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Методическое пособие
(STUDY GUIDE)

INTRODUCTION

"Is there still a country in the world,
Where they wouldn't know about grief and darkness."

The song, Our thanks to great Stalin, was written and composed in a time where the population of prison camps exceeded ten million and there was widespread fear. Anyone could be a suspect, as Khrushchev later stated: "Once Stalin said someone was guilty, one had to assume he was guilty and an enemy of the people." Prominent communists, skilled commanders, workers, and government officials were all at the risk of being tried and executed by the secret police, the NKVD, once under Genrikh Yagoda.

The NKVD implemented Soviet domestic policy on Stalin's orders, using violent methods to strengthen control over the civilians through fear and terror. Stalin's longing to consolidate his power led to many purges being conducted by the NKVD. After the Great Purge was authorized in 1936, the three corresponding trials took place and many were executed, although the validity of the evidence against the people on trial was questionable.

The NKVD even reached Spain, where they solidified their influence over the republican government by using Soviet military aid. This influence enabled them to set up numerous secret prisons around the capital, where enemies of the NKVD were tortured and imprisoned during the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939. Spanish nationalists, diplomats, journalists and generals became victims of these brutal actions in these secret prisons. The Great Purge ended in 1938 after Stalin was satisfied, later he declared that the internal enemies had been removed.

In August 1939, the Gestapo, the official secret police of Nazi Germany, and the NKVD of the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact to coordinate the pacification of Poland. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the NKVD evacuated and killed political prisoners. During the Second World War, the NKVD Internal Troops units were deployed to secure the rear area. This included preventing the retreat of Soviet Union army divisions through Stalin's Order No. 270 and Order No. 227, which were issued in an attempt to revive the disorganized Soviet defense system. Although their original task was to ensure internal security, the NKVD divisions were sometimes also deployed on the front-lines and in numerous other missions.

At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union occupied Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Poland and East Germany. Although it won the conflict, the war had profound and devastating long-term consequences for the Soviet Union and the civilian population. It suffered great financial losses and the strain was catastrophic. The purges of countless people and hundreds of thousands sent to GULAG camps by the NKVD only stopped when the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was elected. Desperate attempts were made to legally "rehabilitate" the victims, but to no avail.

NKVD

a. History and structure

The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, which is the ministry of the Interior in the Soviet Union, abbreviated to NKVD, was founded shortly after the October Revolution in 1917. The NKVD would initially oversee matters such as border security, infrastructure, firefighting, and the maintenance of domestic peace keeping. Even though the NKVD is notorious for its role in political repression and carrying out the Great Purge, its reach is still limited in 1920 in comparison to the Soviet's secret police and intelligence agency, formerly established as the Che-ka and later reorganized as the Joint State Political Directorate(OGBU) is under the jurisdiction of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, which are the highest executive authorities of the Soviet Union.

Following Genrikh Yagoda's appointment as the new head of the People's Commissar for International Affairs in 1934, the NKVD would grow in strength, taking control of previous and child agencies like OGBU, whose functions were transferred to the NKVD in 1930, giving it immense power at this time. With this new power, the NKVD was integrated into an all-union security apparatus under Yagoda, who also assumed command of the regular police and all detention facilities, including the Gulag forced labor camps.

The NKVD fell under Stalin's direct command after Yagoda was appointed, and he carried out the political and economic purges that Stalin personally ordered, which led to a faster increase in the efforts to kill kulaks, or peasants who owned land. Under his direction, the GULAG system was greatly expanded, and prison labor turned into a significant resource for the Soviet economy's development. During the 1934–1935 period, over half a million people who were deemed undesirable and a "danger to state security" were arrested or deported into remote areas.

He was in charge of organizing the first Moscow Show Trial and investigating the assassination of Sergei Kirov, which commenced the Great Purge. At some point, the NKVD learned that Leon Trotsky and several other soviet politicians, including Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev, had formed a conspiratorial Opposition Bloc in 1932. In mid-1936, Stalin became increasingly disillusioned with Yagoda's performance as he was deemed not brutal enough. To Stalin's mind Yagoda's tactics for bringing Stalin's political opponents to justice were inadequate. Another reason why Stalin might not have trusted Yagoda was because he withheld to report the existence of the Bloc of Oppositions earlier. Stalin forwarded a telegram to the Politburo members on September 25, 1936. Nikolai Yezhov took his place one day later.

b. Yezhov Era

Yezhov supervised the fabrication of charges against the opposition leaders Kamenev, Zinoviev, and their allies in the Kirov murder case. Yezhov performed well in this assignment, which led to his further promotion and eventual appointment as

head of the NKVD. This appointment was not initially seen as a signal for a more aggressive purge, but Yezhov had no problem with the removal of party leadership or the execution of those who had been found guilty during the Moscow trials, often without a shred of legitimate evidence. Yagoda was the man Stalin needed to lead the NKVD and root out anyone who was seen as an internal or personal opponent of Stalin or Yezhov, as he appeared to be a loyal supporter of Stalin.

