

The Ural-Siberian Home Front of Victory and the Anglo-American Allies

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Abstract. The paper gives an analysis of conditions and factors which, during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945, had determined the heightened attention of the USSR's Anglo-American allies toward the regions of the Urals and Siberia as the strategic military-industrial base of fighting the aggression of both Nazi Germany and militarist Japan. Specific features of the attitudes of the USA and Great Britain over the role and significance of the Ural-Siberian home front are revealed concerning the formation of the anti-Hitlerite coalition, the organization of combat against the aggressive powers, and postwar power balance. The analysis is based on positions and estimates of the political establishment, diplomats, and journalists, as well as literature on the Urals and Siberia, published in the USA and Great Britain during wartime.

Keywords: Urals; Siberia; United States of America; Great Britain; Great Patriotic War; Second World War; strategic home front; allies; anti-Hitlerite coalition; military-industrial base.

The significance of Urals and Siberia as major industrial regions that grew during the first Soviet five-year plans and became the foundation of strategic logistic services in the years of the great patriotic war included not just their direct contribution to the victory but also its influence on the general strategic war scenarios and the so-called ‘big strategy’. It supported the geostrategic planning, which along with consideration of current war factors involved a very complex system of projected estimates of economic potentials, spatial reserves, and communication capacities of each of the warring parties. Such estimates had a great impact on political-military options and the morale of the warring parties, defined the horizon ‘of a big strategy of conduct of war embracing a broad range of military, political, spatial, and economic decisions.

The critical issue of coalition strategy

Although in summer and fall of 1941 the entire world held its breath watching the red army wage grinding defensive

actions around Moscow, the strategic thinking of the USSR's allies – Great Britain and the USA – focused all the more on the deep logistical regions of the Soviet Union. The British ruling class imagined an inevitable military downfall of the USSR and the only sense of the continued Soviet resistance seemed a depletion of the German military power, its absorption in the boundless spaces of Russia to push back the remote prospect of renewed Hitler's attacks against Great Britain. That is why the initial objective of the British diplomacy was keeping the Russians in the state of war at all costs – even if it takes them to retreat as far as Siberia [Kennedy, 1957: 147–148]. At the same time, the British did not rate high the military-industrial potential of the 'near East' of Russia. The well-known British military expert B. G. Liddell Hart who regularly published comments on current military events in 'Daily Mail' wrote on 12 August 1941: "Development of latest industrial regions in the Urals and beyond it made remarkable progress. But it hardly went so far as to adequately replace the needs of the Red Army if it were to lose the old industrial regions" [Liddell Hart, 1942: 94]. A more optimistic and constructive position was shared by American military experts. Already on 11 September 1941, the official document "The opinion of the joint committee [of heads of staff] regarding the general industrial program of the United States pointed out the connection between the target "of keeping up the existing front in Russia" and the development of a powerful strategic defense base in the Urals: "... Even if the Soviet troops are pushed back beyond the Urals and continue an organized resistance, there will always be a hope of a final and complete defeat of Germany by means of land operations. One of the most important measures that may be taken by the allied powers is the necessary armament of Russian forces by way of supplying arms from the outside and by the installation of industrial capacities in the Volga basin or to the East of the Ural mountains " [Cited from: Sherwood, 1958: 645–646].

A heightened interest of Anglo-American allies of the USSR in the state of military-industrial potential of the Urals and

Siberia came from their far-reaching strategic considerations. The allies saw the purpose of the attack of Nazi Germany on the USSR on 22 June 1941 not only in Hitler's wish to crush the hated Soviet Union in the course of a 'blitzkrieg' but also in capturing its vast economic resources. It was believed that Hitler's goal was to create on the ruins of the USSR a powerful Eurasian 'transcontinental' empire stretching at least to the Urals and Caucasus [Wight, 1999: 59]. (Later, in January 1942, it became known that at the negotiations with Japan about the division of 'spheres of responsibility', on the territory of the defeated USSR, the Wehrmacht's directorate of military economy and armament was no longer content with drawing the division line at Omsk meridian and believed that a complete German 'macroeconomic space' in Eurasia required uniting the Urals and the Kuznetsk 'industrial basin' [Rich, 1973: 235]). Had this scenario become real, it would have dramatically shifted the global power balance and provided Germany with a sustainable resource-economic base to battle for world leadership against America and Great Britain.

