

Operation Barbarossa

(1941–2024)

'Operation Barbarossa' (German 'Unternehmen Barbarossa') was the code name for the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Axis powers. On Sunday, June 22, 1941, German aircraft attacked Soviet airfields early in the morning without a declaration of war, destroying most of them in the initial advance. An army of three million men, consisting of 150 German divisions and 37 divisions of Italians, Romanians, Hungarians and Finns, was set in motion. It was the largest land invasion in history and claimed a large number of victims.

The German armed forces were divided into three army groups:

- Army Group North, whose main task was to secure the Russian ports in the Baltic Sea and establish a land connection with Finland;
- Army Group Center, whose main objective was to destroy the core of the Russian Red Army and, in the event of a successful advance, to capture Moscow, the nerve and communications center of Russia;
- Army Group South, whose main task was to penetrate the Caucasian oil fields in order to secure the complete autonomy of German industry.

By the end of September 1941, when the resistance became more organized and effective, the Soviet Union suffered extremely high losses. Nevertheless, the attack initially came to a standstill in the central part of the front, while the invasion continued in the south and only stopped at the eastern borders of the Ukraine. In the fall of 1941, Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), the Austrian-born Nazi leader and German Chancellor, launched a new offensive after a brief lull that lasted until December. German and Finnish troops surrounded Leningrad, and in the central part of the front the Germans could already see Moscow. They made no progress, both because of the ever-increasing resistance and because of the winter, to which they were not accustomed. The cost was high, they lost a quarter of their army and were unable to replace these losses, while the Soviet Union replaced their losses at a ratio of one to five. At the beginning of December 1941, when Operation Barbarossa was supposed to be over, a major counter-offensive was launched in Moscow, which was already half empty, and lasted until spring 1942. During the counter-offensive, the German units were pushed back by 150 to 200 kilometers in some places.

The operation, named after Frederick Barbarossa, Ital. Red Beard (1122–1190), Holy Roman Emperor and crusader of the 12th century, who drowned in the river Saleph near the Silifke Castle (present-day Turkey) in Asia Minor during the Third Crusade, realized the ideological goals of National Socialist Germany to eradicate communism and conquer the western Soviet Union in order to repopulate it with Germans. The German General Plan East envisaged using part of the indigenous population as forced labor for the Axis war effort while acquiring the oil reserves of the Caucasus and the agricultural resources of various Soviet territories, including Ukraine and Belarus. Their ultimate goal was the creation of more so-called Lebensraum for Germany and the eventual extermination of the indigenous Slavic peoples through mass deportation to Siberia, Germanization, enslavement and genocide.

This war claimed around 62 million lives, 50 million on the anti-occupation side (14 million soldiers and 36 million civilians) and 12 million on the side of the Axis powers (8 million soldiers and 4 million civilians), 35 million wounded and a further 3 million missing. 45 million people were imprisoned, 20 million children were left without parents, and there were also 10 million forced laborers. For the first time in the history of modern warfare, more civilians died than soldiers – about 40 million who died from various diseases, starvation, bombings and massacres, genocides and other war crimes, especially in the conquered and occupied territories, because most people died as a result of Nazi crimes.

With around 26 million people, the Soviet Union suffered by far the most victims. It is estimated that between 1.1 and 1.5 million soldiers and 40,000 civilians died on the side of the Soviet Union in the Battle of Stalingrad alone (1942-1943). It was the bloodiest and worst battle of the entire Second World War and probably of the entire history of mankind. Today it is considered the turning point of the Second World War and the Soviet Union alone suffered more casualties than the USA and Great Britain in the entire war combined.

In April 1945, the Soviet Red Army marched into Berlin, which was one of the last major military operations in Europe during the Second World War. The Germans surrendered on May 2, 1945, but fighting continued in some parts of the city until the end of the war in Europe on May 8 (May 9 in the Soviet Union), as some German units continued to fight Allied troops to surrender not to the Soviets but to the Western Allies.

A year later, Winston Churchill (1874-1965) spoke his "famous" words in a speech on March 5, 1946 at Westminster College in Fulton (Missouri, USA): "From Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic, an 'iron curtain' has descended across the continent." These words heralded the beginning of the Cold War and shaped the political landscape for the next 50 years. The then British Prime Minister and American President Harry S. Truman (1884-1972) "articulated" the threat that the West and communism posed to peace and stability in the post-war world. Invoking the spirit of the Atlantic Charter, Churchill called for strengthening Anglo-American relations and making the United Nations a world peace organization that would succeed where its predecessor, the League of Nations, had failed. Thus began the Cold War.