The Great Purge reached its climax during Yezhov's term of office. In several separate actions in 1937 and 1938, 1 million and 150 thousand people were put on trial by troikas; in two years alone, at least 1.3 million were arrested and 681,692 - almost 1000 people a day - were executed for 'crimes against the state'. Hundreds of thousands were mysteriously disposed of in Siberian labor camps, and the number of Gulags swelled by 685,201, almost tripling the number of prisoners in just two years. Malnutrition, exhaustion, and weather-related factors claimed the lives of at least 140,000 of these prisoners—and most likely many more.

The personnel of the defunct directorates like GUGB were transferred to the recently established People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB). Former directorate departments were elevated to directorates, given new names, and integrated into the NKVD's structure. All People's Commissariats were renamed ministries in March 1946. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) replaced the NKVD, while the NKGB was renamed as the Ministry of State Security (MGB).

Following Lavrenty Beria's arrest in 1953—who served as the head of the NKVD from 1938 to 1945—the MGB and MVD reunited. The USSR Committee for State Security (KGB) and the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) were established in 1954 after the police and security services were finally split apart.

c. Activities

When it first came into existence in 1917–1918, the NKVD was in charge of the local Soviets and anticipated the application of laws and proletariat–peasantry police. In short, all offices that were difficult to organize were subordinated to the NKVD. However, after Stalin had united all offices under the NKVD, it developed into a secret police force that exclusively protected the interests of the ruling class, which included almost the entire adult population of the USSR.

The NKVD's task was to defend Stalin's authority within the country against opponents from within. As the NKVD troops were much better armed than the regular army, they had better weapons than the border, interior and escort troops. All of the numerous GULAG concentration and labor camps were run by the NKVD. Many thousands of people were sent to these GULAG camps as part of Soviet internal policy towards those who were seen as "enemies of the people"; the NKVD, which had its own court system separate from the regular court, also executed hundreds of thousands of people.

To defend the Soviet state and its leaders from the nation's political adversaries, the NKVD subjugated the police in the 1930s. Mass repression campaigns and social disorder were sparked by this development. Mass repression campaigns were linked to dekulakization, an effort to dismantle organized class resistance in the villages. Property was seized by the NKVD, which also executed, imprisoned, and banished kulaks, anti-Soviet activists, and purportedly wealthy peasants. During this time the NKVD applied methods of mass repression against an increasing number of ethnic and national minorities as well as criminal elements.

Additionally, the Russian Soviet communist government used the NKVD as an instrument to murderously persecute and destroy various religious groups and ethnic minorities, including the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, Greek Catholics, Muslims, Jews, and other faiths.

The NKVD's interaction with the outside world was its final specialty: It used blackmail and terrorist tactics against groups that resisted the Soviet Union outside of the USSR. These strategies were employed to destroy Joseph Stalin's rivals and to plan assassinations of USSR opposition politicians abroad.

SOVIET UNION

a. History of USSR

Between 1922 and 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, abbreviated as USSR, was a transcontinental country that covered a huge portion of Eurasia. It was a model communist state that was officially a federal union containing fifteen national republics, but up until its final years, both its economy and government were extremely centralized. Communist Party of the Soviet Union headed the country by making the country a one-party state.