The significance of the resource-economic dimension of war was emphasized in the situation review of the Russian front in October 1941 published in the American journal 'Life'. The journal believed that the loss of Ukraine, Donbas, and Leningrad was inevitable and anxiously asserted that Hitler's main military efforts would focus on a breakthrough to the Caucasus, which would give Germany access to the resources of Chiatura's manganese, Baku's oil, and capture of Moscow as a strategic hub of the entire Russian defense. Under such circumstances, the journal considered that the most important issue of Russia's continued resistance was the degree of readiness of industry in the Urals region that was achieved in the five years spent preparing for the alternative course of the war against Germany and Japan. The journal believed that the Urals region, surrounded by a thick veil of secrecy, was responsible for 50% of the Soviet output of railway rolling stock, 40% of tractors, 35% of aluminum, 20% of pig iron,

35% of iron ore extraction, 20% of chemical products and 4% of oil, would become ‘an ace in the sleeve’ that allows the Soviets to continue resistance in case Moscow surrenders. The journal tried to convince its readers that this region is only the first and the most powerful of the military-industrial ‘depos’ that the Soviet Union built in the years of its initial five-year plans along the Transsiberian route. Thanks to the layered ‘chain’ of centers of resistance – Sverdlovsk, Cheliabinsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk – even in the worst scenario of event development the ‘Red Army would still be able to defend the whole Siberia slowly retreating from base to base’. The review claimed that given the Allies’ capability to maintain principal routes of supplying Russia through the Arctic, Transcaucasia, and Vladivostok, their mission would not be totally lost [War on Russia, 1941: 47–48].

No matter how optimistically exaggerated such evaluation of the military-industrial potential of the Urals and Siberia was, at the time the anti-Hitlerite coalition was forming it was turning into a critical issue for the whole Anglo-American strategy. Before sending to the Soviet Union large shipments of military equipment, the allies had to be sure that it would be able, having lost a vast part of its territory and a third of its production capacities, to stop the Nazi attack drawing on the military-industrial base of the Urals-Kuzbass that had been built during the first five-year plans. The allies also speculated what time advantage they might get in a much worse scenario – the surrender of Moscow and the Red Army’s retreat to prepared strongholds in Siberia. Should the Soviet defense fall under Hitler’s blows, the former’s resources would fall into Hitler’s hands according to the Anglo-American allies’ logic and so one should refrain from active assistance to the Soviet Union in the hope that the agony of the failed ally provides Great Britain and the US with sufficient time to set up own defenses. This position was first of all propagated by isolationists who believed that the war is already lost by the Soviet Union and the USA must put all its resources in its own defense.

The 'miracle' of mobilization economy

By the time the USSR started the war with Nazi Germany, the Allies had very scarce information about its deep logistics regions, which remained for them to a large extent *terra incognita* [Lauterbach, 1945: 180]. In those conditions, there was a great demand for American experts that had been contracted by the Soviet Union during the great depression, Russian language scientists, journalists that used to review Russian problems and reside in the USSR. The most sought after, obviously, were the journalists.

