.⁸

Stalin was fully prepared to use unconventional means to promote Soviet interests beyond the territories he ruled. He kept Lenin's Comintern in place but turned it to his own purposes: this became clear during the Spanish Civil War, when Stalin used Comintern agents as much to wipe out Trotskyists as to fight fascists.^{9,10} Nor did Stalin rule out war itself as a means of advancing the revolutionary cause. He would not, like Hitler, risk military conflict to meet some pre-determined timetable. But he did see wars among capitalists as likely to weaken them and therefore speed "socialist encirclement:"

⁸ Mark, Eduard. *Revolution by Degrees* 2001.

⁹ Thomas, Hugh. *The Spanish Civil War*. New York: Harper, 1961, pages 214-17.

¹⁰ McDermott, Kevin. *Stalinist Terror in the Comintern: New Perspectives*. *Journal of Contemporary History* 1995; 30:111-30.

that may be one reason why he failed to foresee the German attack in 1941.^{11,12} And he by no means excluded the possibility of an eventual war with capitalism involving the Soviet Union itself. “Stalin looked at it this way,” his foreign minister, Viačeslav Molotov recalled: “World War I has wrested one country from capitalist slavery; World War II has created a socialist system; and the third will finish off imperialism forever.”¹³

To further understand Stalin’s intentions in the SNU one must also carefully analyze his actions in similar resistance movements in 1944-45, such as the Yugoslavian resistance under Josip (Broz) Tito¹⁴ and the Warsaw uprising. Because of its strong democratic leadership who refused to abdicate Polish territory and political control to Stalin, the Warsaw uprising was most exemplary of Stalin’s strategy in the SNU. The uprising in Warsaw broke out only 28 days before the SNU on August 1, 1944, and, like the SNU, was crushed in 60 days by German forces. Despite all the repetitive calls to arms over Soviet airwaves to ordinary Poles living in Warsaw, Stalin was quite openly vocal about his disdain for the Polish democratic leadership in London and their armed forces in Poland, even going so far as to calling them “criminals.” As recently as 2005, the issue of the March 1940 Katyn Forest massacre by the NKVD of nearly 8,000 Polish Army officers and 21,768 Polish citizens who supported the democratic Polish leadership in

¹¹ Raack, R. C. *Stalin’s Drive to the West, 1938-1945: The Origins of the Cold War*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, pages 11-36.

¹² Zubok, Vladislav M., Pleshakov, Konstantin. *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, page 37.

¹³ *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev*, ed. Albert Resis. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993, page 63.

¹⁴ *Yugoslavia: A Country Study: The Resistance Movement*, ed. G. E. Curtis. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1990 (hereafter *Yugoslavia: A Country Study*).

London has resurfaced as yet another example of the virulent animosity that persists between the Poles and former Soviets.^{15,16}

American and British archives include communiqués between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin regarding Allied assistance in the Warsaw uprising.¹⁷

1. [Aug. 4, 1944 message from Winston Churchill to Josef Stalin]

Prime Minister to Marshal Stalin At urgent request of Polish Underground Army we are dropping, subject to weather, about sixty tons of equipment and ammunition into the southwest quarter of Warsaw, where it is said a Polish revolt against the Germans is in fierce struggle. They also say that they appeal for Russian aid, which seems to be very near. They are being attacked by one and a half German divisions. This may be of help to your operation.

2. [Aug. 15, 1944 Andrey Y. Vyshinsky, First Assistant to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, message to Ambassador Harrison in Moscow]

The Soviet Government cannot of course object to English or American aircraft dropping arms in the region of Warsaw, since this is an American and British affair. But they decidedly object to American or British aircraft, after dropping arms in the region of Warsaw, landing on Soviet territory, since the Soviet Government do not wish to associate themselves either directly or indirectly with the adventure in Warsaw.

3. [Message from Josef Stalin to Winston Churchill on Aug. 16, 1944]

After the conversation with M. Mikolajczyk I gave orders that the command of the Red Army should drop arms intensively in the Warsaw sector. A parachutist liaison officer was also dropped, who, according to the report of the command, did not reach his objective as he was killed by the Germans.

Further, having familiarized myself more closely with the Warsaw affair, I am convinced that the Warsaw action represents a reckless and terrible adventure which is costing the population large sacrifices. This would not have been if the Soviet command had been informed before the beginning of the Warsaw action and if the Poles had maintained contact with it.

4. [Aug. 15, 1944 Ambassador Harriman message to F. D. Roosevelt and the Acting Secretary of State]

In Molotov's alleged absence, Vyshinski received us early this afternoon [15 August]. We informed him that we believed the decision of the Soviet Government was a grave mistake and that it would have serious repercussions in Washington and London. We pointed out that Vyshinski's letter did not tally with Stalin's promise to Mikolajczyk to assist the resistance movement in Warsaw... Vyshinski adhered to the statements made in his letter and to the view that the outbreak in Warsaw was ill-advised, not a serious matter, not worthy of assistance, and that it would have no influence on the future course of the war. There were no reasons to reconsider the Soviet position. He said that the Soviet Government had nothing to fear as to public reaction abroad since the exploits of the Red Army and the Soviet people clearly spoke for themselves. I pointed out

¹⁵ "Katyn Resolution Adopted." *The Warsaw Voice Online*. 30 March 2005. (Cited 13 October 2005). <http://www.warsawvoice.pl/view/8069>

¹⁶ Borowiec, Andrew, Sands, David R. "Assaults in Poland, Russia reignite old tensions." *The Washington Times Online*. 17 August 2005. (Cited 17 August 2005.) <http://www.washingtontimes.com/>

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944*, vol. III: *The British Commonwealth, Europe*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965, pages 1374-96.

that we were not requesting Soviet participation in the operation and stated that I could not understand why the Soviet Government should object to our endeavour to assist the Poles even if our attempt to get arms to them should not bring about the desired results. Vyshinski maintained that the landing of the American planes at the Soviet bases constituted participation and the Soviet Government did not wish to encourage 'adventuristic actions' which might later be turned against the Soviet Union ...

Clark Kerr inquired whether he understood correctly that there had been a change in Soviet policy from Stalin's promise to Mikolajczyk to assist the Poles in Warsaw. Vyshinski maintained that there had been no change in policy, that it was primarily a matter of the best ways and means of effecting this policy, that the Red Army was helping Poland, and that the question was purely military in character. He was evasive when asked whether the Soviets intended to assist directly the Poles fighting in Warsaw.

5. [Aug. 17, 1944 Ambassador Harriman message to F. D. Roosevelt and the Secretary of State]

I recommend that the President send immediately a strong message to Stalin and instruct me to deliver it personally provided he is in Moscow, otherwise to Molotov (it would be helpful also to receive guidance on the oral explanation desired in order that there may be no doubt Stalin understands the President's views).

In making this recommendation I assume that I am not so out of touch with American opinion but that I reflect your views in believing that we can not (repeat not) accept the Soviet position when they allow the Poles fighting in Warsaw to be killed without lifting a hand and arbitrarily prevent us from making efforts to assist.

My own feeling is that Stalin should be made to understand that American public belief in the chances of the success of world security organization and postwar cooperation would be deeply shaken if the Soviet Government continues such a policy.

... Care should be taken however to avoid anything in the nature of a threat, and it should be borne in mind that we have so far no official knowledge that Stalin personally is committed to the decisions Vyshinski expounded as those of the Soviet Government.

6. [Aug. 18, 1944 Winston Churchill's telegram to F. D. Roosevelt]

The refusal of the Soviets to allow the U.S. aircraft to bring succour to the heroic insurgents in Warsaw, added to their own complete neglect to fly supplies when only a few score of miles away, constitutes an episode of profound and far-reaching gravity. If, as is almost certain, the German triumph in Warsaw is followed by a wholesale massacre, no measure can be put upon the full consequences that will arise. I am willing to send a personal message to Stalin if you think this wise and if you will yourself send a separate similar message.

Better far than two messages would be a joint message signed by both of us. I have no doubt we could agree on the wording.

7. [Aug. 24, 1944 message from F. D. Roosevelt to Winston Churchill]

My information points to the practical impossibility of our providing supplies to the Warsaw Poles unless we are permitted to land on and take off from Soviet airfields, and the Soviet authorities are at the present time prohibiting their use for the relief of Warsaw.

I do not see that we can take any additional steps at the present time that promise results.

Stalin's reply ... to our joint message about the Warsaw Poles is far from encouraging to our wishes to assist.

[Signed] Roosevelt.

8. [Aug. 25, 1944 Winston Churchill's telegram to F. D. Roosevelt]

Uncle Joe's reply adds nothing to our knowledge, and he avoids the definite questions asked. I suggest following reply:

"We are most anxious to send American planes from England. Why should they not land on the refueling ground which has been assigned to us behind the Russian lines without enquiry as to what they have done on the way. This should preserve the principle of your [government's] dissociation from this particular episode. We feel sure that if wounded British or American planes arrive behind the lines of your armies, they will be succoured with your usual consideration. We do not try to form an opinion about the persons who instigated this rising, which was certainly called for repeatedly by radio Moscow. Our sympathies are, however, for the 'almost unarmed people' whose special faith has led them to attack German guns, tanks, and aircraft. We cannot think that Hitler's cruelties will end with their resistance. On the contrary, it seems probable that that is the time when they will begin with full ferocity. The massacre in Warsaw will undoubtedly be a very great annoyance to us when we all meet at the end of the war. Unless you directly forbid it, therefore, we propose to send the planes."

If he will not give any reply to this I feel we ought to go and see what happens. I cannot conceive that he would maltreat or detain them. Since signing this, I have seen that they are even trying to take away your airfields at Poltava and elsewhere.

9. [Aug. 24, 1944 message from F. D. Roosevelt to Winston Churchill]

... I do not consider it advantageous to the long range general war prospect for me to join with you in the proposed message to U.J. [Uncle Joe].

I have no objection to your sending such a message if you consider it advisable to do so.

Despite repeated insistence by Churchill that the Allies be allowed to deliver desperately needed arms and food to the resistance in Warsaw, Stalin refused to allow Allied planes to stop and refuel on Soviet territory and Roosevelt refused to support Churchill in further pursuing the matter.^B Without the ability to refuel in the Ukraine, Allied planes could not deliver the life-sustaining matériel to the resistance in Warsaw. Furthermore, the advancing Red Army (1st Belorussian Front¹⁸) under Marshal Konstantin Rokossovskij (himself, the son of a Pole with family still in Warsaw at the time of the uprising) approaching Warsaw during the uprising suddenly on Stalin's orders halted just outside the city on the eastern banks of the Vistula River only to watch the Germans burn and decimate the city. Consequently, the resistance—composed primarily of democrats who

¹⁸ The Soviet term *Front* referred to a large military unit comparable to an army group in the American military. It does not refer to a geographical theater of war such as the Western or Eastern Front.

supported the exiled Polish democratic leadership in London—was systematically annihilated.

II

Stalin took much criticism from Western allies over his failure to come to the aid of the Poles and his refusal to allow Allied assistance in the Warsaw uprising. While the Warsaw uprising was still unfolding, the SNU commenced on 29 August 1944. Although the SNU had token communist participation, the vast majority of its participants were democrats whose goals were to remove the fascist puppet regime in Bratislava and restore a democratic Slovakia within a Czechoslovak republic.^{C,D} Stalin received delegations and extended offers of support for an armed uprising in Slovakia to at least three different entities: exiled Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš when he personally met with Stalin and signed a 20-year treaty of friendship and cooperation on December 12, 1943; the diplomatic and military missions based in Moscow under Czechoslovak General Heliodor Píka; and the Slovak National Council (SNC) representatives Lieutenant Colonel Mikuláš Ferjenčík and Karol Šmidke in August 1944. Despite all the promises Moscow made, Stalin had no intentions of supporting any armed resistance that he did not have complete control over¹⁹, particularly one backed by democrats. When Stalin met with President Beneš in Moscow in December 1943 he had already successfully managed the infamous diplomatic *coup d'état* only 12 days earlier at the Teheran conference in winning important concessions from Churchill and Roosevelt regarding the Soviet “sphere of influence” in Central and Eastern Europe and the fate of the Polish and Baltic countries after the war. Moreover, Stalin was in the driver’s seat

¹⁹ *Yugoslavia: A Country Study*, ed. G. E. Curtis.

since October 1, 1941, when the first protocol of the American-Soviet Lend-Lease agreement was signed and executed. Extraordinary amounts of war matériel, food, military transports, raw industrial materials and medical supplies were given to the Soviets until May 1945.^E Unlike the insurrectional Slovak army, the Soviets had an endless supply of war matériel from the American arsenal to achieve their goals. When Stalin signed the Czechoslovak-U.S.S.R. Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Beneš on December 12, 1943, and promised to support the Czechoslovaks in an uprising, he already knew he had the means and a green light to establish political and military control over Czechoslovakia on his own terms and in his own time. He had neither any political or military reason nor the intent whatsoever to fulfill his promises to the democratic London-based government or the SNC. Evidence exists that from the very beginning after hearing the detailed plans for the uprising the Soviet high command (*Stavka - Shtab vierhovnogo komandovania*) viewed the plans as “unrealistic” and simply shelved it.^{20,21} However, this time Stalin needed an excuse to not definitively support and participate in the SNU while maintaining an image of cooperation with the uprising leaders in order to avoid the criticism he endured from the West regarding his blatant actions during the Warsaw uprising.²² Although the SNU, unlike the Warsaw uprising, did have local Slovak communist support from within the SNC, Stalin would go on to betray the Slovak communist leadership, as he did for a time in Yugoslavia, by replacing it with his own communist operators embedded in Soviet-controlled partisan units

²⁰ Grečko, Andrej A. *Čerez Karpaty* [Through the Carpathians]. Moskva: Vojennoje izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1970, page 70.

²¹ Štemenko, S. M. *Generální štáb za války* [The General Staff During the War], vol. 2. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1974, pages 288, 294.

²² Erickson, John. *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany: Volume Two*. Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd., 1983, page 289.

fighting in Slovakia and later by installing loyal, Moscow-indoctrinated Czechoslovak figures such as Klement Gottwald and General Ludvík Svoboda.²³ After the outbreak of the uprising, Stalin wanted to create an image of cooperation with the SNC by naming SNC member Karol Šmidke head of the partisan movement in Slovakia and sending Soviet Colonel Aleksej Nikitič Asmolov to “work with” Šmidke. Stalin was simply following his own dictates when he dissolved the Comintern in 1943 and gave the directive to communist operatives throughout Central and Eastern Europe to cooperate with the parties of “bourgeois democracy” while establishing a beachhead and expanding the influence of Communism. Although Karol Šmidke was a communist loyal to Moscow, Stalin considered the SNC and its SNU the brainchild of “bourgeois democrats.”^F Stalin would go on to do all he could to hijack the SNU and turn it into a communist revolution under the guise of a Soviet-led “People’s War” against fascism.^G

Shortly after hearing Beneš’s plans for an armed revolt in Slovakia in December 1943, Stalin gave the directive to establish partisan training camps in the Ukraine with their command headquarters in Kiev. These camps received their first recruits and began training in February 1944. By the summer of 1944 Soviet partisan units began infiltrating North-Central and Eastern Slovakia. Although fighters from over 30 countries participated in the partisan units in Slovakia between 1944 and 1945, all were under direct Soviet command based in Kiev. Each partisan unit had its own field commander, typically a Red Army officer^H, and a Soviet political commissar or senior political officer (*zampolit*—*заместитель командира по политработе* or “deputy of

²³ Elias, Andrew. *The Slovak Uprising of 1944*. A doctoral dissertation in the Department of Government and International Relations, New York University, 1963, pages 43, 52-3 (hereafter Elias, Andrew. *The Slovak Uprising*).

the commander for political work") attached to the unit.^{24,25} The partisans were a well-organized, fiercely-loyal, although often an undisciplined force that followed a clear chain of command that led back to Moscow via Kiev. Membership in a partisan unit required swearing of allegiance to Moscow and communist ideology. No partisan expedition or mission was undertaken without explicit orders from Kiev which in turn received its orders from the *Stavka* in Moscow.

Immediately upon their arrival in Slovakia in mid-summer 1944 the partisan units began to execute their hit-and-run missions of sabotage and mayhem against Nazi supply and communication lines, transportation, and targeted assassinations of *Wehrmacht* officers and the local citizenry of Germanic decent. The level of their activity in North-Central and Eastern Slovakia had risen so dramatically by the end of summer 1944 that concern erupted among planners of the SNU that the actions of the partisans were threatening to draw unwanted attention from German forces before the two infantry divisions in Eastern Slovakia were fully prepared. The exiled Czechoslovak government in London sent several communiqués to Moscow regarding this concern and to request the partisan units suspend their activities before the outbreak of the planned SNU. Lieutenant Colonel Ján Golian, commander of the insurrectional Slovak Army, held several meetings with partisan leaders throughout August 1944 and also sent communiqués and a delegation to Moscow to address among other things the premature actions of the partisan units in Slovakia and their lack of coordination with the insurgent Slovak Army leadership. After

²⁴ Goff, K. J., LtCol. USAR, Military Intelligence. "The Political Officer (*Zampolit*) in the Soviet Army," graduate research paper, Arkansas State University, 1999. (Cited 7 October 2005).