The USSR was set up after the October Revolution of 1917. The Bolsheviks, which are led by Vladimir Lenin, ended the Russian Provisional Government after the February Revolution and the demission of Tsar Nicholas II. That was also the end of the Russian Empire and establishment of a new government led by Lenin. Internal strife that persisted led to the brutal Russian Civil War. As the Bolsheviks conquered ground in the conflict, the RSFSR started to unite the seized territory into ostensibly separate nations. These states united to form the Soviet Union in December 1922. Joseph Stalin gained control in 1924 after Lenin's death. Stalin sparked an era of intense industrialization and forced collectivization that resulted in substantial economic growth, but he also played a part in the millions of deaths caused by the 1930–1933 scarcity. During this time, the Gulag's system of forced labor camps was also expanded. Stalin carried out the Great Purge in order to eliminate both his real and imagined rivals. Germany invaded the Soviet Union with the start of World War II. The bulk of Allied forces' casualties were attributable to the combined civilian and military casualty count of the Soviet Union, which is believed to be over 20 million people. Following World War II, the Red Army's captured land gave rise to a number of Soviet satellite governments. The Soviet Union saw tremendous economic growth

in the years following World War II and accomplished several "firsts" in the race for space travel in the 1960s.

The Soviet Union's Eastern Bloc and the United States' Western Bloc faced off at the start of the Cold War. The former grouping unified under the Warsaw Pact in 1955, while the latter grouping joined NATO in 1949. Nikita Khrushchev led the de-Stalinization movement that took place after Stalin's death in 1953. With the first man-made satellite, the first space mission, and the first probe to set foot on a different planet (Venus), the Soviets jumped out to an early lead in the Space Race.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the final Soviet leader, attempted to reform the nation in the middle of the 1980s by implementing the glasnost and perestroika policies. As the Cold War was coming to an end in 1989, a number of Warsaw Pact nations toppled their Marxist–Leninist regimes, sparking a surge in separatist and nationalist movements throughout the Soviet Union. The majority of voters in the 1991 national referendum, which Gorbachev called—and which was boycotted by the Soviet republics of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova—voted to keep the nation intact as a reformed federation. Hardline Communist Party members attempted a coup d'état against Gorbachev in August 1991; however, Boris Yeltsin successfully calmed the disturbance, leading to the Communist Party's subsequent ban. All of the other republics emerged from the dissolution of the USSR as fully sovereign post-Soviet entities, whereas the Russian Federation became the state that succeeded the Soviet Union.

b. Stalin Era (1930's)

Surprisingly, Stalin, a Georgian, used "Great Russian" nationalism to bolster the Soviet government. He held the Russians up as the older brother for the non-Slavs to follow throughout the 1930s and 1940s, promoting the Russian language, select Russian national and cultural heroes, and specific aspects of Russian history. Primarily, industrialization emerged in Russia. However, there was a lot of opposition to collectivizing in rural areas. Stalin's forced collectivization caused tremendous suffering, especially for Ukraine. There, he faced fierce opposition, for which he never felt sorry for the Ukrainians. Following that, his policies caused massive hunger in that country, particularly in 1932–1933, when millions of people may have perished.

Under Stalin, Russian industry grew quickly, followed by Ukrainian industry. In the 1930s, the Caucasus and Central Asia started to become industrialized. Russians, with Ukrainian assistance, were in charge of the factories. Both the labor force and the growing technical elites were primarily Russian. The late 1920s saw a shift in Stalin's nationality policy, which had previously supported native cadres and cultures. Stalin appears to have changed his nationality policy after realizing that non-Russians were growing dangerously self-assured and forceful. He concluded that a Russian elite that had been Sovietized would be a more useful tool for modernization.

Because they were perceived as imperialists determined to Russify the locals, Russians would suffer grave long-term consequences as a result of their program. Russian and Ukrainian laborers were typically drawn to new industries, changing the U.S.S.R.'s demographic makeup. Russians migrated throughout the union, and by 1991, 25 million of them—11 million of them in Ukraine—were living outside of the Russian republic. More than half of Kazakhstan's population in 1991 was comprised of Russians and Ukrainians. At the time the union broke up in 1991, there were about half as many Russians living in the capital cities of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, respectively, and Tashkent, Russia.

Much of Ukraine was conquered as a result of the German invasion in June 1941. The German army, the Wehrmacht, was warmly welcomed by many Ukrainians. This only made Stalin's already bitter emotions toward the Ukrainians stronger.

But under Stalin's reign of terror and purges, the Russian people suffered just as much as everybody else. Stalin demolished numerous exquisite examples of Russian architecture and damaged Russian cultural sites. Some of the best cathedrals in Moscow were destroyed because of him directly. Stalin seemed to be attempting to erase Russia's past and create a new Russia in his own image.