In September 1941, when most British and American politicians were sure of the Russian front collapse, a well-known American journalist Morris H. Hindus published a book with the telling name "Hitler can't conquer Russia". Based on his twenty years' experience Hindus sought to prove that even in the case of 'formal front' collapse and fragmentation of the Russian defense Hitler would not be able to conquer this huge country – first of all, due to its vast spaces capable to absorb any army, and, secondly, due to special features of 'Russian humanity' – spontaneous instinctive love of freedom and defiance that makes every Russian peasant a guerilla [Hindus, 1941: 12, 19]. However, the important thing was that the book by Hindus was one of the first Anglo-American attempts to reevaluate the merits and shortcomings of the Soviet economic system during the war years. In the 1930-s, Soviet industrialization had been criticized in the West for voluntarism and unjustified rejection of 'consumption' interests. In the situation of war, the same came to be considered with the opposite sign – as a manifestation of strategic foresight.

Hindus believed that the 'resistance' of the Russian stretches to an invading enemy was many times over reinforced by the 'steely strength' dished out by the USSR at high speed and in the shortest historic period as it spread its economic potential all over its vast territory putting up whole industrial districts war away in the East. The American journalist called the Urals industrial district 'a superb bulwark against the enemy from

the West or East and described it as a rapidly growing and ‘almost self-sustainable’ ‘industrial-agrarian empire’ that has within its borders all types of products for survival and defense. Its industrial structure, according to Hindus, was purposefully designed on the basis of heavy industry – with a view of using it to multiply the output of armaments. “Together with the Siberian hinterland as its support base, it [the Urals. – K.Z.] would be able to support a large army and continue the war even if the whole of European Russia were lost. Its weakest link is oil, which could be supplied by the US unless Japan prevents it” – wrote the journalist. Hindus thought highly about the establishment of a second coal-metallurgic base of Urals-Kuzbass during the first five-year plans and believed it to be an exceptionally important strategic decision for effective defense implementing the principle of ‘economic autonomy’ – inevitable with immense distances and underdeveloped communication routes – the economy being a ‘multi-layered’ distributed system of relatively autonomous military-industrial complexes [Hindus, 1941: 64, 65–66].

Another amazing phenomenon to the allies was the colossal epic evacuation to the Urals and Siberia of industrial capacities and personnel. An American journalist from ‘the Time’ Richard A. Lauterbach described a mindboggling scale of this transfer of industry to the East (over 1 million freight wagons full of equipment and several million people) calling it ‘a miracle’ almost impossible to believe if one takes into account the inadequate capacity of the Soviet union’s railway network, which density adjusted for the size of the area was 8 times lower than that of France. Another source of wonder was the speed at which evacuated plants were put into operation. R. Lauterbach cites an example of the tractor plant named after K.Y. Voroshilov that had been dismantled and shipped from Dnepropetrovsk in late September of 1941 and already on 11 October of the same year it started producing in Orsk [Lauterbach, 1945: 181–182].

In autumn of 1941, despite the promising news about the start of intensive work of creating strategic logistics in the Urals and Siberia, most Anglo-American politicians and experts openly declared their distrust in the ability of Soviet troops to repel the ‘blitzkrieg’ and save Moscow. An American journalist, head of the Moscow bureau of United press, Henry Shapiro remembered in 1975 that an improvised survey he had taken among numerous diplomats and journalists who departed on 15 October 1941 to Kuibyshev found only three people confident that the Russians would be able to defend Moscow. Those were the British envoy Stafford Kripps, the Iranian envoy Mohammed Said and the head of American lend-lease mission Philip Feinmonville [Senn, 2006: 64]. Under these circumstances, any credible information about the state of strategic logistics that was rapidly created in the East of the USSR – in the regions closed for Western observers became very valuable for politicians and the public opinion in Great Britain and the USA, who were interested in strengthening ties with the USSR. The dramatic nature of the situation only whipped up this interest.

H. Shapiro, by a lucky coincidence, was the first American journalist to visit Sverdlovsk in December 1941 (he managed to get permission from the Ministry of foreign affairs of the USSR to visit his wife and daughter, who being Soviet citizens, were evacuated to Alapaievsk). The journalist was impressed by the intensive work that was put into the production of military products and the installation of evacuated plants in the Urals and remembered: “It was so cold that people had to light fires on the ground in order to lay down pipes and foundations. They worked days and nights, especially women. Probably 70 to 80 percent of those working there were women. I heard stories about people who fell down and died. They never left plants working there at subzero temperatures. It was a heartening sight. Such people as those do not lose wars easily. Hunger was rampant and food norms were very low. Food shops were

all closed except those that rationed food for coupons” [Senn, 2006: 65].