<http://www.mvep.org/zampolit.htm>

²⁵ Elias, Andrew. *The Slovak Uprising* at page 49.

some deliberation with Golian, partisan leaders Red Army 1st Lieutenant Peter Aleksejevič Veličko and Captain Alexej Semionovič Jegorov reluctantly agreed on August 13 in Turčiansky Svätý Martin to curb partisan activities on the condition that the Slovak Army would “soon” declare the national uprising. However, when no uprising was declared after one week, the partisans resumed their activities on an unprecedented scale.²⁶ On August 4, 1944, Golian’s Chief of Staff Lieutenant Colonel Mikuláš Ferjenčík flew along with several others to Moscow carrying detailed plans of the uprising. He arrived in Moscow only to have his documents, personal papers and uniform confiscated and be placed under house arrest for one month before being able to speak with the Soviets and representatives of the Czechoslovak military mission there under General Heliodor Píka.²⁷ The military mission in Moscow and the London-based government repeatedly made inquiries as to the fate and location of Golian’s delegation, but Moscow refused to acknowledge their presence.²⁸ Ferjenčík at last did get a chance to present to the Soviets the issues he came to discuss and was finally released and returned to Slovakia on September 5 after the outbreak of the uprising. No progress was made in Moscow on the immediate release from the Soviet Union of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps or the 2nd Czechoslovak Parachute Brigade for the uprising. Both groups were organized and being held in the Soviet Union since January 1944.²⁹ Moreover and despite the efforts to convince the Soviets to suspend partisan activity, Kiev and Moscow

²⁶ Graca, Bohuslav. *Slovenské národné povstanie – vyvrcholenie národnooslobodzovacieho boja slovenského ľudu* [Slovak National Uprising – the Culmination of the National-Liberation War of the Slovak People]. Doctorial dissertation, presented in 1952. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1954, pages 78-80.

²⁷ Ferjenčík, Mikuláš. *Slovak National Uprising and Mission to the USSR*. In: *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War II, Part II*, ed. Lewis M. White. Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1995, pages 221-232 (hereafter Ferjenčík, Mikuláš. *Slovak National Uprising*).

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Erickson, John. *The Road to Berlin: Stalin’s War with Germany: Volume Two*. Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd., 1983, page 292.

chose not to heed the repeated, fervent requests and orders to the partisan units in Slovakia to continue missions persisted. This ultimately led to the premature outbreak of the SNU when German forces invaded Slovakia to quell increasing partisan activity and the impending uprising.

III

The initial plan of the SNU included two variants—offensive and defensive. The offensive plan involved attacking German forces from the rear at Dukla and Lupkov Passes, connecting Northeastern Slovakia, Poland and the Ukraine, thereby securing easy passage for Red Army forces through the Carpathian Mountains. The Eastern Slovak Army consisted of two heavily armed divisions (1st infantry division *Giraltovce* under the command of Colonel Mikuláš Markus and 2nd infantry division *Radvaň* under the command of Colonel Štefan Tatarko) together with the Eastern Slovak Air Force Group (12th and 13th air squadrons) based at Išla airport near Prešov. Their total strength was approximately 32,000 men, 50 tanks, 42 planes and over 300 canons and mortars.^{30,31,32} Beginning in May 1944 they were deployed in the area of Prešov under the guise of securing the northeastern Carpathian mountain passes against a Soviet advance. Both divisions and the Eastern Air Force Group were under Army Corps Commander General Augustín Malár and Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff Air Force Colonel Viliam Antonín Talský. In August 1944 the divisions were still in the state of building their

³⁰ *Vojenské dějiny Československa IV. díl (1939-1945)* [Military History of Czechoslovakia, vol. IV]. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1988.

³¹ Šumichrast, Peter, Klabník, Viliam. *Slovenské letectvo 1939-1944* [Slovak Air Force], vol. 2. Bratislava: Magnet-Press, 2000.

³² Holub, Ota. *Československé tanky a tankisté* [Czechoslovak Tanks and Tank Drivers]. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1980.

preparedness for the uprising. These two divisions were given the mission of securing Dukla and Lupkov Passes for the Red Army.

The second, defensive, variant of the uprising was to be executed only if German forces began occupying Slovakia and regardless of the state of preparation of the insurgent Slovak Army and any coordination with Soviet forces. It involved the immediate transfer of the two Eastern Slovak divisions to the strategic triangle of Banská Bystrica-Zvolen-Brezno nad Hronom. This rugged region in Central Slovakia was to be held at all costs as long as possible.^{33,34} The two variants were laid out by the SNC and the insurgent army leadership (Lieutenant Colonels Ján Golian, Mikuláš Ferjenčík, Mirko Vesel, Dezider Kíšš-Kalina, and Majors Julius Nosko and Jozef Marko) during a meeting on 29 July 1944. The order to commence the uprising would be executed by one of two possible scenarios, as follows:

1. On the order of Colonel Talský and the SNC at the most opportune time as determined by:
 - a. Prearranged coordination between the SNC, Colonel Talský and the Soviet Army approaching North-Eastern Slovakia (1st Ukrainian Front under Marshal Ivan S. Koňev), and/or
 - b. Successful negotiations on Soviet coordination and support between Stalin and the Czechoslovak military mission in Moscow.
2. On the order of General Golian after determination that German forces had begun invading and occupying Slovakia, regardless of the state of preparation of the two eastern divisions and any coordination with the Soviet Army.

On August 27, 1944, in Turčiansky Svätý Martin, an 11-member group of communist partisans, under the command of Red Army 1st Lieutenant Peter Aleksejevič Veličko and Soviet political commissar A. K. Ľach, captured and executed a German general and 30

³³ Doležal, Jiří. *Slovenské národné povstanie* [Slovak National Uprising]. Praha: Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, 1954, page 104.

³⁴ Elias, Andrew. *The Slovak Uprising* at page 42.

members his military mission, *en route* to Berlin from Romania which had just defected to the Allies four days earlier. For Hitler this was the final straw. On August 29 German troops entered Slovakia from the north, south and west to quell partisan resistance and put down the rebellion. At 19:00 hours on August 29, 1944, President Tiso's Defense Minister General Ferdinand Čatloš announced on state radio that Germany had occupied Slovakia and for all Slovak forces to remain in their barracks and to stand down. One hour later at 20:00 hours Lieutenant Colonel Golian sent the coded message, *Turn out begins, valid from 20:00 hours today*, to all units to begin the uprising. On the morning of August 30, 1944, Corps Commander General Augustín Malár suddenly left his post in Prešov and flew to Bratislava. Some historians believe he went to Bratislava to reassure his loyalty to the Tiso regime amidst announcement of the uprising the night before. Others insist Malár was summoned to a secret emergency conference with Tiso's Defense Minister General Čatloš, who surreptitiously, but reservedly supported an uprising in general. Regardless of the reasons he abandoned his post in Prešov without leaving any instructions with his subordinates, General Malár made a plea over national radio from Bratislava on the evening of August 30 that the Slovak Army stand down to the Germans. This announcement from their commander created great confusion among the men of the Eastern Slovak Army and Air Force Group just at the moment they were deliberating about how to respond to the German invasion in his absence. In his plea he clumsily employed the word "premature" when referring to armed resistance against the Germans. This single word later cost him his life before a German firing squad.

Slovak Army Captain Peter Vlčko knew General Malár from his days at the War College in Bratislava where Malár was the College's Commandant and Inspector General. Vlčko testifies in his recollection of General Malár that in November 1943 the Slovak Ministry of National Defense Chief of Staff, Colonel Štefan Tatarko, sent Captain Vlčko on a mission to deliver some important papers directly into the hands of General Malár, who was serving as Defense Attaché at the Slovak Embassy in Berlin. During their meeting in Berlin the following conversation took place³⁵:

Welcome, Vlčko. Sit down and give us the news from home. I'm more interested in what's happening there than here.

General, I don't have to report the official news because you're probably better informed than I. However, there are a few things you may not know unofficially.

Tell me, is our army winning the battle at the front as Tiso would have us believe?

No, just the opposite. We're losing and the people are overjoyed.

Good, I suspected as much for some time now.

General, you know as well as I where the Slovak stands in this war. Only the government won't tell him the truth.

Not too loud, Vlčko. These walls have ears. You were saying our government lies to the people.

Yes, and lies won't work anymore.

It's a tragedy, our boys dying in vain.

Do you know many are refusing to fight now? They are running over to the Russians.

How do you know this?

From my staff colleagues, and from what I hear on the London broadcasts. Our underground is telling people the truth. But this isn't enough. What the nation needs now is good leadership. General, many Slovak officers are expecting you to come back home where you belong. The army needs an experienced commander to lead them during the critical period ahead—when the Soviets cross the Carpathians. We must free Slovakia before the retreating Nazis destroy the country. This will prove to the Russians we liberated ourselves.

You're right. But the Soviets are nowhere near the Carpathians.

³⁵ Vlčko, Peter E. *In the Shadow of Tyranny: A History in Novel Form*. New York: Vantage Press, 1973, pages 313-15 (hereafter *In the Shadow of Tyranny*).

True, but they'll be there soon, and we can't wait until they arrive. I like the Russians, General. I just don't trust the communists.

Then Hitler was right when he said the Bolsheviks presented the greatest danger to Europe and the entire World.

Yes, but he made this warning only after he had ravished all of Europe. Although the communist threat has always been a fact of life, neither Hitler nor the rest of the world honestly thought so. He wanted to destroy Communism so he could dominate the continent. Anyone with an ounce of intelligence knew this. Who knows? The day may come when we will have to challenge Communism.

Vlčko, what are you trying to tell me?

That you should return home and take command of the army, Pán Generál.

It won't be that simple. Now, what message have you brought from Headquarters?

Further evidence of General Malár's contempt for the Tiso regime lies in the fact that he joined several other fellow Czechoslovak Legionnaires, including General Rudolph Viest, in signing the statement condemning the announcement of an independent Slovakia on March 14, 1939.¹ However, shortly after announcement of Slovakia's independence in March 1939, General Malár conducted himself heroically in an operation repulsing invading Hungarian troops in Southern Slovakia. Thereafter and up to 1944, General Malár conducted himself as a loyal officer of the Slovak Army under the new Slovak state, and SNU planners remained uncertain if his original stand against the Tiso regime had evolved over those years. Therefore, the SNU planners chose to approach Colonel Talský instead of General Malár, even though they would have preferred Malár's loyalty and leadership of the uprising. Lieutenant Colonel Golian, himself, viewed General Malár and Colonel Talský as Čatloš men. This was based on the fact that Malár was a close personal friend of General Čatloš. Their relationship went as far back as the Russian Revolution in 1917 when both served in Russia as Legionnaires. General Malár was at Čatloš's side at the Ministry of Defense in Bratislava when Čatloš arranged for a flight to send the SNC delegation to Moscow in July 1944. On that flight,

which did not occur until August 4, 1944, the SNC delegation carried General Čatloš's memorandum to Moscow with it.³⁶ Additionally, in 1940 after establishment of the Tiso regime Defense Minister Čatloš named Talský his Chief of Staff in the Ministry of Defense. Notwithstanding these close ties to Čatloš, the plan remained that Talský and Urban were going to approach General Malár at the final moment before the outbreak of the uprising and offer him command of the two eastern divisions in an armed revolt against the Germans and Tiso's government. If Malár refused, the plan included summarily executing him on the spot.³⁷ This may have played a role in his being emergently summoned on August 30 to Bratislava by General Čatloš, who may have been privy via Talský to this secret plan and wanted to save his life. Čatloš was well aware of the planned uprising and Talský's role in it. On August 23, 1944, Čatloš summoned Talský to headquarters in Bratislava and told him that he was aware of the plans for the uprising and asked if Talský could provide him with a list of trustworthy officers who would take part in such an uprising.³⁷

IV

Instead of assuming command of the two Slovak Army divisions in the absence of General Malár and executing the plan agreed to beforehand, Colonel Talský ordered the Air Force Group on August 30 to prepare for departure and abandon the two divisions flying to a prearranged landing zone in Kaliniv and Lvov, Ukraine (formerly, Poland) to join Marshal Ivan Stěpanovič Koņev and the Soviet Army. The two divisions, left in chaos and without leadership, were surrounded by the 24th *Panzer* Division of the 1st

³⁶ Ferjenčík, Mikuláš. *Slovak National Uprising* at page 223.

³⁷ Šolc, Jiří. *Osudné rozhodnutí: případ Talský* [Fateful Decision: the Case of Talský], *Vojenská história* [Military History], Roč. 6, č. 3-4/2002, s. 81-89. Bratislava: VHÚ.

Panzer Army (Army Group A) under command of *Wehrmacht* General Gotthard Heinrici³⁸ and disarmed on the afternoon of August 31 without a single shot. Consequently, the uprising commenced prematurely and lost a crucial component of their plan, as well as their two most heavily armed divisions capable of resisting a German advance. There is some evidence Colonel Talský held a meeting just outside Prešov on the evening of August 30 at 22:00 hours in Kelemeš (modern-day Ľubotice) with the insurgent army officer staff, including Assistant Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant Colonel František Urban and 1st Division Commander Colonel Mikuláš Markus to discuss their options.³⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Jozef Husár, who was supposed to assume command of the 2nd division from Tiso-loyal Colonel Tatarko at the outbreak of the uprising, was reportedly absent from the meeting. The discussion reportedly addressed three options^{40,41}:

1. Keep together the two divisions and the Air Force Group, begin disarming local German units and prepare for a rear attack of German units at Dukla and Lupkov Passes while Major Elemér Polk (Chief of Staff to Colonel Markus) flies on 31 August to meet Marshal Koňev to ensure attack of the Red Army on the morning of September 2.
2. Move the two divisions and the Air Force Group to Central Slovakia where the insurgent army had anti-aircraft defenses and firm control of the air field at Tri Duby. There they could join up with other insurgent army forces.

³⁸ The 1st Panzer Army was part of Army Group A, whose name after January 25, 1945, was changed to Army Group Center. Some called Heinrici's 1st Panzer Army "Army Group Heinrici" because it was also composed of the 1st Hungarian Army under General Dezső László.

³⁹ Stanislav, Ján. *Mocnosti protifašistickej koalície a ozbrojený zápas v SNP*. In: *Humanistické tradície v literárnom odkaze Slovenského národného povstania: zborník príspevkov z odborného seminára k 60. výročiu Slovenského národného povstania a 100. výročiu narodenia Ladislava Novomeského* [The Strength of the Anti-Fascist Coalition and the Armed Conflict in the SNU. In: Humanistic Traditions in the Literary Heritage of the Slovak National Uprising: Anthology of Contributions from the Special Seminar of the 60th Anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising and the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Ladislav Novomeský]. Banská Bystrica: Štátna vedecká knižnica, 597/2004, at pages 22-23. <http://www.snp.sk/docs/zbornik.pdf> (hereafter *Zborník* 2004).

⁴⁰ Grečko, Andrej A. *Přes Karpaty* [Through the Carpathians], 2nd supplemental edition. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1974, pages 76-77, 100-101.

⁴¹ Honza, M. „Návrh dukelské operace.“ [The Proposition of the Dukla Operation.] 1999. (Cited 14 September 2005). www.fronta.cz/index.php?dokument=55

3. Alternatively, to transfer the Eastern Air Force Group to safe territory just across the northern border in the Ukraine where the Red Army was in control and to provide air support for the two divisions from the Ukraine.