The victory over Germany sparked a wave of Russian patriotism. Under the U.S.S.R., Russia had grown into a major force and was one of the two global superpowers by the 1970s. Stalin tightened his hold on his sphere of influence in eastern and southeast Europe with the start of the Cold War in the 1940s. Russian was made the primary foreign language, and Russian business practices were imitated. The presence of Russian and other communist officials in ministries had this effect. The area became entangled in the Russian web of accords. Russian factories benefited most from war reparations.

The earliest deportations of non-Russian minorities to Siberia and Central Asia started in the 1920s, a sign that the Bolsheviks were always conscious of the minority populations living on its borders. In addition, there were efforts against non-Russians and Jews throughout the late Stalin era. Those writers and artists who ventured to assert that Western culture and writers from the past had taught them something were ridiculed. Everything worth inventing was said to have been created by a Russian after Russian nationalism gained hold.

KEY TERMS

a. Great Purge

The Great Purge was a series of brutal actions that took place from 1936 to 1938 in which more than a million people died, instigated by Stalin. Although his motives in doing so have been much debated by historians, it has gone down in history as a campaign led by Stalin to consolidate his power over his party, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and his region. It is also said that Stalin's original aim was to eliminate all officials who remembered Trotsky as a great revolutionary and clear away the potential influence of his political rivals.

After Lenin's death in 1924, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union desperately searched for a new political figure to succeed Lenin. Various protagonists emerged in the struggle to become his successor: alongside Stalin was Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Alexei Rykov, and Mikhail Tomsky. The General Secretary of the party, Joseph Stalin, prevailed over his political opponents and finally took control of the ruling party of the Soviet Union in 1928. Even though he was now the supreme leader of the party, according to some historical figures he was still far from being a dictator. His leadership was initially accepted by his people and he introduced policies such as "socialism in one country" to strengthen socialism in the country rather than socialism globally, which was eventually adopted as Soviet state policy.

After the implementation of the first five-year plan in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which began in 1928 under Stalin's orders, the country began to industrialize rapidly and it was based on policies such as the collectivization of agriculture. This was the point at which hope began to fade, as this vision was too grand and these unrealistic goals would not be achieved for decades to come. His speeches and articles reflected his utopian vision of the Soviet Union as a new Soviet man that would prevail among all citizens of the Soviet Union, regardless of the country's cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity, leading to a suppression of native sentiment among ethnic minorities. Some of Stalin's rivals had by this time begun to call for his removal, prompting Stalin to wonder whether both the dissatisfied and the moderates were plotting to replace him with the young and very popular Sergei Kirov, who was currently fourth in the Soviet hierarchy.

Stalin made sure that his loyal allies ran the various state institutions, which proves that he had been planning a purge for some time. So it finally happened, on the first of December 1934, Sergei Kirov was shot dead on the streets of Leningrad by Leonid Nikolayev which was the perfect excuse for Stalin to initiate the Great Purge. There is still a historical consensus that Stalin was the one who orchestrated the assassination, or at least there was enough evidence to come to such a conclusion. The murderers of Sergei Kirov were found, Nikolayev was tried together with 13 other suspected accomplices and executed shortly afterwards. Throughout the process of vindication, many death lists were signed by Vyacheslav Molotov and Lazar Kaganovich to eliminate any group of people who undermined Stalin and the Soviet nation. In this case, 103 other people who, as far as can be proved, had nothing to do with the assassination were also shot dead.

Stalin's reaction to the 1934 assassination of Sergei Kirov, the Bolshevik leader of Leningrad, marked a turning point in Yezhov's career. Stalin assigned Yezhov to carry out the task because he intended to use the murder as a pretext for additional purges. There are reports that Stalin was informed that one of the people detained in the expanded investigation had Trotsky's correspondences among his belongings. Stalin therefore emphasized the significance of the inquiry and gave Nikolai Yezhov the order to take up the case and determine whether Trotsky was involved.

During their interrogation in July 1936, Zinoviev and Kamenev denied being a part of any conspiracy headed by Trotsky. Three weeks later, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and 14

other members of the "Trotskyite-Kamenevite-Zinovievite-Leftist-Counter-Revolutionary Bloc", appeared before their judges. They were accused of plotting to murder Stalin acting on Trotsky's orders. On the understanding that they would be spared their lives as well as the lives of their families and supporters, Zinoviev and Kamenev agreed to confess. Kamenev acknowledged that he had fought Stalin personally as well as the party and government for ten years. It was clear that both men would be executed from the beginning of the trial.