Shapiro’s reports full of admiration and optimism regarding the state of the Urals logistics in February 1942 were referred to the US State Department by the American solicitor Walter Turnstone. He pointed out that one of the main factors of the USSR’s tenacity in its arduous struggle against the aggressor was the military industry flourishing in the East of the country, which partly consisted of evacuated plants and partially of newly built ones [Foreign Relations, 1961: 414].

There was a more detailed analysis of the sources of the Soviet defense that was made in April 1942 in the report to the US State Department by the US ambassador to the USSR Admiral William H. Standly. The ambassador cited several factors and above all the Soviet structural policy, which even before the war ‘centered on the heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods production’ and contingent with it ‘Planned distribution’ of the economic potential of the country that involved creating heavy industry bases in the East of the country (Urals, Siberia, Kazakhstan). These regions beyond the limits of ‘systematic operations of the enemy’s air force’, pointed out Standly, produced half of Soviet steel and accumulated most strategic resources (copper, zinc, lead, vanadium, molybdenum, etc.). Speaking about the results of unprecedented measures to evacuate industry to the East, Standly said “All of the principal industrial enterprises had been timely transferred to the East from the occupied territory and from the border districts and, as a rule, got into full operation within 2–3 months” [Foreign Relations, 1961: 4346 435].

These military facts permitted making more far-reaching strategic conclusions. British experts, authors of the “Global war’ book (1942) analyzed the experience of the Soviet strategic logistics and concluded that the ‘war of engines’, which shortens distances and demonstrates the failure of even such “logistical triumph’ as Wehrmacht’s break-through to Moscow proves that surviving in the new military reality is

possible only for largest states. The first place there belongs to the Soviet Union. Besides having a very large territory it also had the advantage of the preventive location of a large part of military-industrial capacities at a necessary distance from its borders [Mowrer, 1942: 24–25].

Expediting a victory

The allies were watching the strategic logistics of the USSR with growing interest during the entire war period as they believed it had a bearing on the balance of power on the Eurasian continent and the world as a whole. In the years of war, the USSR was changing its geographical image – in the years before the war it was deeply involved in European politics and was perceived in the West through its front facing Europe but now due to the rapid migration of important centers of Soviet defense industry to the East this setting significantly changed.

Observing the formation of a ‘median’ military-industrial basis of the Soviet Union in the depths of Eurasia, the well-known British geographer, the founder of geopolitics Halford J. Mackinder concluded his concept of ‘heartland’. Mackinder considered Hitler’s attack itself on the USSR in June 1941 as an attempt to intercept the Soviets’ efforts to redress the inopportune location of the defense industry and agricultural granaries that were connected to their inertial gravitation to long-inhabited regions of European Russia. In 1943, in its program article, the British strategist concluded that the continued struggle against the aggressor makes the emergent Russian heartland, which has a giant and varied resource potential, an opportunity for the USSR to achieve complete self-sufficiency. This potential comprising primarily deposits of mineral resources is strategically conveniently located all over the country’s territory. Mackinder believed that further strengthening of the USSR’s strategic might will be inevitably tied to the fastest achievement of complete correspondence between the existing natural-geographical premises of its strength of having the central position on the Eurasian continent

and a new model of distribution of productive forces that comprised their decisive shift to the East. Mackinder saw vestiges of this trend in fast growth of the heavy industry in the south Urals (in the very center of the “central region”), development of coal in the Kuznetsk basin, the establishment of eastern bases for extraction of manganese and oil, expansion of agricultural areas in Siberia. These achievements that the USSR demonstrated under severe war conditions allowed Mackinder to envisage it “becoming the greatest land power in the world if it finishes the war with Germany as a winner. Moreover, it will be a superpower with a strategically strongest defensive position. Heartland is the greatest natural fortress on Earth. For the first time in its history, it is equipped with a garrison, which is sufficient in numbers and quality” [Mackinder, 1943: 600–601].