The first option appeared to Colonel Talský and his Air Force Group the most risky since Išla airport had no anti-aircraft defenses. Exercising the second option would in Talský's mind mean abandoning the primary mission given to the Eastern Army and Air Force Group—to capture and defend Dukla and Lupkov Passes in preparation for the arrival of the Soviet Army. The decision on these plans was reportedly quickly settled, at least in Colonel Talský's mind, on the night of August 30 when reports came that German soldiers and armaments were being unloaded at the Prešov railway station and news that Major Polk, with the help of the local Čapajev partisan group, was finally successful in making contact with the 1st Ukrainian Front, only 40 kilometers north of the border in Krosno, Poland and obtaining permission for the wing to land in Kalinuv and Lvov. The reality of the situation, however, on August 30—made quite clear by Golian with the code words announced the previous evening, and the announcement over public radio by the SNC on August 30 for a general mobilization—plainly indicated that executing the original mission of capturing and holding Dukla and Lupkov Passes was no longer an option because of the rapidly-approaching German forces from the south, west and northeast through Dukla Pass. By all accounts, Colonel Talský must have known about the 24th *Panzer* Division arriving in Prešov before he left Išla airport with the Eastern Air Force Group. According to the agreed plan, if the Germans invaded Slovakia the two divisions were to immediately transfer to Central Slovakia, rather than execute plan “A” at Dukla and Lupkov Passes. Talský and Golian met on August 24 and the evening before the uprising on August 28 in Banská Bystrica to confirm the final plans. During

those two meetings special emphasis was made on what to do in the case of a preemptive German invasion. On August 25 Golian received news of German troops west of Slovakia in Moravia preparing for invasion and sent out a “special secret instruction” to all military units about what to do in this case. However, when Talský made the decision to fly to Kalinuv and Lvov he failed to recognize the fact that if he transferred the Eastern Air Force Group there he would be left with a greater flying distance to provide air support for the two Slovak divisions fighting the Germans than if he transferred the Air Force Group to Tri Duby. Thus, his argument against the second option, reportedly discussed at the meeting on August 30, was in reality without merit. The fact remains that Talský continued to believe he could convince the Soviets to immediately come to the aid of the insurgent Slovak Army in time to execute the first (offensive) variant before the Germans arrived in force in Prešov. Clearly, he believed by flying his Air Force Group to Kalinuv and Lvov he was preserving the support role his air force was to play. Yet, there is no convincing evidence that on the night of August 30 Colonel Talský and the rest of the officer staff in Prešov did not know the Germans had invaded Slovakia and were arriving in Prešov. That was the very reason Talský gave Koňev for flying to Lvov. Therefore, Talský’s argument against moving the Air Force Group to Tri Duby was patently unmeritorious and is additional evidence that Talský had no intention to execute the agreed second (defensive) variant of the uprising without Soviet support. This is just another proof of how Talský viewed the entire SNU plan under Golian. Talský’s opinion of how the uprising should be executed appeared to be closer in line with the plan of General Čatloš and his close associate General Malár, viz., the Slovak Army should jump ship only at the last moment and in close cooperation with the

Soviets, yet without any contingency for a preemptive strike by the Germans (see Čatloš memorandum).^K

History continues to view General Čatloš not as a fascist ideologue, but as an opportunist ready to jump any sinking ship to join the winning team. It appears that history will reward General Malár and Colonel Talský with the same dishonorable distinction. Neither Malár nor Talský were known to be political ideologues; both were opportunists. The preponderance of the evidence indicates that Talský viewed the Soviets as a greater (more certain) opportunity than the Beneš-Golian team.

Captain Vlčko, serving directly under Urban and Talský had this to say about Lieutenant Colonel Urban's reaction to Talský's sudden departure to Lvov.⁴²

[News of the uprising was received with joy in Prešov. Even the presence of German liaison officers in the mess hall did not hinder open jubilation. This lack of restraint was a grave error. On August 31, at two in the afternoon, an end came to their freedom celebration.

Captain Vlčko was seated in his office trying to tune in the BBC. Instead of a voice from London, he heard familiar rumblings on the street below.]

What the hell's going on? I'd better check with Urban.

[Bursting into Urban's office, he found his superior burning all incriminating documents in an open fireplace. In a matter of seconds their dreams had disappeared in smoke and flames.]

Sir, what's happening outside?

Peter, we're surrounded by German tanks. If you've anything you don't want to fall into their hands, destroy it.

Where's Talský?

⁴² Vlčko, Peter E. *In the Shadow of Tyranny* at pages 358-59.

He flew to Russia yesterday with our only squadron.

Damn it! How are we going to fight back without air support?

It's too late now. By the way, Malár's in Bratislava. He left no instructions.

Save yourself, Peter. There's not much time.

This description of the events of August 31, 1944, leaves only a few possible explanations for Lieutenant Colonel Urban's reaction. Possibly, Lieutenant Colonel Urban had no premonition of what Colonel Talský had done the evening before on August 30 and was desperately destroying secret documents at the last second on the afternoon of August 31 to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Germans. Like many other officers and enlisted men remaining with the two divisions in Prešov on the afternoon of August 31, Lieutenant Colonel Urban, Colonel Markus and Captain Vlčko were captured by surprise. If any meeting between Talský, Urban, Markus and other select officers of the two divisions actually took place on the night of August 30 and Talský's true intentions were made known during that meeting, it is doubtful that Urban and Markus would blissfully remain in Prešov and fail to order either the immediate transfer of the divisions or to take up defensive positions. Moreover, it would be extreme to conclude Urban and Markus would willingly allow themselves to remain in the danger of capture and possibly face interrogation under torture and death at the hands of the Germans—everyone was aware of the fate of the Polish soldiers in Katyn Forest in 1940. There are a few possibilities regarding the alleged meeting between Talský, Urban and Markus on August 30:

1. Colonel Talský ordered Urban and Markus to remain at their posts and await his word from Lvov.

2. Colonel Talský ordered Urban and Markus to transfer the two divisions to Central Slovakia while he transferred the Air Force Group to the Soviets.
3. Colonel Talský never made known at the meeting his final decision to abandon the army and join the Soviets abroad with the Eastern Slovak Air Force Group.
4. Urban was at a loss as to how he should react first to Malár and then to Talský and many others abandoning their posts; in other words, he was incompetent.
5. Urban was not present at the meeting.
6. Alternatively, the meeting never took place.

Had such a meeting actually took place (evidence tends to confirm it did) and had Colonel Talský indeed indicated his intentions to either leave the country with the Air Force Group or transfer the two divisions and Air Force Group to Central Slovakia, logic dictates that Lieutenant Colonel Urban and Colonel Markus would have been part of either plan and would have made arrangements along with Colonel Talský on August 30 to immediately redeploy the two divisions or take up defensive positions. Abandoning the two divisions to certain capture was anathema to the oath taken by and fidelity of all three officers and entirely uncharacteristic of their past proven reliability as soldiers in the face of the enemy. Colonel Talský had a well-established record of competence and bravery in the field while acting as Chief of Staff of the Slovak Rapid (*Blitz*) Mechanized Division during *Operation Barbarossa* in the Ukraine in 1941-42. Captain Peter Vlčko testifies to this fact in his memoirs after serving under Colonel Talský in the Ukraine in 1941. According to Vlčko, Colonel Talský was a take-charge, decisive soldier when facing the enemy. Vlčko also knew Talský from his days at the War College in Bratislava where Talský was professor. Much convincing evidence exists that sets aside any argument that Colonel Talský abandoned the two eastern divisions on August 30, 1944, because of his incompetence or cowardice. The only two tenable remaining explanations for his actions on August 30 are that Colonel Talský deliberately and

consciously acted traitorously against the insurgency or he was manipulated like a pawn in a much larger scheme.

Colonel Talský had good motivation to harbor ill will against the leadership of the uprising. He was much more experienced as a field commander in battle than most other SNU officers of his rank. As a matter of fact, after long delay and discussions about who should lead the uprising, the plan at one point included placing Colonel Talský at the head of the SNU command, but the London-based leadership insisted on the less-experienced and lower-ranking Golian over Talský, largely for Golian's organizational and logistical expertise and his closer ties to the Beneš group.^L Consequently and although he was intimately involved in the planning phase from the beginning and approached Golian earlier in the summer of 1944 promising to lead the two eastern divisions in the case of an uprising, Colonel Talský had very little faith in the prospects of the uprising and its chosen leadership under Golian without Soviet support. Likewise, Golian remained skeptical about Talský, considering him a Čatloš ally through whom the Minister of Defense was establishing a future alibi in case he were apprehended by a different regime in Bratislava after the war.⁴³ There is conflicting history who actually assigned Colonel Talský to the position of Chief of Staff of the Eastern Slovak Army. Some historians report it was Golian, himself, who assigned Talský to that post, but too many facts contradict this version of history.⁴⁴ Others believe it was Talský's friend General Čatloš, in cooperation with General Malár, who assigned him to the Eastern Slovak Army post. Regardless of which authority delegated Talský to the Eastern Slovak

⁴³ Šolc, Jiří. *Osudné rozhodnutí: případ Talský* [Fateful Decision: the Case of Talský], *Vojenská história* [Military History], Roč. 6, č. 3-4/2002, s. 81-89. Bratislava: VHÚ.

⁴⁴ Elias, Andrew. *The Slovak Uprising* at page 40.

Army, on August 30 Colonel Talský preferred the company of the Red Army than remain in Slovakia and resolve the issue of what to do with the two divisions from within Slovakia. He was only concerned about where he could safely transfer his Air Force Group, and not what to do with the two infantry divisions with 40,000 men and heavy equipment. Apparently, he thought he had the time and ability to convince the Soviets—who were aware of the plans for the uprising for well over eight months in advance but failed to act on all the pleas and requests for help and coordination—to immediately come to his aid. After all, Colonel Talský was continually led to believe this may indeed be possible.

Evidence confirms the close ties the Čapajev partisan group maintained between Marshal Koňev and the Eastern Slovak Army. During the summer of 1944 the Čapajev group operated in Northeastern Slovakia under the command of Soviet Army Major Ivan Kononovič Baľuta (also known as Jagupov) and his Chief of Staff Slovak 1st Lieutenant Ľudovít Kukorelli. On August 29, 1944, Major Baľuta left his post near Prešov and flew off to meet with the staff of the partisan movement (ŠPH) of the 1st Ukrainian Front under Marshal Koňev.^{45,46} Major Baľuta took with him secret documents that Lieutenant Kukorelli managed to obtain from the headquarters of the Eastern Slovak Army regarding the defense plan and state of the two divisions in Eastern Slovakia. Major Baľuta reportedly used this information to update Koňev and ŠPH on the possible (eventual) role

⁴⁵ Benčík A., Broft M., Kural V., *et al.* *Osvobození Československa Rudou armádou 1944/1945.* [The Liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army 1944/1945.] sv. 1. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1965, s.69.

⁴⁶ Archív Múzea SNP [Archive of the Museum of the SNU], Banská Bystrica, IV. fond, prir. č. S 117/81.

the Slovak divisions would play in the uprising.⁴⁷ After the meeting, rather than send Major Baľuta back to his command with the partisan group, Koňev sent Red Army Captain Viktor Kokin to replace him. These events raise the questions, why would the commander of the partisan group leave his post to hand-deliver documents to the Soviet Army and why then would he be replaced by another Soviet officer of lower rank? Although it would be speculation to opine on this, it brings to the forefront the strong possibility someone at the headquarters of the Eastern Slovak Army was working with the Soviets—either for loyal or traitorous motives regarding the uprising. There are some reports that it was Major Polk of the 1st Slovak division that gave the secret defense plans to Lieutenant Kukorelli, however this is not entirely clear and confirmed by other sources.⁴⁸ The definitive answers to these questions unfortunately have either died with the eye-witnesses of those times or remain buried deep within former Soviet archives.^M The fact remains, however, that after Talský returned to Slovakia he immediately joined up with the Čapajev partisan group and later with the Red Army. It leaves open the strong likelihood that Koňev and the *Stavka* had indirect influence over Talský via the Čapajev partisan leadership and employed this influence to manipulate Talský and the insurgent Slovak Army for their own political and military purposes. Moreover, it helps to further strengthen the argument that Stalin betrayed the Slovak communists in the SNC using them as a decoy, and instead chose to work through the political influences he had

⁴⁷ Benčík A., Broft M., Kural V., *et al. Osvobození Československa Rudou armádou 1944/1945.* [The Liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army 1944/1945.] sv. 1. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1965, s.69.

⁴⁸ Archív Múzea SNP [Archive of the Museum of the SNU], Banská Bystrica, IV. fond, prir. č. S 117/81.

complete control over and had established on the ground among the partisan units and their political *zampolits*.^{49,50}

While the representatives of the SNC and General Golian were desperately trying to garner a guarantee backed up with concrete actions by the Soviets for mutual cooperation and support for the uprising, Golian was, nonetheless, prepared for the possibility that the Soviets would not come to their support. Colonel Talský continued to hold to the belief that the Soviets would eventually come to the support of the insurgents in time to execute their original offensive plan. Either this error in thinking was the result of his naivety or manipulation on the part of the Soviet high command. The overall body of evidence strongly supports the latter and Colonel Talský was only a pawn in the greater Soviet scheme.^N

In the absence of both Malár and Talský it appears the next officer in command that was part of the insurgency, Lieutenant Colonel František Urban, was the genuine incompetent in the command structure of the Eastern Slovak Army. Lieutenant Colonel Urban was fully aware of the plan to commence the uprising should the Germans begin occupying Slovakia. On August 30 he most likely was also fully aware the Germans were knocking at their door and that Talský and the Eastern Air Force Group had abandoned the uprising. Rather than immediately give the order to transfer the two divisions to Central Slovakia, he simply sat idly put and waited for the Germans to arrive and disarm them. As incomprehensible as this may appear and although not outright cowardice, this failure

⁴⁹ Erickson, John. *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany: Volume Two*. Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd., 1983, page 295.

⁵⁰ Elias, Andrew. *The Slovak Uprising* at page 43, 52-3.

to act at a decisive moment can only be interpreted as incompetence. Without the air support of the Eastern Air Force Group Urban had, in reality, only one option on August 30: to retreat with the two divisions to Central Slovakia under the cover of night before the Germans arrived in full force. For approximately 14 critical hours between the time Colonel Talský left on August 30 and the time the Germans arrived in force, Lieutenant Colonel Urban did nothing to preserve the fighting capabilities of the Eastern Slovak Army and the great opportunity of the SNU.

Colonel Mikuláš Markus was just as paralyzed at this critical moment as Urban. He was in command of the 1st division and in a position to order his men to fight even in the absence of Malár, Talský and Urban; Markus actually outranked Urban, but Urban was positioned higher in the command structure of the Eastern Slovak Army. It remains possible that both Urban and Markus had the same high hopes as Talský that the Soviets would fulfill their promises and come to their assistance in time. As early as May 1944 and shortly after his arrival in Prešov with the 1st division of the Eastern Slovak Army, Colonel Markus established contact with the Čapajev partisan group. With the knowledge and permission of General Malár, Markus established contact with the Red Army near the village of Dukla on the Polish side of the border by mid July 1944. He, too, could have been manipulated and misled to believe the Soviets would aid the insurgent Slovak Army in their hour of need. At least Markus later acknowledged such naivety and attempted to make up for his paralysis by taking over command of the 4th Tactical Group from another Slovak officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ján Malár (the younger brother of General Malár) who spread low morale among his troops and abandoned his

post under fire.⁵⁰ Urban, on the other hand, went and joined the partisan group Alexandr Něvský under Red Army officer V. A. Karasiov-Stepanov. When the group reached the Banská Bystrica region around September 20, 1944, Urban received an order from Moscow to join the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps and General Svoboda. On September 25, 1944, Urban flew from Tri Duby airport to Moscow to fulfill his orders. Immediately upon his arrival in Moscow he was taken into custody by the NKVD. After two years of confinement and interrogation he was charged with treason and working with the Germans. Without a trial he was sent to a Siberian labor camp where he remained for five years. In 1951 he was handed over to the Czechoslovak Army and finally returned to his homeland. In 1960 he was fully rehabilitated to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in reserve. He never returned to military service, and from 1952 until the end of his life he served as a transportation dispatcher for various construction firms in Central Slovakia.⁵¹

V

Late on the night of August 30 Colonel Talský and a good portion of his Eastern Air Force Group (27 planes – including the two Bf 109G-6s, the two Bf 109E-7s, five Focke-Wulf Fw-189s, four Avia B-534s, one Avia Bk-534, and seven Letov S-328s)^{52,53} left

⁵¹ Zudová-Lešková, Zlatica. “Podplukovník František Urban.” [Lieutenant Colonel František Urban.] 1999. (Cited 23 October 2005.) http://www.army.cz/avis/vojenske_rozhledy/1999_4/169.htm

⁵² Bf 109 was the initial *Reichsluftfahrtministerium* (RLM: the German Aviation Ministry) designation, since the design was sent in by the *Bayerische Flugzeugwerke* company, and used exclusively in all official German documents dealing with this aircraft family. After the company was renamed Messerschmitt AG after July 1938, when Erhard Milch finally allowed Willy Messerschmitt to acquire the company, from that date forward, all Messerschmitt aircraft were to carry the "Me" designation — at least in theory, as wartime documents from Messerschmitt AG, the RLM and others continued to use both designations, sometimes even on the same page. Me 109 is known to have been the name used in print by the *Luftwaffe* propaganda publications as well as by the Messerschmitt company itself after July 1938, and the *Luftwaffe* personnel, who pronounced it *may hundert-neun*. The Me 109 designation was usually used in the English-speaking

Išľa airport and landed at prearranged locations at Kalinuv and Lvov, Ukraine. There, General Smirnov welcomed Talský in the early morning hours of August 31. Smirnov received an order from Moscow to arrange for a guide to deliver Colonel Talský to the staff headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front where Marshal Koňev awaited him. Talský met Koňev the following day on September 1. They discussed the Red Army joining up with the two Slovak divisions. Talský's proposals to Koňev made it appear as though Talský was completely unaware of the fate of the two divisions he left behind. Marshal Koňev informed Talský that he cannot make any such plans without first hearing where Moscow stood on his proposal. Talský asked Koňev to send a liaison officer to the two divisions in Prešov and to send Talský back to Slovakia as soon as possible. Koňev informed Talský that it may take one to two days to hear back from Moscow and that Talský must remain in Lvov until orders are received from Moscow. The following communiqués were sent from Marshal Koňev to the Soviet high command in Moscow.^{54,55,56}

Today, September 1, 1944, I met with Col. Talský of the General Staff of the Slovak Army - deputy commander of the army groups of the Slovak Forces (1st and 2nd divisions).