Throughout the trial, the court hinted at filing charges against numerous individuals, including Karl Radek and Bukharin Tomsy. Stalin lost faith in Yagoda and his secret police since it was evident that some of the alleged conspirators couldn't be apprehended. The purge was proceeding at an ever-increasing pace following his replacement by Nikolai Yezhov.

The trial that followed took place in January 1937. It was alleged that Radek, Pyatakov, and fifteen other people were Trotskyites. The records show that, despite the Bristol Hotel in Copenhagen having burned down prior to World War I, the accused would have met Trotsky agents there. In the end, Pyatakov and the other twelve defendants were shot to death. Radek was among those who were sentenced to labor camps, where they were eventually killed. As he exposed others, such as Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, Alexei Rykov, and Nikolai Bukharin, only Radek was spared, paving the way for the Trial of the Twenty-One and the Trial of the Military. Yagoda, the former head of the secret police, was arrested after it was revealed that he was a thief, a swindler, and a spy for the tsar. This would later demonstrate that military personnel would also be victims of this purge, in addition to the party and the government.

During the second show trial, one of the Red Army's most accomplished commanders, General Mikhail Tukhachevsky, was already mentioned. He was put on trial in secret in June 1937 before a military tribunal in the Tukhachevsky Affair, along with other Red Army generals.

It is regarded as one of the crucial trials of the Great Purge and consisted of the same type of defendant frame-up. On June 11 and 12, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, along with senior military officers Iona Yakir, Ieronim Uborevich, Robert Eideman, August Kork, Vitovt Putna, Boris Feldman, and Vitaly Primakov, were found guilty of anti-Communist conspiracy and given the death penalty. Their execution took place on the same night following the Supreme Court of the USSR's decision. The Red Army underwent a massive purge as an outcome of this trial.

All the loose ends from the previous trials were tied together in the third show trial, which took place in March 1938 and was dubbed The Trial of the Twenty-One. Several offenses were raised against Nikolai Bukharin, Genrikh Yagoda, Mikhail Alexandrovich Chernov, Alexei Rykov, and seventeen other people. Yagoda was accused of poisoning Soviet writer Maxim Gorky, while Bukharin was accused of plotting Lenin's murder. The former commissar of agriculture, Chernov, came under fire for allegedly making mistakes during collectivisation. All of the men—three not included—were given death sentences and put to death. The remaining three were

given harsh labor sentences in the Gulag, where they were all killed by NKVD agents.

The Great Purge was a terrible period in Soviet history. It left scars on both the national and international populace. More than a million people lost their lives during the purges, which also had a revolutionary impact on administrative and social change. It also resulted in a reduction in agricultural productivity and a shortage of skilled labor. Even now, the consequences are still being felt.

b. Operations over the world

During 1930, the NKVD used its foreign influence to set up spy networks abroad in almost every major Western nation, with seasoned NKVD officers at the helm. These espionage networks were used to obtain information and, in the end, to help organize the assassinations of people thought to be Stalin's opponents. On 20 August 1940, Trotsky, a personal political enemy of Stalin, was attacked in his study in Mexico City by Spanish-born NKVD agent Ramón Mercader.

Apart from its spying activities, the NKVD was also involved in creating chaos and instability in other countries. This involved carrying out sabotage operations to disrupt military operations, communication networks, and enemy infrastructure. To achieve its objectives, the NKVD also cooperated with communist and leftist organizations throughout the world.

The NKVD kept tight relations with both friendly and adversarial intelligence services. Through this partnership, the NKVD was able to share resources, knowledge, and experience and grow its operations internationally. In order to accomplish common goals, the NKVD frequently collaborated with foreign intelligence services during covert operations.

During the Spanish Civil War, the NKVD worked with the Spanish Republicans to set up espionage networks and multiple secret prisons in order to destroy any potential enemies the NKVD may have abroad.

In conclusion, the NKVD needed to stabilize collective security even if it meant to cooperate with such organizations as the German Gestapo because its foreign operations were an essential part of Soviet security and foreign policy.

c. Spanish Civil War

Even though General Secretary Joseph Stalin had signed the Non-Intervention Agreement, which several nations adhered to in order to prevent any potential escalation or possible expansion of the war to other states, NKVD-led operations and significant Soviet involvement were carried out during the Spanish Civil War.