A similar evaluation of the changes in the spatial structure of the Soviet military-industrial clout was presented at the end of the war by an illustrious American expert Robert Strausz-Hupé. Looking at the future balance of forces in the world through the lens of distribution of principal centers of coal-metal (and correspondingly, machine-building and military) industries, Strausz-Hupé pointed out that in the war years the Soviet Union demonstrated surprising energy in the location of its arsenal in the East of the country and set up on the basis of an earlier Urals-Kuznetsk project a new ‘vast autonomous industrial system in the Russian Asia’ that is capable to exert influence on the power balance in the world. This system, according to the expert, promises to be other than an artificial ‘greenhouse’ product but a premise for further ‘phenomenal expansion’ [Strausz-Hupé, 1945: 130, 131–132].

A more reserved and skeptical view of the economic and power potential of the Russian ‘heartland’ was given by a leading figure in the American geopolitics Nicolas J. Spykman. He did not deny the USSR’s success in the development of its Eastern regions (first of all, the promising the military-industrial axis Sverdlovsk – Novosibirsk) and subordinating

their potential to the needs of defense but expressed doubt that this would lead to any cardinal shift in the ratios of resources and productivity between the regions of the USSR. He believed that without extraordinary war circumstances the severe natural conditions of Eurasia would strongly impede transferring most industries and granaries of the USSR to the East, particularly to Siberia. One cannot expect a great effect from moving principal nodes of transport communications to the center of Eurasia as their importance would, according to Spykman, diminish due to the fact that bordering on Siberia territories of the USSR (Soviet Central Asia) and adjacent Asian countries (Afghanistan, Xinjiang, Mongolia) would remain territories poorly developed in terms of transportation. The American analyst believed that this would constrain the USSR from spreading out of the Eurasian center its influence on the neighboring Asian countries and thus challenge the western countries [Spykman, 1944: 39–40]. Spykman unerringly nailed down those factors that restrained ‘the eastern shift’ that later were qualified not only in terms of severe natural conditions but as a conflict of economic interests – ambitions of sectoral ministries)people’s commissariats) of the USSR ‘to maximize in the short-term’ costs on account of older developed regions of the European part of the USSR and the wish of the upper management to achieve a more even and rational (from the point of view of proximity to the sources of resources and energy) location of new manufacturing plants. However, Spykman’s forecast regarding geopolitical consequences of the military displacement of the industry to the East has turned out inaccurate in general and regarding the war experience and its impact of the post-war programs of expansion in Siberia as well as the influence of the Soviet experience on the neighboring Asian countries (the best illustration is the Chinese revolution of 1949). Essentially, Spykman’s position concerned not as much the problem of evaluating the military potential of the Eastern regions of the USSR in the context of battling Germany as the prospects of post-war development when the Soviet Union,

having strengthened its geopolitical position in Asia, was not an ally but a rival of the USA.