In a discussion with me Col. Talský expressed the notion that in the case of our westward attack, the Slovak 1st and 2nd divisions, located in the border region of Nižná Radvaň-Tylicz could turn eastward and join with the Red Army.

Col. Talský is convinced that the 1st division, under command of Col. Markus, will fulfill his orders.

world. However, in both wartime and contemporary literature, both the "Bf" and "Me" prefixes are used, and both are considered valid and accurate — although some debate still occurs over this issue from time to time. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messerschmitt_Bf_109. (Cited 31 December 2007.)

⁵³ Long, Jason. "Eagles of the Tatras: The Slovak Air Force 1939-1945." (Cited 31 December 2007.) <http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/2072/Slovakaf.html>.

⁵⁴ Koňev, I.S.. *Zapiski Komanduyushchego frontom* [Writings of a Front commander] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1981), page 300.

⁵⁵ Grečko, Andrej A. *Přes Karpaty* [Through the Carpathians], 2nd supplemental edition. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1974, pages 76-77, 100-101.

⁵⁶ Honza, M. „Návrh dukelské operace.“ [The Proposition of the Dukla Operation.] 1999. (Cited 14 September 2005). www.fronta.cz/index.php?dokument=55

In no way does he particularly count on the commander of the 2nd division and its soldiers.

The German occupation of Slovakia is a reason why Col. Talský joined our side.

Col. Talský stated that units of 1st and 2nd Slovak divisions can proceed with an attack in the direction of Krosno towards our armies.

If for any reason our armies could not go on the offensive, Col. Talský supposes it would be expedient if the 1st and 2nd divisions change to partisan activities.

Together with Talský a group of 27 planes with the group commander Major Trnka in the lead arrived on our territory on 30 September 1944. Among them are 9 planes of the type Focke-Wulf 189 and Me 109E. The rest are transport planes.

Our frontline is in the area of Krosno about 30-40 kilometers from the Slovak border.

For us to join the Slovak units and partisan movement in Slovakia, it would be useful, if you decide so, to carry out a joint operation of the left wing of the 1st Ukrainian Front and right wing of the 4th Ukrainian Front to penetrate Slovak territory in the area of Stropkov and Medzilaborce.

The 1st Ukrainian Front can set aside 4 infantry divisions of the 38th Army and 1st Cavalry Corps for this operation. Direction of attack: Krosno-Dukla-Tylawa. In this respect it would be good to involve the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps. The operation can commence in seven days.

I am asking for your instructions in this matter.

Koňev

Lvov 3 September 1944

I am presenting a plan of operation to reach the Slovak border and to connect with Slovak units and partisans.

1) The operation will be executed by the 38th Army composed of six infantry divisions strengthened by the 17th artillery division, two tank brigades (70 tanks) one cavalry corps, two rocket brigades M31, two rocket regiments M13 and the Czechoslovak Army Corps.

2) The concentration of troops will form in the area of Przybówka, Odrzykon, Malé Krásne, Lutcze, Bonarówky and Oparówki (5-15 kilometers north and northwest of Krosno).

3) To breach enemy defenses in the area of Neplja-Odrzykon (8 kilometers), to deliver a blow and to continue with the attack in the direction of Potok-Dukla-Tylawa-Prešov.

4) In the first assault wave four divisions will be used to breach enemy defenses, in the second wave two divisions. After the breach of the enemy defense line to continue in the attack from the Žmigród Nowý-Dukla line, and to this objective deliver into the battle the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps, the 1st Cavalry Corps and two tank brigades: the 1st Cavalry Corps in the direction of Žmigród Nowý-Zborov-Bardejov and further, according to the situation, either westward towards Stará Lubovňa or southward in the direction of Prešov; the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps and two tank brigades in the direction of Dukla-Prešov.

5) Depending on how the breach and second attack will progress, will secure a western defense line Szebnie-Jaslo-Osiek-Smerekowiec-Tylicz with three infantry divisions; in the southeast direction capture Krosno and disorganize enemy defenses as far as the boundary of the 4th Ukrainian Front.

6) According to how the situation will unfold, the 2nd Czechoslovak parachute brigade will at the beginning of the operation either drop into an area north of Stropkov in the location of the main strength of the Slovak divisions or onto the airports. Three flights of C-50 Douglass aircraft will be needed for this purpose; I ask that the planes be made available to me.

7) To ensure that on the third day of the operation the 1st and 2nd Slovak divisions together with the partisans will launch an assault from the area north of Stropkov and continue towards the units of the 38th Army.

8) About 140 cannons and mortars (including 82 mm caliber) with two firing bores will be used on 1 kilometer of the frontline for breaching enemy defenses.

9) Progression of the operation by individual days:
First day of operation advance to the line Jaslo-Łajsce-Žeglce-Krosno; second day advance to the line Osiek-Żmigród Nowý-Dukla-Rymanów; third day reach the Slovak border and fifth day of operation occupy Stará Lubovňa and Prešov.

10) Preparation for the operation over 5 days.

11) In view of the fact that the direction of the operation of the 4th Ukrainian Front is advantageous for an additional attack on Miškovec and Budapešť, it is urgently imperative that the right wing of the 4th Ukrainian Front also partake in this operation in the strength of at least four divisions from the area of Sanok, or that four infantry divisions of the 4th Ukrainian Front be transferred to my command.

Koňev

On the afternoon August 31, 1944, the two Slovak divisions were surrounded in Prešov and disarmed by the 24th *Panzer* Division. Although most of the officer staff was interned by the late afternoon of August 31, it reportedly took four days to complete the disarmament of both divisions. Many of the Slovak officers left behind in Prešov were disarmed and detained together in a building (M. R. Štefanik barracks) before they were transported to prisoner of war camps in Germany. Several officers managed to escape from the German guards, including Lieutenant Colonel Urban, Colonel Markus and Captain Vlčko. General Malár, unaware of the events that had transpired in Prešov over the previous 36 or more hours since he left for Bratislava, flew back to Išla airport only to be greeted by German soldiers and taken into custody. Later he was transported to a prison in Germany where he underwent interrogation and was then shot for suspected collaboration with the insurgents.

From the communiqués between Marshal Koňev and Moscow one can glean evidence on several important issues that have been at the center of debate for decades. First, Koňev confirms Colonel Talský left Slovakia with a good portion of the Eastern Air Force Group because of German occupation of Slovakia. This corroborates the fact that Talský knew the state of affairs in Slovakia regarding German invasion and occupation and had made a conscious decision to disobey the order to execute the second (defensive) variant intended in this case, irrespective of the state of preparations and Soviet cooperation. Second, Koňev believed Colonel Talský came to “join” the Red Army, or at least to join the “side” of the Red Army. Third, contrary to the opinion of some historians, Colonel Talský did not leave Slovakia on his own with the rest of the Eastern Air Force Group deciding to follow him shortly thereafter. Fourth, Colonel Talský was clearly attempting to mislead Marshal Koňev about the state of the two divisions and to get him to come to the aid of the uprising. The reality of the events of August 30 and 31, of which Talský had to have been at least in part aware, do not harmonize with the statements and pleas he made to Marshal Koňev on September 1. If one went solely by his statements and attitude with Koňev, one would come to believe Talský had no idea the Germans were breathing down the necks of the two Slovak divisions in Prešov late on August 30 or early on August 31. Yet, all the evidence points to the fact that Talský and his immediate subordinates had reports the Germans were arriving at the Prešov railway station on the night of August 30 before Talský left Išla airport. Did Talský really believe Marshal Koňev was completely in the dark as to the events of the previous 36 hours in Slovakia and was unaware of the most recent sudden southerly movements of German divisions

from Poland through Dukla Pass? Even national radio stations in Germany and Slovakia had by August 29 broadcast what was going on. Talský's statements to Koňev on September 1 were shamefully and obviously misleading and untrue. Moreover, any interpreter of history must ask themselves if Koňev was merely playing along with him when he transmitted the communiqués regarding Talský's proposals on to Stalin in Moscow. It is inconceivable that on September 1 Moscow and Koňev were unaware of the latest developments in Slovakia. On September 2 Koňev finally did break the news to Talský of what had transpired in Slovakia in the previous days. At this point Talský must have sensed how his actions could be or were being interpreted. Yet, he continued to insist to Koňev that he be allowed to return to Slovakia without considering at all what his peers were thinking as to why he failed to execute the prearranged optional plan for the uprising. Talský's statement to Koňev regarding the two eastern divisions resorting to partisan warfare in the case the Soviets could not come to their aid is additional confirmation that Talský never seriously intended to fulfill the defensive variant he and Golian agreed to on several occasions. Interestingly, Koňev was insistent Talský not immediately return to Slovakia and told him he had to remain in Lvov.

Fifth, despite the incredibly detailed plans Koňev supposedly put together *ad hoc* for the Dukla operation to come to the aid of the insurgent Slovak Army, he did not send in to Slovakia forces that could quickly and decisively defeat the occupying German divisions. Instead, Koňev, in his race to Berlin with Marshal Georgij Konstantinovič Žukov of the 1st Belorussian Front, held back the bulk of his forces for the long-anticipated march to Berlin through Western Poland and sent into Slovakia his 38th Army under General Kirill

Semenovič Moskalenko and the 1st Guard Army under General Andrej A. Grečko of the 4th Ukrainian Front. The 2nd Ukrainian Front under Marshal Rodion Jakovlevič Malinovskij and the remaining fragments of the 4th Ukrainian Front under General Ivan Jefimovič Petrov were to enter Slovakia from the East through the Carpathians. After finally breaking through and defeating German defenses at Dukla Pass on October 25, 1944, it took the Soviets another five months to reach Bratislava on April 4, because during those months the Soviets placed their primary focus elsewhere, namely, on Marshals Malinovskij and Fjodor Ivanovič Tolbuchin defeating the Germans in Romania and Hungary where Hitler held critical oil fields. In October 1944 Stalin gave the urgent order that Budapešť was of greater importance than Slovakia. Instead of continuing to press westward against the Germans in Slovakia, Malinovskij's 2nd Ukrainian Front rushed southward to join with its counterpart in Hungary, the 3rd Ukrainian Front under Marshal Tolbuchin, while the surviving divisions of the 38th Army and 4th Ukrainian Front under General Petrov, the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps and scattered units of the Romanian Army remained stranded in Eastern Slovakia for months. Although these remaining fragmented divisions eventually slogged their way through Eastern and Central Slovakia, they did not liberate the two major cities in Eastern Slovakia, Košice and Prešov, until January 19, 1945, and Banská Bystrica in Central Slovakia until March 26. Koņev must have had detailed knowledge of what was happening on the ground in Eastern Slovakia and among the Slovak revolutionary military leadership to know that Malinovskij could quickly pass through and down to Hungary. While sweeping-up operations were still completing their assignments at Dukla Pass, the siege of Budapešť began on October 28, 1944, and after 103 days finally ended in February 1945.

Bratislava was then taken by Malinovskij approximately six weeks later on April 4 followed by Vienna on April 12. By this time Koňev and Marshal Žukov were encircling Berlin with the overwhelming strength of the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts.

Sixth, Koňev knew of the political and military benefits to Moscow of thrusting the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps and the 2nd Czechoslovak Parachute Brigade under his friend General Ludvík Svoboda into the opening assault waves of the battle for Dukla.⁵⁷ Having had Svoboda and his 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps successfully fight under him in several previous battles on the Russian Front, this idea must have originated with Koňev and sent up the chain to Moscow via the Soviet high command. In 1943 Svoboda was awarded the Order of Lenin for his successes in Sokolov, Ukraine.⁵⁸ Moreover, having had the fortune of being part of some landmark battles against the Germans since the onset of the Soviet counteroffensive in 1943 and having found great success in one battle after another, Koňev knew just how to maximize his opportunities to improve even further his own standing before the *Stavka*. It was a perfect idea for the Soviets to sit idly by while the democratically-backed uprising quickly petered out, playing as if the Soviets were completely caught by surprise when the Slovak insurgents began the uprising, and then to make it appear they were doing all they could to come to the rescue of the insurgents with the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps and 2nd Czechoslovak Parachute Brigade leading the way with Moscow's favorite Czechoslovak General.⁵⁹ Having

⁵⁷ For further information on the enduring friendship Svoboda and Koňev enjoyed long after the war see Baumgarten, R. V. "General Ludvik Svoboda: Commander of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps." 2003. (Cited 4 October 2005). <http://lemko.org/rusyn/svoboda.html>

⁵⁸ Werth, Alexander. *Russia at War, 1941-1945*. New York: Dutton, 1964, pages 644-45.

⁵⁹ Erickson, John. *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany: Volume Two*. Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd., 1983, page 289.

Colonel Talský and the Slovak Eastern Air Force Group fall into his lap placed Koňev in an even more advantageous position to suggest unification of the 1st and portions of the 4th Ukrainian Fronts under his sole command to not only control the events in Czechoslovakia, but to also commence the long-awaited massive offensive into Germany through Western Poland and Prussia. Like the rest of the Soviet high command, Marshal Koňev viewed Czechoslovakia as a given in their short- and long-term strategic planning of victories against the Nazi forces and for the solidification of the Soviet sphere of influence. More pressing on Marshal Koňev's and also on Generalissimo Stalin's mind was beating the Americans to Berlin and capturing and definitively conquering (occupying) Germany. Although an integral component of the Great Patriotic War and National-Front strategy, to the Soviets Czechoslovakia was a distraction at a critical time of preparation for entering Germany and Hungary. Stalin's and the *Stavka's* original plans were to have the various Soviet Fronts bypass the Carpathian Mountains altogether to form a unified attack on Berlin from Poland and on Romania and Hungary from the south. Yet, the Dukla operation was a perfect opportunity for Marshal Koňev to convince the Soviet high command to give him the reins to an even stronger unified command to march to Berlin while also "liberating" Czechoslovakia and rushing support to Stalin's all-important Budapešť operation. In no way, however, were the Soviets interested in politically or militarily propping up the escapades of the democratic London-based Czechoslovak government and their loyal Slovak officers. Even Czechoslovak General Ludvík Svoboda adopted Stalin's disdain for the London crowd, including Heliodor Píka, Jaroslav Kratochvíl, Ján Golian, Julius Nosko and Mikuláš Ferjenčík.⁶⁰ For the Soviets,

⁶⁰ Baumgarten, R. Vladimir. "General Ludvik Svoboda: Commander of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps." 2003. (Cited 4 October 2005). <http://lemko.org/rusyn/svoboda.html>

if the democratic Czechoslovak leadership was successful in liberating Slovakia, or at least put up a valiant fight that would be memorialized by their populace for generations to come, the National-Front strategy would face great challenges in post-war Czechoslovakia. Failure of the SNU under democratic leadership followed by a victorious liberation by the Soviets was very much in the interest of Stalin and the “underground” Comintern, despite the great cost in additional blood its failure would demand of ordinary Soviet citizenry.^P

VI

The two Slovak divisions along with the entire Eastern Slovak Air Force Group were quite capable of resisting a German attack, even in their under-prepared state. Yet, they were completely neutralized without a single shot being fired. Certainly, the divided loyalties of General Malár and autonomist General Čatloš and their failure to coordinate with the London-based government only contributed to the loss of the two divisions. More importantly, the wavering loyalty of Colonel Talský—appropriately seen as being treasonous against the SNC and the London-based government—and his insistence, even in the final decisive moments, on reliance on the Soviets for their support delivered a death-blow to the crucial opening salvos of the uprising with the chaotic abandonment of the two eastern divisions. This loss left the SNU essentially doomed from the beginning. With their loss the Red Army, less than 40 kilometers away near Krosno, Poland, had no easy and expeditious way to get into Slovakia to come to the aid of the uprising. Hence and despite the orders to Koňev to begin preparing plans to attack at Dukla Pass on September 8, Stalin now had the legitimate excuse upon which he was counting not to

immediately and definitively support the SNU, despite his previous agreements on numerous occasions to do so. Any interpreter of history must read with great skepticism Koňev's apparent ignorance of the impending uprising in Slovakia, as depicted in his communiqué to Moscow on September 1, 1944, and other published statements thereafter. The Soviets had plenty of spies in that region in the form of partisans that sent accurate reconnaissance reports back to Koňev, Kiev and Moscow. As already discussed, Koňev had his own direct contacts with and control over the partisan groups operating in Northeastern Slovakia (ŠPH of the 1st Ukrainian Front). Particularly during the weeks preceding the uprising the Čapajev partisan brigade in the Prešov area was in close communication with Koňev regarding the state of the two Eastern Slovak divisions. Moreover, Moscow was regularly receiving detailed information from the London-based government and directly from Slovak Foreign Ministry employee and diplomat Ladislav Gejza Krno regarding Slovak, German and Hungarian troop movements and their strength in Slovakia. In addition to the partisans, the Soviets had their own special army intelligence-gathering sources whose reports of that time stated the strength and position of German and Hungarian forces in Slovakia.⁶¹ When Stalin and the *Stavka* refused to give permission to the British and Americans to assist with the uprising, they alluded to the state of preparation of the two eastern Slovak divisions as a basis for their decision.⁶² Clearly, the Soviet high command had intimate knowledge of the key issues and state of preparedness of Slovak divisions. By August 1944, the insurgent Slovak Army was still racing to improve the state of preparedness of its two eastern divisions. Koňev certainly knew of the partisan activity unfolding in Slovakia since July 1944 and very well

⁶¹ Falťan, Samo. *Partizánska vojna na Slovensku* [The Partisan War in Slovakia]. Bratislava: Osveta, 1959, pages 260-61.