The Soviet Union broke the League of Nations embargo by providing material support to the Republican forces and becoming their exclusive source of significant weaponry. The number of aircraft, tanks, and artillery pieces that the USSR allegedly

gave the Republicans ranges from 634 to 806, and the number of artillery pieces from 331 to 362. Stalin also established Section X of the Soviet Union military, also known as Operation X, to supervise the arms transfer operation and plan the Soviet intervention on behalf of the Spanish Republicans.

The NKVD was a key player inside the Republican rearguard as well. In order to maintain considerable control over the Republican government, NKVD agents acted in conjunction with the Communist Party of Spain. As a result, communist leaders conducted operations that included the assassinations of numerous anti-Stalinist Communist politicians and NKVD opponents.

The Republic used the official Bank of Spain gold reserves to pay for the Soviet weapons, and 176 tons of gold were transported to the capital via France. 510 tons were shipped straight to Moscow.

ç. Events during the World War II

The Soviet Union played a major role in what happened during World War II. The Soviets attempted to establish diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany following the Munich Agreement. Following the Munich Agreement, which handed Nazi Germany control over portions of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union redirected its foreign policy toward a reconciliation with Germany as a result of the appeasement tactics of the Western democracies. Stalin agreed to Hitler's suggestion to form a non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Germany. It was signed on August 23, 1939, and it contained a covert protocol that partitioned Eastern Europe in anticipation of future "territorial and political rearrangements" between these nations.

According to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact the Eastern part of Poland had to belong to the Soviets. Subsequently, on the first of September 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland from the West, and three weeks after the Soviets came marching in from the East. Together these two nations carved up what was known as the Second Polish Republic.

Operation Barbarossa, Germany's surprise attack on the Soviet Union, began in June 1941. The biggest and bloodiest conflict in human history began with this invasion. Despite suffering significant casualties, the Soviet Red Army held their ground against the Nazi Wehrmacht.

Stalin believed that Germany would wait to attack the Soviet Union until after defeating Britain. Therefore, political prisoners were a common sight in Lviv's prisons. Despite having a mandate to evacuate the prisoners, the NKVD was in danger of being overtaken by the Nazis during this process. Altogether, the NKVD executed roughly 4000 political prisoners in total.

Although the interior ministry forces of the NKVD were intended for rear area security, there were times in history when the forces of the NKVD would be used to issue desertions at the front. Stalin's Order No. 270 and Order No. 227 decrees of 1941 and 1942 that aimed to increase the efficiency and morale of the Red Army command staff, which was low due to Stalin's purges, stated that anyone who tried to

give up rather than fight on had to be shot on the spot, and their families subjected to arrest.

Using intelligence from espionage networks, the NKVD conducted multiple sabotage missions in enemy-held territories. These sabotage missions included mass murder, arson, and other similar crimes committed in Germany, Ukraine, and Belarus.

Mass arrests, deportations, and executions were carried out by the NKVD. Targets included individuals who had collaborated with Germany as well as those involved in non-communist resistance movements attempting to break away from the Soviet Union, such as the Polish Home Army and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.

d. Circumstances after the war

After Stalin died in March 1953, Nikita Khrushchev became his successor as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The new Soviet leader Khrushchev stopped the purges of the NKVD and began reforms to de-Stalinize the country.

Since Stalin's death, de-Stalinization had been taking place in secret; Khrushchev's speech on Stalin entitled "On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences" was the turning point. When he gave a speech at a closed session of the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on 25 February 1956, in which he described some of Stalin's crimes and the "conditions of insecurity, fear, and even despair" he had created, de-Stalinization officially began. Khrushchev criticized Stalin's autocratic rule and his personality cult as incompatible with communist and party doctrine, stunning his audience.

Most of the prisoners were released after the subsequent rehabilitation proceedings. On their return, the former political prisoners often encountered deep-seated hostility, which made their reintegration into society more difficult. A CPSU resolution of 25 October 1956 stated that it was "inexpedient" to allow the Gulag labor system to continue. On January 25, 1960, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) ordered No. 020 to close the Gulag institution. From the 1950s through the 1980s, attempts were made to rehabilitate the victims; however, many of them declined to apply for rehabilitation for a variety of reasons.

Khrushchev made efforts to mitigate the harshness of the Gulag labor system for survivors by allowing letters to be sent home to relatives and allowing relatives to send clothing to prisoners, which Stalin had forbidden.