During the final stage of the war, the strategic value for the allies of the military-industrial potential built in the Urals and Siberia was determined by a number of factors. The creation of a 'median' military-industrial basis of the USSR in the East marked its growing influence in the bordering countries of Asia and also turned into an objective factor that tethered the forces of Japan in the Pacific theatre of operations. Already in 1942, the USA attempted to involve the Soviet Union in their war efforts against Japan. The allies' press spread rumors about Japan's intention to redirect its aggression from 'southwards' to the Soviet seaside and laid the grounds for urging the USSR to open a new front against Japan [See.: Steiger, 1942]. The president of the USA F.D. Roosevelt sent a telegram to I. V. Stalin in June 1942 suggesting to strengthen the strategic military cooperation between the USSR and the USA on the pretext of a growing threat to the USSR from Japan. It was proposed to set up a ferry air route from Alaska to lake Baikal. This would involve sending a US military mission to the USSR to study opportunities to install necessary infrastructure in East Siberia трассы [Outgoing Messages, 1942]. Obviously, this was a veiled attempt to provoke the USSR to break its neutrality pact with Japan and use the USSR's need in American fighter planes in order to involve it prematurely in a war in the Far East. The Americans wanted an opportunity to use Soviet airfields in East Siberia and in the Far East for shuttle bombing missions to Japan and maintaining air bridges with western China. Roosevelt's plan was implemented partially: the air bridge Alaska – Siberia (ALSIB) was ready in August 1942 but the Soviet Union insisted that missions from Noma at Alaska to Krasnoyarsk were manned exclusively by Soviet pilots. Supplying airfields and other ground services along the route required a complex logistics operation – arranging regular shipment of military goods and aircraft fuel by Soviet vessels (most of them were American steamships and tankers handed

over and registered as Soviet) from the USA across the strait of Bering to Ambarchik (the mouth of the Kolyma river) and Tiksi (the mouth of the Lena River). From the day it opened until June 1945, the ALSIB route delivered to the USSR 7925 aircraft out of the total 14203 contributed during the war years by lend-lease [Jones, 1969: 211, 212–213].

The urgent character of joint operations of the USSR and the allies in the Far East reached a high point at the end of 1943 after the Teheran conference passed the resolution for the Soviet Union to join the war effort against Japan after concluding fighting in Europe. In the view of American military experts, having an 'axis' military-industrial base in the Urals-Siberian region was a substantial factor in establishing effective cooperation within the coalition to defeat Japan. An American expert Richard Logan pointed out that the military-industrial capacities both evacuated and built anew in Siberia, in the very center of the Eurasian continent, produced another quality of the industrial development in the East of the USSR. Before the war, industrial enterprises that appeared there were capable to meet the demands of 'local markets' to reduce extra shipment. During the war, in the East of the USSR appeared large plants capable to effectively supply with its output major military campaigns not only against Germany in the West but also against Japan in the East [Logan, 1945: 118]. The American allies paid most attention to the expert appraisal of the state of transportation logistical infrastructure of Siberia and the Far East, which served the preparation and deployment of one and a half million strong force of Soviet troops against Japan in August 1945 as the USA supplied over 860 thousand tons of dry cargo and 206 thousand tons of liquids (mostly fuel) [Deane, 1947: 104].

At the end of the war, the business community and many politicians of the USA took an interest in the regions of Urals and Siberia as they considered the growing need for advanced technological products there as an opportunity for further military-industrial cooperation with the USSR and as a big

potential market for the American industry. The USA strove to raise its global economic profile in the post-war world and reckoned to use the deepened cooperation between the allies as an effective tool of influence on the USSR towards its evolution in the direction favored by the West through loans and goods supplies. These considerations largely shaped the agendas of visits to major industrial centers of Soviet Asia by a number of public figures of the USA – vice-president Henry A. Wallace (May-June 1944) [СМ: Wallace, 1946], chairman of military production council of the USA Donald M. Nelson (August 1944), who visited Sverdlovsk, Magnitogorsk and Novosibirsk [Nelson, 1946: 420, 425], chairman of trade chamber of the USA Eric Johnston (August 1944), who with a large group of American journalists visited most significant industrial centers of the Urals and West Siberia [See: Zubkov, 1993].

The changing context of relations between the USSR and the Anglo-American allies demonstrates that the strategic logistics built in the Urals and Siberia at every phase of the Great patriotic war determined the strength of the Soviet defense and played a crucial role in raising the international weight of the USSR and strengthening geopolitical and pragmatic foundations of the anti-Hitler coalition.

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