⁶² Stanislav, Ján. *Zborník* 2004 at page 19.

understood the implications of such continued agitation of German forces. They also knew timing was critical in that the Slovaks were racing to finalize their preparations for the uprising. Any Soviet military tactician could realistically and accurately predict the outcome of increasing partisan agitation in Northern Slovakia near the location of several German divisions just over the northern Slovak border. Furthermore, the Soviets were quite aware of and counted on the intelligence reconnaissance of spies working for the Germans that heavily infiltrated Slovak forces to report on increasing revolutionary activities within the ranks of the Slovak military and to set the stage for a premature outbreak of the uprising. Even Slovak historian and former director of the Slovak National Museum of the SNU Dr. Ján Stalislav confirms the fact that the Germans were acutely aware of the impending outbreak of the uprising and the need to surround and disarm the two most threatening Slovak divisions in the east in a *Blitzkrieg* fashion.⁶³ The invading German Army's paramount priority was to neutralize the two eastern Slovak divisions.^{64,65} The Germans already had plans prepared by July 1944 to quickly occupy and disarm the entire Slovak Army because of the growing distrust the Germans had for it and its leadership under General Čatloš. Knowledge of the uprising was no deeply hidden secret. Stalin, Marshal Koňev and the *Stavka* knew and planned what would most likely unfold in Slovakia, particularly in Northeastern Slovakia where the two strongest and strategically most important Slovak divisions were deployed. For, they had it within their power and influence to set the stage and effectuate the premature

⁶³ Stalislav, Ján. *Zborník* 2004 at page 24.

⁶⁴ Jablonický, Jaroslav. *Povstanie bez legend* [Uprising Without a Legend]. Bratislava: Obzor, 1990, page 241, ISBN 80-215-0077-8.

⁶⁵ Prečan Vilém. *Slovenské národné povstanie: Nemci a Slovensko 1944: Dokumenty* [Slovak National Uprising: the Germans and Slovakia 1944: Documents]. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry (VPL), 1971, page 507-8.

outbreak of the uprising, thereby precipitating the diversion of German divisions away from the Ukrainian Fronts entering Poland and Hungary, and locking down the best passage into Slovakia across the Carpathian Mountains. This outcome was certainly in the long-range interest of the Soviets on at least two prongs—military and political. For the Soviets knew they were going to have to face those German divisions somewhere and sometime or another. Best if they were, in the meantime, diverted and employed for Soviet military and political purposes in the region. Hence, the repeated pleas and solicitations for help and cooperation with the SNU and to suspend partisan activities from the Czechs and Slovaks—both communists and democrats—fell on the deaf ears of Stalin and the Soviet high command. Stalin had a well-established reputation of making promises he had no intention of keeping. He was a master of deception and misleading his partners with the use of vagaries and generalities in his discussions. The more ambiguous the agreement is the more room Stalin left himself to maneuver and tack at the last moment as the situation dictated for his best interest and long-range plans. The political conditions in Slovakia were ripe for manipulation by Stalin. He knew several competing groups were planning a revolt against the Tiso government—Čatloš-Malár, SNC-Beneš, and the partisans—all of whom operated independently of and often in opposition to one another. Stalin only controlled the partisans, and if the others would not abdicate their command and join the partisans under Soviet control, Stalin would rather see the uprising fail than risk the success of a grassroots democratic-based politico-military force whose loyalties did not lie with Moscow and would only marginalize the communists after the war. Stalin saw through the transparent last-minute attempt of Čatloš to promise post-war conditions in Slovakia that would be politically favorable to

the Soviets if they agreed to his proposed plan in his infamous memorandum. They refused to even acknowledge his plan, calling him a “quisling.”⁶⁶ Likewise, the longer Stalin and Koňev could drag along Colonel Talský, the SNC and the Czechoslovak mission in Moscow regarding Soviet coordination and support for the SNU the greater the likelihood the democratically-backed uprising would remain disorganized, fall apart and fail altogether. This bought Stalin time to execute and effectuate his plan via partisan agitation in North-Central Slovakia. No other tenable explanation could be proffered for partisan agitation in a region that remains distant from any Soviet ground forces that could promptly arrive to complete the mission the partisans started. While many partisan missions throughout Europe were intended to set the stage for greater military operations that were about to commence, most partisan activity in Central and Eastern Europe was intended for political goals rather than military ones. The partisan activities in Slovakia throughout the summer of 1944 and during the uprising were purely for three political ends, *viz.*, 1) recruit as many Slovak soldiers as possible to desert their army posts and swear allegiance to Moscow and join the partisans, 2) create an illusion that the insurgent Slovak Army was incompetent and unreliable to liberate Slovakia and that only Soviet-led efforts were the best chance for liberation, and 3) to set the conditions for the failure of the insurgent Slovak Army and the ultimate liberation of Slovakia by the Soviet Red Army. These goals had to be achieved before the Eastern Slovak Army was fully prepared to commence the uprising. Under this scenario Stalin could count on significant defections from Slovak Army ranks to Soviet-controlled partisan units and control of the events on the ground upon the arrival of Soviet political commissars and the Red Army.

⁶⁶ Stanislav, Ján. *Zborník* 2004 at page 26.

Golian's Chief of Staff and fellow organizer of the uprising Lieutenant Colonel Ferjenčík noted the following regarding the partisans:

The mutual cooperation of the army and the partisans was to be accomplished through a so-called War Council consisting of Janko Ursíny, Karol Šmidke, Lt. Col. Ján Golian, Lt. Col. Julius Nosko as the chief of staff, and me. Afterwards, following their arrival in Slovakia, Gen. Viest and Col. Asmolov also became members of the Council. The entire War Council, originally well intentioned, became worthless. The partisans, that is Šmidke, kept on promising cooperation and unified military action, but the individual unit commanders did what they pleased or what was ordered from Kiev. Kiev harbored no illusions on our uprising, but rather had ulterior motives to hinder us.

* * *

When at the War Council we reproached our partners, Col. Asmolov, as in other similar instances, advised us to adapt to the partisan method of warfare and abandon the doctrines of the regular army. We were slow in understanding what he wanted to accomplish by such insistence and what was uppermost on his mind. Only later, when we were forced to adapt partisan methods following the evacuation of Banská Bystrica and Donovaly, did we realize what he was after. Our soldiers were being forcibly recruited into partisan units and made members of the Communist Party. Only our larger units were able to survive such pressure and save their independence, often by threat of arms.⁶⁷

Stalin had already ensured himself the insurgency would receive no help from Western allies with his refusal to give permission to the British and Americans to drop matériel in Slovakia during the uprising. Like the fate of the Polish officers in the Ukraine, if Stalin could not absorb and convert the Slovak Army to his control and Soviet ideology, he would rather see it destroyed.⁶⁸ There is no other tenable argument to explain the deliberate, ongoing counterproductive and obstructive activities of the Soviet-led partisans in Slovakia and the clear decision of Stalin and the *Stavka* to ignore all the plans and pleas for support for the uprising. Further evidence of Stalin's failure to support the

⁶⁷ Ferjenčík, Mikuláš. *Slovak National Uprising* at pages 228-29.

⁶⁸ Elias, Andrew. *The Slovak Uprising* at page 69.

insurgent Slovak Army lies in his actions after the outbreak of the uprising and will be addressed later.

Adding to the problems the uprising faced from the very beginning was the failure of the SNC to firmly establish the loyalty of several Western and Northern Army division commanders before the outbreak of the uprising. These divisions were supposed to join the revolt and guard against western and northern invasion by the Germans. When it was announced the Germans were entering Slovakia on August 29, these divisions respected Čatloš' order to stand-down and remain in their barracks rather than join the uprising. Once it became apparent the uprising was suffering heavy losses of men and territory and was beleaguered with conflicting agendas among the participant groups that Golian could not bring together, the London-based government decided to hand over the command of the insurgency to General Rudolph Viest on October 7, keeping Golian on as his second in command. This move also attempted to achieve the other goal of the Beneš group, *viz.*, increase the prestige of the operation in the eyes of the British in hopes they and the Americans would jump in despite Moscow's interference. Viest, a man completely loyal to President Beneš and the only Slovak General from the pre-war era, flew from London to Moscow in mid summer 1944 to press the Soviets further on coordination and support for the uprising and to take command of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps in the Soviet Union in preparation for the uprising. A political battle broke out between the Soviets and the Beneš group after Viest took over the 1st Army Corps for a short while that resulted in his replacement with another London man General Jaroslav Kratochvil. The Soviets were still not pleased, and after the opening salvos of the Dukla operation

General Kratochvíl was accused by the Soviets of incompetence and quickly replaced him with Koňev's friend and Moscow's man General Svoboda. However, much like Colonel Talský, General Viest, General Svoboda and the entire 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps, was not permitted to enter Slovakia until the conclusion of major operations at Dukla and near to the time of the defeat of the insurgent Slovak Army. Clearly, the Soviets feared return of familiar and competent military leaders would increase the chances of the SNU succeeding. It is unlikely Svoboda would agree to come to the assistance of the London-backed uprising, anyhow. Likewise and despite repeated demands the Soviets immediately release all Czechoslovak soldiers in the Ukraine at the beginning of the SNU, Koňev and the *Stavka* refused to accept this demand until completion of the Dukla operation.^{69,70} Again, in harmony with his Soviet mentors it is unlikely Svoboda saw any cooperation with the London-backed insurgency as profitable. The 2nd Czechoslovak Parachute Brigade took heavy losses, approximately 50 percent, in the Dukla operation. The remaining survivors of the Parachute Brigade were permitted to finally leave Dukla Pass and redeploy in Slovakia in small groups between September 26 and October 19, 1944.⁷¹ Many of these brave, young men died in the haphazard redeployment process.⁷² By this time the uprising had suffered numerous serious setbacks, and the few surviving men of the parachute brigade permitted to redeploy mostly in October, although heroic fighters, were too little and much too late.

⁶⁹ Stanislav, Ján. *Zborník* 2004 at page 24.

⁷⁰ Prečan, Vilém. *Slovenské národné povstanie: Dokumenty* [Slovak National Uprising: Documents]. Bratislava: VPL, 1965, page 385.

⁷¹ Stanislav, Ján. *Zborník* 2004 at page 28.

⁷² Ferjenčík, Mikuláš. *Slovak National Uprising* at page 229.

After the fall of the two eastern divisions, nearly all Soviet military aid flown in to Slovakia was distributed to the Soviet-controlled partisan units first, while the insurgent Slovak Army was sometimes able to take the leftovers. Between September 4 and October 24, 1944, the Soviets attempted 1,199 flights via the air bridge between Krosno, Tri Duby and Rohožná, of which 682 flights were successful in dropping approximately 2,000 people (nearly all being from the Czechoslovak Parachute Brigade) and 610 tons of matériel.^{73,74,75} The partisans routinely stripped insurgent Slovak Army matériel and stole food, livestock and shelter from local villagers while refusing to coordinate their military activities with field commanders of the insurgent Slovak Army. Ferjenčík further elaborates regarding the partisans:

The nefarious activities of the partisans, such as the theft of our supplies and reserves, terrorization of civilians, and destruction of the morale of our soldiers assumed such proportions that once at the meeting of the War Council, Golian, in the presence of Šmidke and Asmolov, called the partisans our enemy No. 1.⁷⁶

Many of the Soviet transports via the air bridge between Krosno and Tri Duby carried Soviet political commissars along with any war matériel.⁷⁷ Historians who cite the tonnage of matériel carried via the air bridge as additional evidence of strong Soviet support for the insurgent Slovak Army have misled generations about the truth of the intent of that matériel. Slovak Army officers who actually controlled the air field at Tri

⁷³ *Report of the warrant officer from the headquarters of the Red Army in Beljanova about the redeployment of the 2nd Czechoslovak Parachute Brigade to Slovakia.* Podol'sk, USSR: Central archives of the Ministry of Defense, f. 19, op. 11539, d. 57, l. 58.

⁷⁴ Jalovoj, S.F. *Učastie 4. gvardejskogo Gomeľskogo aviacionnogo korpusa ADD po okazaniju bratskoj pomošči Slovačkomu nacional'nomu vosstaniju v 1944 g.* [Involvement of the 4th Guards Gomeľský Aviation Corps ADD to Show Brotherly Help to the Slovak National Uprising in 1944.] (Abstracts from the archives of the Ministry of Defense, USSR).

⁷⁵ Stanislav, Ján, Rajnivec, J. *Povstalecké a spojenecké letectvo v SNP* [The Insurgent and Allied Air Force in the SNU]. Bratislava: ÚV SZPB, 1990, s. 83.

⁷⁶ Ferjenčík, Mikuláš. *Slovak National Uprising* at page 229.

⁷⁷ Stanislav, Ján, Rajnivec, J. *Povstalecké a spojenecké letectvo v SNP* [The Insurgent and Allied Air Force in the SNU]. Bratislava: ÚV SZPB, 1990, s. 71.

Duby and Rohožná, who observed the matériel arriving there and how it was organized and distributed, and those who coordinated and managed insurgent army weapons depots for the six tactical groups under the insurgent army leadership tell a very different history. Among the insurgent Slovak Army officers the history of how the Soviets and partisans managed weapons distribution remains the same. Almost every single Soviet transport carrying war matériel was intended for partisan use only. Nearly from the beginning of the air bridge operation the matériel was dropped from the transports and much of it was found to be completely useless due to damage sustained from the drop. Moreover, the most needed weapons to fight against German *Panzer* tanks were repeatedly requested, but never delivered. The insurgent army leadership became so frustrated with partisan hoarding of the remaining useful matériel that they sent several direct communiqués to the Soviets regarding the need to clearly designate what transports and matériel was intended for the Slovak Army insurgents. They never received a reply. Furthermore, each of the six tactical groups under insurgent Army command reported repeated partisan looting of their weapons depots. Ferjenčík goes on to further describe Soviet cooperation this way:

Aid from Russia was not rated much better than partisan cooperation. The Soviets were sending us arms, but we never found out for whom they were intended. The partisans, of course, claimed all shipments exclusively for themselves. Through the Soviet liaison officer, Maj. I. I. Studenský on the staff of Marshall I. S. Koňev, we were constantly requesting that the planes land at Tri Duby airfield, that mostly anti-tank weapons be sent, and that every shipment be specifically marked for whom intended. Our requests were never heeded. They sent us about 150 anti-tank rifles, of antiquated type, questionable effectiveness, and of no value against medium tanks. These shipments were dumped from planes and consequently a majority of the guns were damaged, lost, or stolen. A similar fate was meted out to the Second Parachute Brigade, which before being sent to Slovakia was put into service at Dukla Pass. There they were decimated and then in small groups over a period of weeks

transported to Slovakia, as a result of which many of our people lost their lives.⁷⁸

Despite all the aid the partisans received from the Soviets, there is not a single battle or operation of any major significance in support of the uprising that the partisans were responsible for, with the possible exception of the Čapajev partisan group.^Q Therefore, citing Soviet transports to Slovakia during the uprising as evidence of strong Soviet support for the insurgent Slovak Army is misleading, not factual and groundless. The insurgent Slovak Army was continually in want of war matériel and was ultimately not only bled to death, but also left without out the necessary and appropriate arms to fight the Germans.

On July 1, 1944, liaison officers of the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS, the precursor to the modern-day CIA) met with the Czechoslovak government in London to discuss matériel support for the uprising. The British Foreign Office also instructed their Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, to request Soviet approval for British military support in the Soviet sphere of influence in Slovakia. The Soviets only responded tepidly and evasively. It became quite clear to the British that the Soviets were only interested in the precise state of preparedness of the two Slovak eastern divisions and that no further discussion on support for the uprising would be entertained until this could be ascertained in detail.⁷⁹ In the end, the Soviets never did give the British and Americans permission to deliver the requested matériel support they were prepared to deliver, estimated to be enough for

⁷⁸ Ferjenčík, Mikuláš. *Slovak National Uprising* at page 229.

⁷⁹ ČSVM v ZSSR [Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR], č. j. 211/1/30 por. č. 63 942. Praha: Vojenský historický archiv.

10,000 men. After the lessons of the Warsaw uprising and Stalin's unyielding refusal to cooperate with the Allies in his territory of "influence," the Allies' efforts to support the SNU were limited to a few secret military transport deliveries from Bari, Italy and the late arrival in September 1944 of an OSS team intended primarily to help return American Airmen shot down over the Czech protectorate and Slovakia, and then to assess the situation of the uprising and coordinate with the insurgent leadership. Slovak historian Ján Stanislav squarely places the brunt of the blame on the Beneš group in London for not taking full advantage of the opportunity the British and Americans presented to them in July 1944 while he minimizes the dogged obstruction the Soviets repeatedly presented Western Allies wanting to support resistance movements in Central and Eastern Europe.⁸⁰ Although this allegation about President Beneš may in part be true due to the fact that he had already been on more than one occasion betrayed by the West and was acutely aware of the fate of the Polish military leadership when they refused to yield to Stalin, it does disservice to modern-day scholarship and the intelligence of those who have studied Soviet history and Stalin's National-Front strategy. Many historians from Central and Eastern Europe continue to cover for their "Slavic brother's" shameful imperialistic past. Having stated this, the evidence does bear out the fact that after Munich Beneš was a broken man whose health was slowly failing him.⁸¹

On October 28, 1944, President Roosevelt sent the following message to President Beneš:

The people and armed forces inside Czechoslovakia have joined actively and gloriously with their countrymen abroad in the ranks of the nations united against tyranny.... We Americans salute our Czechoslovak

⁸⁰ Stanislav, Ján. *Zborník* 2004 at page 35.

⁸¹ Vlčko, Peter E. *In the Shadow of Tyranny* at pages 705-6.

comrades-in-arms who are today so bravely contributing to the liberation of their homeland and the rest of Europe.⁸²

Clearly, Roosevelt was unaware of the developments in Slovakia by this time. Despite Soviet refusal to grant permission to aid the insurgents, the OSS chose to act independently of official channels. On September 17, 1944, the secret American military mission with officers of the OSS flew in to the airport at Tri Duby on two B-17 bombers with eight tons of armaments followed on October 7, 1944, by an additional six B-17s filled with 16 tons of war matériel that included 150 antitank weapons, 3,000 rockets, 100 Marlin-type light machine guns with 100,000 rounds of ammunition, 99 Bren anti-aircraft machine guns, 75,000 rounds of rifle ammunition, gasoline, medical supplies and explosives for dynamiting bridges and railway tracks.^{83,84} In total, the Americans were successful in delivering 24 tons of arms, supplies and liaison personnel to the insurgent Slovak Army with only two missions. Unfortunately, of the 20 liaison and intelligence personnel brought into Slovakia by the OSS only eight managed to evade being hunted down by Nazi and fascist Slovak *Einsatzkommando* units in the forests and mountains. Twelve, including the mission's leaders, were caught, brought to Bratislava and then to Mauthausen prison in Austria, brutally interrogated and then executed on the order of Hitler, himself.

VII

⁸² Lettrich, Jozef. *History of Modern Slovakia*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1955, page 212.

⁸³ Miller, William J. *Unforgettable Days of the Slovak National Uprising*. In: *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War II, Part III*, ed. Lewis M. White. Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2000, pages 209-10.

⁸⁴ Downs, Jim. *World War II: OSS Tragedy in Slovakia*. Oceanside, CA: Liefrinck Publishers, 2002, page 82.

The Soviet offensive on Dukla Pass is one of the most controversial events relating to Stalin's strategic political and military plans for Central Europe during and after the Second World War. Czechoslovak democratic leader Jozef Lettrich belittles the operation as a half-hearted attempt which was abandoned after stiff German resistance was encountered.⁸⁵ Modern historians such as R. Vladimir Baumgarten and Mark W. A. Axworthy claim that the offensive is proof that the Soviets intended to uphold their promises to the Slovak National Council and Beneš and support the insurgent Slovak Army. Evidence which has long existed makes it clear that modern historians who advocate the Soviets did their best to support the Slovak Army insurgents under the circumstances are incorrect, and that evidence is reinforced by new documents recently released which shed light on Stalin's National-Front strategy and his total disdain for any democratically-backed armed resistance. When speaking of Soviet contributions and support for the uprising many Czechoslovak former-Marxist historians and uninformed western historians continue to confuse the partisans with the insurgent Slovak Army. Historically and factually, this is entirely misleading to the events on the ground as they played out during those fateful 60 days in Slovakia. For decades since the war the Soviets billed the uprising, which they were the first to label as the "Slovak National Uprising," as a great partisan war that they supported with immense effort and sacrifice, completely ignoring the fact that the vast majority of the combatants were members of the Slovak Army—and most Western historians have to date bought into this myth.

The Dukla operation was launched on September 8, 1944, by the Soviet 38th Army under the command of General Kirill Moskalenko of the 1st Ukrainian Front, and the 1st Cavalry

⁸⁵ Lettrich, Jozef. *History of Modern Slovakia*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1955, pages 210-12.

Guard Army under the command of General Andrej A. Grečko of the 4th Ukrainian Front, with the intention to break through Dukla Pass and enter Slovakia, where the bulk of the Slovak Army was in revolt. Respectively, they began their attacks on Krosno and Sanok, both in Poland. Initially they were successful, pushing back the defenses of *Wehrmacht* General Gotthard Heinrici and his 1st Panzer Army. However, their progress was halted in only a few days, and they were not able to capture Dukla Pass decisively until October 28, 1944.

Soviet casualties were extremely high. Axworthy claims the Soviets suffered 126,211 casualties in the Eastern Carpathians (where Dukla is located) between September 8 and October 28. Of these soldiers, the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps under the command of General Ludvík Svoboda, a man loyal to Stalin, committed 14,900 men, of which 5,699 died. Axworthy uses these numbers to support his claim that the Soviet command did not deliberately hold back “in order to allow the Germans to suppress the Slovak National Uprising, which owed its primary loyalty to the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile in London, not to Moscow.”⁸⁶ Axworthy goes on to say the Red Army was unprepared for a major offensive and was surprised by the timing of the uprising. However, both of these conclusions are, in fact, incorrect. The entire Soviet high command was thoroughly familiar with what was being planned in Slovakia as much as eight months in advance. They were in complete control of planning and executing partisan activities in Slovakia in 1944, despite the alleged role the SNC and Karol Šmidke played in managing the partisan movement in Slovakia. In no way were the Soviets surprised by the outbreak of

⁸⁶ Axworthy, Mark W. A. *Axis Slovakia: Hitler's Slavic Wedge, 1938 – 1945*. Bayside, NY: Axis Europa Books, 2002, pages 282-3.

the uprising. They simply chose to not plan for cooperation with the Slovak insurgents. In fact, enough convincing evidence has surfaced to comfortably conclude the Soviets planned for the preemptive invasion and occupation of Slovakia by the Germans and premature outbreak of the uprising. Moreover, Axworthy's logic citing the number of casualties in the Dukla operation as evidence of the degree of seriousness on the part of Stalin and the Soviets to support the uprising flies in the face of all that is known about Stalin and his lack of concern for casualties. When assessing Stalin's intentions, concern over casualties and determination to succeed are not at all connected. Historians for decades have asserted that of the estimated 26.7 million Soviets killed in the Second World War, a large percentage were the result of Generalissimo Stalin's incompetence as a military strategist and his complete indifference to casualty estimates when planning an operation. Therefore, Baumgarten's and Axworthy's conclusions about Soviet intentions regarding the SNU are without merit.

In his typical fashion, Axworthy does not cite any sources in his argument regarding Soviet casualties in the Dukla operation.⁸⁷ Literature in the English language does not provide any concrete numbers with regard to the Soviet Dukla Operation, and Axworthy's only sources most probably were Czechoslovak ones published before the fall of the communist regime, which are likely to be strongly influenced by communist propaganda and censorship. Baumgarten sets the number of casualties at 80,000—6,500 of which were soldiers from the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps. He bases his claims

⁸⁷ In fact, Axworthy does not cite any sources throughout his entire 340-page book.

primarily on the assertions of Miroslav Kerner⁸⁸ and John Erickson.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, both of these historians overlook the fact that the Dukla Operation was doomed to fail in its alleged mission to support the SNU from the beginning, and there is no way it can serve as proof of a genuine Soviet attempt to assist the Slovak people to liberate their country. In fact, both historians admit that the Soviets sought to be the liberators, themselves, of all countries within their sphere of operations (drawn out at the Teheran Conference), because of the favorable long-term political consequences which would result. Others, like Slovak historian Ján Stanislav have recently altered their previously held position that the Soviets supported the insurgents from the beginning, but continue to hold to the opinion that once the uprising broke out the Soviets jumped head-to-toe into the fray.⁹⁰ Again, in part, they cite the Dukla operation as evidence of this.

The primary reason the Dukla Operation, under Marshal Koňev's plan, failed in its intended mission to bring aid to the SNU is because of the preemptive German invasion and disarmament of the Eastern Slovak Army after Colonel Talský—a man deeply involved in the preparations for the SNU—abandoned his command of the army and fled to the Soviet lines with the Eastern Slovak Air Force Group. The Soviet offensive on Dukla, which was launched nine days after the Slovaks lost their two strongest and most important divisions in the east, was so ineffective that it did not support or relieve the insurgent army in Slovakia in any way. Not one German unit retreated or was recalled

⁸⁸ Kerner, Miroslav. *General Ludvík Svoboda: Czechoslovak Patriot or Communist Collaborator*. In: *On All Fronts: Czechs and Slovaks in World War II, Part I*, ed. Lewis M. White. Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1991.

⁸⁹ Erickson, John. *The Road to Berlin: Continuing the History of Stalin's War with Germany*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983.

⁹⁰ Stanislav, Ján. *Zborník 2004* at page 26.

from Slovakia during the uprising after September 8 which was not replaced by another unit, and in fact the Germans were able to steadily increase their military presence in Slovakia and eventually crush the uprising with overwhelming force.

Although no “smoking gun” has *yet* been uncovered, a great deal of incontrovertible circumstantial evidence supports the argument that the Soviets carefully planned and counted on the rapid preemptive deployment of German divisions into Slovakia away from the Ukrainian Fronts approaching the Carpathian Mountains resulting in the premature outbreak and quick demise of the SNU. Of the 20 divisions the Germans had facing the 1st Ukrainian Front in Poland, 12 divisions were diverted south into Slovakia throughout September 1944 to suppress the uprising and reinforce the northeastern ridge of the Carpathian Mountains and the main east-west Žilina-Prešov railway transport across Slovakia. This clearly facilitated Koňev’s and Žukov’s trek westward to the Oder River and into Western Prussia during the autumn of 1944 and winter of 1945. Moreover, as evidenced by Stalin’s and the *Stavka’s* strategic directives after breaking through Dukla Pass and the Eastern Carpathians, a reasonable argument can be made the primary objectives of the Dukla operation were to cause the diversion of dozens of German and Hungarian divisions away from Poland and Hungary, breach the Carpathians and open Eastern Slovakia for the quick transfer of much-needed support to the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts for the siege of Budapešť where Stalin wanted all the focus to be in the fall of 1944, rather than to come to the aid of the SNU. Stalin went so far as to personally telephone Marshal Malinovskij of the 2nd Ukrainian Front on the night of October 28, 1944, and argue with him about the extreme political importance of

immediately beginning the attack on Budapešť, despite the fact that Malinovskij was still in Southeastern Slovakia and far from prepared for such an attack. Stalin expressly ordered Malinovskij to begin the operation the following day and then hung up on him.⁹¹ Meanwhile, Koňev and Žukov were racing to the Oder River and into Western Prussia.

Further evidence that the Dukla operation was not intended to come to the aid of the SNU or its subsequent guerrilla war lies in the fact that by mid November 1944 Stalin realized that the 2nd Ukrainian Front did not have the necessary strength to help capture Budapešť and, therefore, ordered the 4th Ukrainian Front out of Slovakia to come to Malinovskij's support rather than focus its strength on any operations in Slovakia, where it was essentially stranded in the east.⁹² From a military tactical viewpoint the Dukla operation was a complete blunder on the part of the Soviets. It accomplished very little in terms of defeating Army Group Center and liberating Slovakia that alternative operations could not have much more easily accomplished and with much fewer casualties. Three Ukrainian Fronts (the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th) could have marched into Slovakia from the south after the Budapešť operation, cleared out the newly-reorganized Army Group Center and marched to Bratislava and Vienna. From a military and political strategic viewpoint, however, the Dukla operation accomplished much. It provided the Soviets the political cover that Stalin sought not to reach Slovakia in time to aid the insurgent Slovak Army and caused the diversion of German divisions from Poland and Hungary, thereby permitting Stalin to quickly move on Budapešť, Warsaw and Western Poland. Even Slovak Defense Minister Ferdinand Čatloš, in his infamous memorandum to the Soviets,

⁹¹ Ungváry, Krisztián. *The Siege of Budapest: 100 Days in World War II*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, pages 7-8.

⁹² Ibid at page 20.

recognized the danger of starting an operation in Northern Slovakia prematurely would only result in the diversion of German and Hungarian divisions and prevent quick entry into Slovakia from the north. Stalin and the *Stavka* certainly could count on this in their tactical and strategic planning. The *Stavka* had already demonstrated its clever deceptive tactics in the Lvov-Sandomierz Operation in July 1944 and several others like it.⁹³ It is entirely plausible and probable the Soviets intended the same with the Dukla operation.

VIII

As for Colonel Talský, he managed to join the Soviet partisan group Čapajev, the same group that helped arrange his escape from Prešov on the night of August 30, 1944, which eventually joined up with the Red Army on November 27, in the region of Vihorlat in Eastern Slovakia.⁹⁴ He was considered for a high post in the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps with the backing of General Svoboda, but reports to General Svoboda from the SNC protesting his appointment set into motion a long investigation. Bitter conflict broke out between the leadership of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps and the SNC over the investigation. Finally, the army was willing to settle the matter by dismissing Talský from the military, but the SNC insisted on his prosecution before the Czechoslovak National Court. After his trial in December 1947 Talský was found guilty of treason and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Viliam Talský died in prison in 1953.⁹⁵

⁹³ Armstrong, Richard M., LtCol., U.S. Army, Military Intelligence. "Soviet Operational Deception: The Red Cloak." December 1988. (Cited 28 November 2005). A Special Studies paper for the Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Leavenworth, Kansas.
<http://www-cgsc.army.mil/carl/resources/csi/Armstrong/ARMSTRONG.asp>

⁹⁴ Šolc, Jiří. *Osudné rozhodnutí: případ Talský* [Fateful decision: the Case of Talský], *Vojenská história* [Military History]. Bratislava: VHÚ, Roč. 6, č. 3-4/2002, s. 81-89.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

Unfortunately, despite all the efforts of the Slovak National Uprising, it failed to accomplish its central goal—a Slovak liberation movement to restore democracy to the Czechoslovak Republic—and was quickly crushed by the better equipped, better organized, better led and quicker-responding German Army. This deprived the Slovak people of liberating themselves and claiming firm control over their political destiny. Instead, the Soviet Army ultimately mounted a successful front through Slovakia and raped, pillaged and overran the countryside, while establishing a firm political and martial foundation for intimidating the populace and political leadership into accepting them as their liberators and eventually their new overlords. The sheer volume and enormity of monuments built after the war throughout Czechoslovakia in honor of the Soviet “liberators”—many of which can be found next to monuments commemorating Czech and Slovak national heroes of past centuries who had nothing to do with the Soviets—testifies to the degree of manipulation the Soviets routinely exercised to promote a false image and a false history. Finally, the massive purges by Stalin’s order of those Czechoslovak government and military officials that were not handpicked by Stalin, himself—some of which were heroic figures in their own right—that occurred between 1949 and 1955 was the final blow to any remaining seed of democracy and opposition to complete Soviet dominance in the country. What Stalin and the Comintern failed to accomplish over 20 years in Central and Eastern Europe, the Red Army and its successive political infrastructure was able to firmly establish in only three and one-half years between 1944 and 1948. The infamous “Victorious February 1948” putsch by the communists was for the Czechoslovak people a return to totalitarianism under which they had suffered in one form or another for nearly 1,000 years.

^A Recently, several authors who call themselves historians have turned activists arguing that America's use of the atomic bomb in 1945 was a great and unnecessary evil, and that America was responsible for starting the Cold War because of the development of the atomic bomb. They argue that Stalin's clamp-down on Central and Eastern Europe was primarily a response to America's development of the atomic bomb and that had the bomb not been developed Stalin would not have brought Central and Eastern Europe under Soviet domination. These far left-wing revisionist historians have for decades been apologists for anti-war, and socialist economic and political policies. Their foreign policy philosophy is generally based on the drive to counter American global hegemony which they, like communists, view as imperialistic. (Alperovitz, Gar, Bird, Kai. The Centrality of the Bomb, *Foreign Policy*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, spring 1994; 94:3-20.)

^B On the last day of the conference at Teheran in December 1943 Roosevelt called Stalin for a private meeting without the presence of Churchill. During that private meeting the issue of Stalin's claims on Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian territory was discussed. Like during the Warsaw uprising, Roosevelt favored Stalin's demands over those of the democratic governments in exile and his own constituents back in the United States. Moreover, Roosevelt had so much respect for Stalin that he was even willing to break the promise he made to Churchill and the British Commonwealth in the Atlantic Charter. Roosevelt never informed Churchill of his *ex parte* statements to Stalin. Below are the minutes of that private meeting. (*The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 10, ed. Samuel Rosenman. New York: Random House, 1938-1950, page 314. Zawodny, Janusz Kazimierz. *Nothing but Honour: The Story of the Warsaw Uprising, 1944*. London: Pan Macmillan, 1978. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943. The Conferences at Cairo and Teheran*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, pages 594-6.)

[President Roosevelt and Stalin agree on the changes in Polish frontiers. The President also disclaims interest in the political integrity of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia in favor of the Soviet Union. (Roosevelt did not inform Churchill about this conversation.) Tehran, December 1943.]

Roosevelt - Stalin Meeting, December 1, 1943, 3:20 p.m.
Roosevelt's quarters, Soviet embassy

Present

United States: President Roosevelt, Mr. Harriman, Mr. Bohlen
Soviet Union: Marshal Stalin, Foreign Commissar Molotov, Mr. Pavlov

Bohlen Minutes

Secret

The President said he had asked Marshal Stalin to come see him as he wished to discuss a matter briefly and frankly. He said it referred to internal American politics.

He said that we had an election in 1944 and that while personally he did not wish to run again, if war was still in progress, he might have to. He added that there were in the United States from six to seven million Americans of Polish extraction, and as a practical man, he did not wish to lose their vote. He said he personally agreed with the views of Marshal Stalin as to the necessity of the restoration of a Polish state but would like to see the Eastern border moved further to the west and the Western border moved even to the River Oder. He hoped, however, that the Marshal would understand that for political reasons outlined above, he could not participate in any decision here at Teheran or even next winter on this subject and that he could not publicly take part in any such arrangement at the present time.

Marshal Stalin replied that now the President explained, he had understood.

The President went on to say that there were a number of persons of Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian origin, in that order, in the United States. He said that he fully realized the three Baltic Republics had in history and again more recently been a part of Russia and jokingly added that when the Soviet armies re-occupied these areas, he did not intend to go to war with the Soviet Union on this point.

He went on to say that the big issue in the United States, insofar as public opinion went, would be the question of referendum and the right of self-determination. He said he thought world opinion would want some expression of the will of the people, perhaps not immediately after their re-occupation by Soviet forces, but some day, and that he personally was confident that the people would vote to join the Soviet Union.

Marshal Stalin replied that the three Baltic Republics had no autonomy under the last Czar who had been an ally of Great Britain and the United States, but that no one had raised the question of public opinion, and he did not quite see why it was being raised now.

The President replied that the truth of the matter was that the public neither knew nor understood.

Marshal Stalin answered that they should be informed and some propaganda work should be done.

He added that as to the expression of the will of the people, there would be lots of opportunities for that to be done in accordance with the Soviet constitution but that he could not agree to any form of international control.

The President replied that it would be helpful for him personally if some public declaration in regard to the future elections to which the Marshal had referred, could be made.

Marshal Stalin repeated there would be plenty of opportunities for such an expression of the will of the people.

^C Agreement on the Founding of an Underground Slovak National Council Announced at Christmas, 1943 (Lettrich, Ján. *History of Modern Slovakia*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1955, pages 303-5).

Those who represent the ideological trends in Slovakia which have remained faithful to the principles of anti-Fascist democracy even after October 6, 1938, and who have been conducting active resistance against the political, economic, and cultural coercion of the Slovak people, and who represent today the true opinions of all strata of the Slovak Nation. have agreed to create a common political leadership, the Slovak National Council, as the only representative of the political will of the Slovak Nation at home.

I. The tasks and aims of the Slovak National Council are:

1. To lead uniformly and centrally the fight of the Slovak Nation for the removal of the Nazi German dictatorship, which dictatorship was exercised also by the domestic usurpers of political power.

2. At the first propitious moment to take over all political, legislative, military, and administrative powers in Slovakia and exercise them according to the will of the people until freely elected representatives of the people are able to assume all power.

3. As soon as feasible after seizing power, the Slovak National Council will make it possible for the Slovak people to elect freely its representatives, to whom the Council will hand over all power.

4. The Slovak National Council will continue its activities in agreement with the Czechoslovak Government and the Liberation Movement Abroad, whose work in the international and military field it recognizes and supports.

II. The representatives of the united trends and groups then agreed on these principles:

1. It is our wish that the Slovak and Czech Nations, as the most closely related Slav nations, shape their destinies in the Czechoslovak Republic, in a common State of the Czechs and Slovaks built upon the principle of national equality.

2. We wish for close cooperation with all Slav countries and nations, especially with the USSR as the protector of the freedom and universal progress of small nations in general and Slav nations in particular.

3. The future Czechoslovak Republic is to direct its foreign policy in the spirit of these principles and is, therefore, to lean on USSR in the military and international fields.

4. The internal order of the future Czechoslovak Republic is to be democratic; all fascist, racist, totalitarian, and other tendencies which are contrary to these principles are to be rooted out. Prompted by this spirit the internal political regime is to be firm but democratic. The errors and mistakes of the past are to be avoided.

5. The ideas of democracy are to be applied and extended to the economic and social fields so that the national income would be divided equitably and justly as possible among all the people and the life of every citizen would have human dignity.

6. Culture, education, and learning are to be governed by the aforementioned principles. Religious freedom is to be retained, the influence of the churches on policies and leadership of the state is to be excluded.

7. The definite solution of these problems-in particular the relation between the Slovak and Czech nations as assured by the Constitution-is to be decided by the freely elected representatives of the Slovak Nation.

Bratislava. Christmas. 1943

^D Declaration of the Slovak National Council in Banská Bystrica, September 1, 1944 (Lettrich, Ján. *History of Modern Slovakia*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1955, pages 305-7).

All Democratic and progressive sections and movements of the Slovak Nation which have been engaged in a constant fight against the present Fascist regime in Slovakia and against its Nazi German allies have, on this day, set up a Slovak National Council which is to be the supreme representative of Slovak resistance on the home front.

Therefore, from this day on the Slovak National Council, which is the only authorized spokesman of the Slovak Nation, assumes the legislative and executive power throughout Slovakia, as well as the defense of Slovakia, and it will discharge these duties until the Slovak Nation has, by democratic methods, appointed its legitimate representatives.

Our resistance movement on the home front, which has hitherto been conducted in complete unity with the Czechoslovak resistance movement abroad, wishes to continue in unity and collaboration until the day of final victory.

We are in favor of a brotherly co-existence with the Czech Nation in the new Czechoslovak Republic. Constitutional, social, economic and cultural problems of the Republic will be settled definitely by elected representatives of the Slovak and Czech people in accordance with democratic principles, progress and social justice.

On achieving political liberation, our aim will be to ensure a better and happier life for the socially weak strata of the nation, that is for the Slovak worker and peasant. In order to secure a higher standard of living for the nation we are in favor of equitable distribution of national wealth, and a new land reform for the benefit of the small peasant. The worker shall have wages corresponding to a higher standard of living and share in the results of his labor.

We most emphatically reject and condemn the anti-democratic outrageous acts and ideas of the People Party's regime in our country. The Slovak Nation has had nothing to do with the alliance with Hitlerite Germany. On the contrary, in its way of thinking and in its conception it has always been entirely on the side of the Allies, as it has proved by its deeds at home and at the front on all possible occasions. The Slovak Nation, true to our national traditions, has rejected with indignation the Tiso-Tuka betrayal committed against Slavdom by the Populist regime which forced the Slovak Nation into the fight against the brotherly Russian Nation and other Slav nations.

Today the Slovak Nation openly and solemnly joins hands with the Allied nations, which by their struggle and great sacrifices will ensure a free, democratic life to all nations throughout the world and to our small nation as well. We wish to contribute everything in our power toward the speedy conclusion of this fight for liberty.

In these historic moments we shall grant every moral and material support to our fighting Slovak Army and the partisans. We call on the entire nation to take up arms and to join in the fight against our traditional enemies and their henchmen at home, so that all Slovaks may be able to arrange their life in a free Czechoslovak Republic according to their own wishes.

May our just cause prevail!
Glory to our Czechoslovak Republic!

Banská Bystrica, September 1, 1944.
The Slovak National Council

^E Lend-Lease provided vital help for the Soviet Union when the country was in desperate straits and made a significant contribution to the final victory in the Second World War. It also strengthened Jozef Stalin, a fact that did not bother its chief architect, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who saw beyond the Allied victory and looked at Stalin as a counterbalance to European colonial powers. Every Soviet leader, from Stalin to Gorbachev, pretended that American aid was just something extra, almost a trifle, while state historians assigned it an arbitrary figure of four percent of the Soviet war production. Those historians abroad who accepted Soviet statistics perpetuated this myth. After the collapse of the Soviet system, Russian historians were able to look into the archival files and total up the real figures. One study, by M. N. Suprin, calculates the caloric content of Lend-Lease foodstuffs sent to the U.S.S.R., divides the total by the caloric needs of the Red Army and arrives at a stunning conclusion: "The foodstuffs provided by Lend-Lease to the USSR would have sufficed to feed an army of ten million men for 1,688 days, that is, for the course of the entire war." Another study, by Boris Sokolov, whose title translates as *The Truth about the Great Patriotic War*, estimates that the U.S. supplied 92.7 percent of the U.S.S.R.'s railroad equipment, including locomotives and rails, and from 15 to 90 percent of production in all other categories. These are facts that even Russian President Vladimir Putin formally acknowledged to be accurate. (See Weeks, Albert L. *Russia's Life-Saver: Lend-Lease Aid to the U.S.S.R. in World War II*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004.)

^F By summer 1943 it was evident a unified resistance was required if the fascist Tiso regime was to be seriously challenged and brought down. The communists needed the cooperation and unity of the non-

communists more than vice versa. The non-communists and communists realized unification in December 1943 with the signing of the Christmas Agreement and declaration of the establishment of the SNC. Although at its height the SNC was partially comprised of communists sympathetic to and allied with the Soviets, they made up only a minority of the SNC—25 Democrats, 13 Communists, 10 Social Democrats, and two military commanders (Lettrich, Ján. *History of Modern Slovakia*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1955, page 207). Furthermore, the vast majority of the insurgent army officer corps was sympathetic to and allied with the democratic London-based Czechoslovak leadership. Despite the persistent claims of those who supported Tiso that the uprising was a communist plot against a legitimate Slovak government, all the evidence points to the fact that the idea and major planning of the uprising was indeed that of Slovak democrats.

^G After the war stories of the Soviet Partisan Movement during the Great Patriotic War became one of the most important factors shaping the consciousness of the Soviet population. Literature in the Soviet Union and its descendant republics celebrated and romanticized this topic in countless novels, thousands of historical books and encyclopedias, and innumerable articles dealing with specific aspects of the guerrilla fighting. An entire industry of partisan folklore arose in the Soviet Union from the ashes of the Second World War. Poems, plays, movies, and television documentaries as well have focused on the “heroic” activities of the partisan struggling in the enemy rear. To the popular consciousness throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, these romantic depictions of the Great Patriotic War were essential to the communist movement and ideology of a “People’s Democracy.” All the while, however, most of these works were selective in their coverage and the judgments they rendered. They simply omitted important set-backs in the history of partisan fighting and ignored some of the more unpleasant facts and figures related to it.

^H Most of the Soviet officers commanding partisan units throughout Europe came from the ranks of those captured by the Germans that managed to escape their captors. Stalin and the *Stavka* looked upon these soldiers as traitors or of questionable loyalty and refused to allow them to return to their active-duty units in the Red Army. As punishment, many were assigned to units given the most dangerous jobs on the front or behind enemy lines and threatened with execution if they refused to carry out their dangerous missions. This was considered a reprieve compared to what those who could not manage escape from their captors suffered after the war and repatriation to the Soviet Union.

^I Protest of the Slovak Legionnaires of March 14, 1939 (Lettrich, Ján. *History of Modern Slovakia*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1955, page 297).

Honorable Diet of Slovakia

Gentlemen,

If you are to decide today whether Slovakia is to be a part of the Czecho-Slovak Republic or an independent state by the side of some neighboring country bear in mind that:

- brave Slovak patriots fought and died together with the Czechs for the liberty of the Slovak Nation;
- that it was the Czechs who helped the Slovaks in the worst moments of their history and that all that we have from the spiritual and material point of view today we have acquired with Czech help during the last twenty years.

We implore you not to tarnish the national honor of the Slovaks and the memory of our fallen comrades, foremost among whom was General M. R. Štefánik.

For lack of time it is not possible for all Slovak Legionnaires and volunteers still living to join us in reminding you but we are certainly voicing the feeling of them all and of the great majority of the Slovak people.

Bratislava, March 14, 1939

Gen. Rudolf Viest
Lieut. Col. Aug. Malár

Anton Granatier
Arch. Juro Tvarožek

Staff-Capt. J. M. Kristin
Josef Kustra
M. Miškóci

Dr. Ján Jesenský
Jozef Gregor-Tajovský
Králiček

Ing. Kalamen

^J This plan regarding General Malár was first revealed to Captain Vlčko in May 1944 in a private conversation he had with Ing. Ladislav Gejza Krno. Vlčko, while working as a matériel officer at headquarters in the Ministry of National Defense (MNO) in Bratislava, was first introduced to Ing. Krno in early 1943 by an outspoken Catholic priest, Father Augustín Pozdech, who openly supported the democrats. Father Pozdech openly and fearlessly encouraged his followers to engage themselves in the resistance. Ing. Ladislav Gejza Krno was *Chargé d'affaires* and commerce agent in the Slovak Embassy in Moscow up until 1941. He then worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bratislava under the Tiso government while he secretly worked with the resistance and Czechoslovak government-in-exile. As their friendship grew, Vlčko began supplying Krno with classified documents and information from the Matériel Department at the Ministry. Besides providing job descriptions and character analysis of individual officers in the Ministry, Vlčko also informed Krno when and where military units and supplies would be deployed at the Eastern Front. Thus, Krno knew exactly what was going on at the MNO and in the field at the same time. He would relay these facts to the Czechoslovak government in London, as well as directly to the Soviet high command in Moscow.

In May 1944 Vlčko had a private meeting in Krno's apartment on the Danube River in Bratislava. The following was discussed during that meeting between Vlčko and Krno. (Vlčko, Peter E. *In the Shadow of Tyranny* at pages 296, 329-30. Vlčko, Peter E. *Remembering My Participation in the Slovak National Uprising of 1944*. In: *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War II, Part II*, ed. Lewis M. White. Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1995, pages 233-42.)

Captain Vlčko, what brings you here?

I have to talk to you.

Come in and sit down.... Now tell me what's on your mind.

Well...

Don't tell me that officer moral has declined since the bombing [in Bratislava]?

Yes and no. Still I feel we're going to witness some changes among those who have collaborated with the Nazis.

Captain, I don't have to tell you what the planned uprising will mean. You know as well as I there'll be few officers who will not cooperate. However, I'm more interested in learning whether you've been contacted yet.

Unfortunately no one has approached me.

Do you suppose someone is afraid you'll take his job?

Who knows? The only thing I'm interested in is getting involved. I've been waiting four years for this opportunity.

I understand how you feel. Don't worry; I may be able to change things.

What do you mean, Pán Engineer?

You know a new army is being organized in eastern Slovakia?

Yes, but I'm not going to fight against the Russians.

You won't have to. Officially they're supposed to reinforce the German defenses on the Carpathians. However, their real task is to break this defense line from behind. Such a maneuver will enable [General] Petrov to cross these mountains.

How do you know this?

I have direct contact with the Slovak National Council. I can't tell you anything more right now. If you really want to get involved in the liberation movement, request a transfer to Prešov. Tatarko will comply. I guarantee it.

He certainly wouldn't assign me to a retreating Blitz Division in Rumania. But whom do I contact in Prešov?

Lieutenant Colonel Urban. He's the assistant Army Chief of Staff there. He knows all the details.

Who is the Chief of Staff?

Colonel Talský. He's been in on the insurrection plans since the beginning. General Malár is Army Commander. Lavota's there, too. Neither of these knows a thing about Talský's and Urban's plans. They'll be asked to cooperate only at the last moment. If they don't they will be shot. What I have just told you is confidential; you understand?

^K The Čatloš memorandum, written to Moscow in July 1944 but not delivered until August 4, offering to join up with Soviet forces and execute a military coup against the Tiso government, alluded to continued Slovak independence after the war. The primary tactical thrust of the memorandum was to encourage the Soviets to not draw too much attention prematurely to the northern Slovak border which would only bring unwanted attention from Hungarian divisions in Košice, but to first press into Hungary forcing the Hungarian divisions in Košice southward and away from subsequent action at the northern Slovak border. In his memorandum, Čatloš spends a great deal of time and energy trying to convince the Soviets of the importance of concentrating their military might against the Hungarians, rather than the Germans. He even goes so far as to promise to replace the declaration of war against the Soviets with one against the Hungarians, but fails to mention a word about a declaration of war against the Germans. Let us examine more closely his words to the Soviets. (Elias, Andrew. *The Slovak Uprising* at page 42-3. Gosiorovský, Miloš. *Slovenské národné povstanie* [Slovak National Uprising]. Bratislava: VPL, 1954, page 51.)

Slovakia, as a state dependent upon Germany, whose foreign policy is contractually conditioned to act according to Germany's, effectively by dictate had to declare war against the USSR and her allies. Today, German strength is breaking and in Slovakia the bond of dependence on Germany is loosening. A small nation in the position of being so dependent must accommodate to powerful neighbors. It is only joy when at the same time she can give expression to her feelings. Today is the time that the Slavonic disposition of our nation finds a path so that her freedom becomes a champion—not an alien, but a blood brother.

By existing circumspection of the establishment we want to wait out in the interest of our nation until the last moment so that Slovakia does not become another unfortunate Italy. Like that of the USSR, the interest of Slovakia is that wars do not break out in the territory of Slovakia prematurely, because later it will go easier without wars. Thus, to not immediately attack when achieving contact with our northeastern national boundaries. The Hungarians have in the area of Košice the largest strategic reserves which want to operate against Soviet armies on the territory of Eastern Slovakia. They

are striving even now to take upon themselves the defense of the Lupkow and Dukla Passes. We Slovaks will not allow that and, therefore, we are doing everything so that we convince the Germans and the Hungarians that we are capable of defending with our own forces. In this the USSR must indirectly support us in its own interest. Later, but according to a precisely predetermined plan, it would be good to execute in this phase a demonstration of cannon fire and an artificial attack which Slovak units would repulse by a noticeable defense so that the Germans and Hungarians would not have a reason for their help and intervention and would trust the Slovaks.

Slovakia offers its forces for a mutual cause with the USSR in this way: let the Soviets intensively push to Užok Pass and more southerly against the Hungarians so that they would tie up as many Hungarian forces there as possible. Furthermore, let them exert an offensive effort to the northern Carpathians in the direction of Tarnov and Krakow. Let them not fear a lateral counteroffensive from Slovakia, because the Slovak Army would already follow its later cooperation with the armies of the USSR and in the event of German and/or Hungarian interference from Slovakia she would timely warn the Soviets if she were not in a position to face these entrapments – Only if the Soviets reached and firmly controlled the area of Krakow, the possibility would arise for an astonishing and successful attack against the Hungarians and the enabling of further operations also against the Germans from the southern and western borders of Slovakia. The Slovak Army would prepare and make possible, specifically a quick and smooth transfer of the Soviet armies through Slovak territory and would attach itself to the exploitation of the Hungarians.

The unquestionable prerequisite, however, for this successful execution would be secrecy by mutual agreement and with no hint whatsoever of unusual propaganda, as well as cooperation until those times of the Slovaks with the Germans as well as the Hungarians. – By that, the USSR suddenly and safely would make a giant and decisive leap in the war on this ground.

In the decisive moment the Slovak military leadership would execute a national coup. The unfavorable individuals would be removed from leadership and the organizations that were unilaterally created by the regime would be discontinued. The Slovak military dictatorship would find in all layers of the nation understanding and support, by which the state of things would immediately stabilize and uphold order. The declaration of war against the USSR and her allies would be cancelled with a simultaneous declaration of war against the Hungarians, which would make it [Slovak military dictatorship] suddenly very popular. Overnight it [Slovak military dictatorship] would deactivate the German military and civilian arrangements in Slovakia and would create possibilities for Soviet operations of great magnitude. Even here is an assumption that the Slovak defense force would uphold her statehood, however, it would become a component of the armies of the USSR and would cooperate also with Czechoslovak units on the basis of mutual independence, because otherwise there would arise a common bone of contention and disturbing conflicts.

This is the reason for the demand that, in the case of a fundamental agreement, permanent commissions would be set up that would maintain contact on both sides in the proximity of the hinterlands and would have long-reaching military as well as political justification. In Slovakia the situation would temporarily remain in the military's hands and stepwise over time would also gain a political personality. A secret organization of Slovak Bolsheviks would arrange mutual contacts, but temporarily would noticeably not get involved in the thing of interest of the natural course of passage *et cetera* as well as the connection of the entire nation. Constitutional reasoning would follow even so after the completion of the war so that an internal political solution would be in harmony with the interests of the USSR. In the existing Soviet-Czechoslovak negotiations to date it is

necessary to reserve the right for Slovakia to adopt its viewpoint and therefore the relations of the Slovaks with the USSR occur directly as long as possible. (Translated from: Prečan, Vilém. *Slovenské národné povstanie roku 1944* [Slovak National Uprising of the Year 1944]. Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied, 1965, page 262.)

^L Golian was never intended to remain the supreme military leader of the uprising once fighting broke out. His role was to prepare a military plan and then to organize and prepare the forces to execute the plan. The London-based leadership, including General Ingr, first wanted Colonel Ján Imro to lead the uprising. However, Imro turned down the offer. They then wanted General Malár to take the top post, but persistent doubts about his stance and his close ties to General Čatloš kept them from approaching him in spring 1944. Early in 1944 Talský wavered on the opportunity to lead the uprising, but later approached Golian about leading the Eastern Slovak Army, should an uprising break out. (See also Šolc, Jiří. *Osudné rozhodnutí: prípad Talský* [Fateful Decision: the Case of Talský], *Vojenská história* [Military History], Roč. 6, č. 3-4/2002, s. 81-89. Bratislava: VHÚ.)

^M After Major Baľuta's departure from the Čapajev partisan group practically the entire leadership of the partisan group was arrested on November 9, 1944, and executed on November 18, 1944, by the Soviets. They were all charged of high treason and being German agents for anti-partisan espionage under Article 58. They were accused of undergoing special espionage training while prisoners of war in German camps and then released into Slovakia with the following tasks: 1) report the location of partisan encampments; 2) demoralize partisan units; 3) kill partisan leaders; and 4) create conflict between Soviet and Slovak members of the partisan units. Their military trial took place in Rohožník, Slovakia where Red Army 1st Lieutenant Tristan acted as Procurator of the Court. Tristan was sent by the ŠPH of the 1st Ukrainian Front to Slovakia along with Captain Viktor Kokin in September 1944. On November 15, 1944, Major Baľuta was also arrested, tried for treason and executed. All witnesses against him were Soviet Red Army officers. After the war an investigation into these trials and executions was conducted by Soviet and Czechoslovak ministries. For many years the investigation failed to yield a conclusion. Finally, in 1965 Major Baľuta and his cohorts were declared by the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior innocent of the trumped up charges. (Archív Múzea SNP [Archive of the Museum of the SNU], Banská Bystrica, IV. fond, prir. č. S 117/81.)

^N Western historians must be very careful here in interpreting the writings of historians published under communist regimes that persist in depicting Talský as an incompetent. While some communist or former-communist historians wrote provocatively about certain facts such as the Talský affair that had the potential to embarrass their communist regimes, very few were brave enough to do so in fear of persecution. One cannot forget that after the arrival in Slovakia of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps and the Soviet Army, General Svoboda and the Soviets wanted to reward Talský by promoting him to a high command post. It was only after intense protests from the SNC and increasing public awareness of his role in the failure of the Eastern Slovak Army at a critical time of the uprising that the communists gave in and Talský ended up facing the National Court in December 1947. Historians must remember it was a democratic National Court under the Beneš government that tried Viliam Talský, found him guilty of treason and sentenced him to 15-years in prison. After the communist putsch in February 1948 Talský could have been released from prison, but too much animus persisted against him. Much like the execution of the leadership of the Čapajev partisan group, Talský's continued imprisonment under the communists can be seen as a necessary sacrifice in order to cover any remaining evidence of a conspiracy and to perpetuate the great Soviet myth of how important and invaluable their support was for the SNU.

^O Colonel Markus helped enlighten many Slovak officers regarding the terrible disappointment the Soviets turned out to be, including Captain Vlčko in the following conversation the two had in Handlová with the 4th Tactical Group in October 1944. (Vlčko, Peter E. *In the Shadow of Tyranny* at pages 519-22.)

[After reporting to Colonel Markus about an incident that occurred between Slovak soldiers and partisans that ended in a partisan's death, Markus had the following conversation with Vlčko.]

I'm sorry this happened, but I can't say I'm surprised. Those fellows have been getting on my nerves. They do nothing but cause trouble. I receive report after report complaining the partisans have stolen one thing or another. One day machine guns are missing and the next day provisions. Their demand for ammunition and hand-grenades is insatiable. Sometimes I have the feeling they are deliberately trying to impoverish us so that eventually we will be incapable of fighting. I would be happy if they would pack up and go somewhere else.

Colonel, don't you think it's our duty to support them while they're in our battle area?

Who assigned them here? Our Supreme Command in Bystrica knows nothing about their presence.

It was probably the Partisan's Supreme Command in Kijev which ordered them here.

All right then, let Kijev take care of them. If they refuse to accept my orders, they can't expect my help either. After all, the Soviets aren't giving us much help.

Why do you say that?

I discovered this and some other rather interesting facts when I was in Bystrica yesterday. Listen to what they have done to us. When the Western Allies, chiefly the Americans, wanted to send us supplies of ammunition and weapons from their air base at Bari in southern Italy, the Soviets protested. The American and British Military Missions in Bystrica are making a combined effort to convince the Soviets to change their minds.

Colonel, I just can't believe that! Surely the Russians, our Slav brothers, should be happy to see us receive supplies and provisions.

Unfortunately, it is true. General Golian revealed it to me in confidence. This, and other betrayals we have discovered, proves that the Soviets are out to destroy everybody who is not in accord with their future plans. The disturbing news concerning the Soviet partisans' misconduct and their violent behavior is reaching our supreme commander's office from all sections of the liberated territory. At first many of our officers and politicians did not want to admit this, or attach any importance to these reports. But lately their eyes are opening and they are beginning to see the total picture. The dream of a truly helpful Soviet ally is evaporating, and the future is clouded by the Communists' aggressive behavior.

At first it was easy to excuse the problems as the result of ineptness or poor judgment, but now it is becoming increasingly difficult to be so patient and forgiving. Their partisans are constantly interfering with our war activity and placing all kinds of artificial obstacles along the road, instead of cooperating. We can't accept their explanation any longer that these are only isolated incidents. Beyond all doubt they are the result of a systematic plan, coming directly from Kijev and certainly originating in Moscow, to undermine our war effort.

But this is incredible! I can hardly believe the Russians would betray us so.

Vlěko, you must make a distinction here. The Russian people have nothing to do with this treachery. Stalin is to blame. The people are our friends. It is the communist minority who ruthlessly suppress their citizens. These are not the Russians we know and love as brothers; they are the power-hungry autocrats of a new order. Neither Stalin nor his followers feel the love and friendship which has always existed between Czech, Slovak and Russian peoples. The narrow interests and appetite for power of the Soviet

Communists devalue the precious affection which Slavs have for one another. Now the Soviet leaders are only friends to those who are obedient and who will support the fulfillment of their worldwide plans, regardless of nationality and origin.

Then those whom we trusted most have betrayed us most.

Yes, unfortunately. I want to be sure every Slovak officer has a true picture of the Soviet hypocrisy. That is why I tell you these awful things. The Soviets know full well that our insurrection is a great help to their war effort. At the moment they need our help. What bothers them is the fact that Slovak Insurrection is not completely in their hands. It would be so simple for them if we all joined the Communist Party. But they know this will never happen. Therefore, they will never trust us either. Besides they do not want us to be successful because then their chances of controlling a free Czechoslovakia would be impaired. Vlčko, do you know what the Soviet Communists used to say?

I'm not certain I know what you mean.

They say that whoever is not a Communist is either bourgeois or a Fascist. According to them, all democrats are imperialists and enemies of socialism, and whoever is against socialism is also against the Soviet Union. Every Soviet soldier and officer in Slovakia is infected with this twisted ideology.

It has become clear to me why we get no support in our struggle from the Soviets. Their mission sends reports to Moscow, which looks at the Slovak National Insurrection not only as an enterprise against the Nazis and Fascists but also against Communism. To them it doesn't matter if several thousand Slovaks die, just so long as this anti-communist effort in our movement is suppressed. Now do you understand our position?

But, my God, if what you say is true, there can be no future for us. If we lose this war, we are destroyed by the Nazis. If we win, the Soviets will swallow us up.

I'm afraid so. That is why I am also worried about this last incident. The partisans are sure to make an issue of it and try to use it for propaganda purposes.

^P Historically, for Stalin the number of casualties any military objective might demand was never a decisive obstacle to the proposed operation. Stalin routinely sent waves of soldiers to their deaths against overwhelming odds with very little regard for total losses. He even gave orders to establish 3-5 NKVD units ("blocking detachments") for each army to shoot soldiers that retreat in the face of a more powerful enemy (Order Number 270, dated August 16, 1941, demanded that force leaders and Red Army men "struggle to their final capabilities," and if "such a leader or Red Army unit preferred to surrender rather than organize a rebuff to the enemy, --to destroy them by all of their means [weapons], both ground and air..." and Order Number 227 – *Ни шагу назад!* [Not a step backwards!], dated July 28, 1942, actually set up the actions of the blocking detachments). After the war Stalin ordered the execution or imprisonment in Gulag labor camps in Siberia of hundreds of thousands of repatriated Soviet prisoners of war who were captured by the Germans. They were convicted of high treason under Article 58 and condemned after being returned to the Soviets by the British when they took control of German-held POWs. Admittedly, some of the Soviet prisoners of war were forced by the Nazis to take up arms against their Soviet brethren. But the vast majority did not. Before forced repatriation under the British many Soviet POWs committed suicide rather than return to their homeland with Stalin in power. News of these suicides reached the highest levels of British government, including Churchill and members of his cabinet. Yet, repatriation continued. (See A. M. Samsonov. 7 February 1988 issue of the newspaper *Moskovskie novosti* [Moscow News]. See also *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal* [Military-Historical Journal], No. 1 (January 1992), 46.)

^Q Some reports attribute significant successes against the Germans in Eastern Slovakia by the Čapajev partisan group, named after a famous Red Army commander in the Russian Revolution, between April and

November 1944. The legendary boldness of the group and its founder, Lieutenant Ludovít Kukorelli, reportedly resulted in 6,698 German dead and 2,097 wounded and missing. German material losses caused by the operations of this group are also reported as 22 trains, 25 locomotives, 13 tanks, 185 automobiles and motorcycles, 28 bridges and four supply depots. The available evidence in archives and eye-witness accounts of all partisan activity in Slovakia in 1944 indicates no other partisan group had even close to the same effectiveness and success as the Čapajev group. (Elias, Andrew. *Slovak Uprising* at page 48.)