But the West recognized that the Soviet Union was strong and that it would be difficult to fight it in the future. So the military bloc of Western countries – NATO – was founded in 1949. The Soviet Union also tried to join in 1954 (the Russian Federation in 2001), but was quickly told that "you are not welcome here" and that they would not accept anyone against whom they had allied themselves. The Warsaw Pact was thus founded on May 14, 1955.

But it is one thing to found a bloc, another to find experienced leaders for it. And of course, those who had already fought against the Soviet Union were best suited to form and lead the military bloc that was created as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. It was not for nothing that the Allies hid numerous Nazi military commanders of various ranks, profiles and positions who had "defected" to America.

In June 1946, the US post-war government established a special department of the CIA in occupied Germany, the Gehlen Organization or "Gehlen Org" (often referred to as "The Org"), composed of former members of the 12th Department of the German General Staff. The department dealt exclusively with the "Russian question". Later it became part of the NATO structure and on its basis the German intelligence service BND (the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* was founded in 1956 during the Cold War by the CIA as a kind of subsidiary, but officially as the foreign intelligence service of the Federal Republic of Germany, which joined NATO on May 6, 1955).

The "Gehlen Org" department was named in honor of its head, Reinhard Gehlen (1902-1979), a German general and head of intelligence on the Eastern Front during the Second World War. He also headed the 12th Department of the Wehrmacht, which dealt with Eastern European countries. At the end of the Third Reich, in May 1945, he surrendered together with the entire headquarters to the Americans and offered them his experience and already established spies in the fight against the communist Soviet Union and also handed over to them all the information about it – agent networks, military intelligence, maps, personal data and many other things. The Americans appreciated this and a few months later Gehlen met with representatives of the American General Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower (1890-1969), who proposed the creation of a special department of the CIA. Gehlen, who had served in the Weimar Republic and in Nazi Germany, agreed on the condition that he would deploy his staff there: 350 former SS officers (the *Schutzstaffel* was the paramilitary organization of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* – NSDAP)), including those who had escaped punishment for war crimes. Five years later, around 4,000 former German "Abwehr" and SS officers were working in this department. During the Cold War, the Gehlen Organization worked actively with the CIA to spy on the

Warsaw Pact and the NATO-allied Federal Republic of Germany.

Alois Brunner (1912–2001 or 2010), an Austrian officer and SS Hauptsturmführer, was also part of this team. Brunner played an important role in carrying out the Holocaust by rounding up and deporting Jews in occupied Austria, Greece, Macedonia, France and Slovakia. As the right-hand man of the architect of the “Final Solution” (die *Endlösung*) Adolf Eichmann, he was responsible for the deaths of 130,000 European Jews from Austria, Greece, France and Slovakia in ghettos and concentration camps in Eastern Europe. At the beginning of the war, he oversaw the deportation of 47,000 Austrian Jews to concentration camps. In Greece, 43,000 Jews were deported in the two months he was stationed in Thessaloniki. From June 1943 to August 1944, as commander of the Drancy internment camp near Paris, he sent 24,000 men, women and children to the gas chambers. His final mission was to exterminate the Jewish community in Slovakia.

Adolf Heusinger (1897–1982), a German officer whose career spanned the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, Nazi Germany, West Germany and NATO, became Chairman of the NATO Military Committee. From 1938 to 1944, he served as Chief of Operations in the General Staff of the High Command of the German Army in the Wehrmacht and was involved in the planning of Operation Barbarossa, among other things. On his orders, the SS shot 6,700 people in the Ukrainian town of Krukowka on the night of March 1 to 2, 1943. He was also involved in drawing up the plans for the attack on Poland and the Soviet Union. In 1944, after the resignation of Chief of the General Staff Kurt Zeitzler (1895–1963), he was appointed acting Chief of the General Staff for two weeks. In the same year, he was accused of being involved in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler, but was released for lack of evidence. After the capitulation, he surrendered to the Americans. In West Germany, he became a general and served as commander of the West German army from 1957 to 1961 and as chairman of the NATO Military Committee from 1961 to 1964.



Adolf Heusinger: Before...



....after

Heusinger succeeded his colleague in NATO, who was also “only a witness” at Nuremberg and surrendered to the Americans in time: General Hans Speidl (1897-1984), a German officer who served successively in the armies of the German Empire, Nazi Germany and West Germany and was commander of NATO's Land Forces Central Europe (COMLANDCENT) from 1957 to 1963. A former member of Hitler's staff who was also involved in drawing up the plan for Operation Barbarossa, he became a member of the anti-Hitler coalition at the end of the war until he defected to the Americans. As the first general of the Armed Forces of West Germany (Bundeswehr), he played a key role in the rearmament of the Bundeswehr during the Cold War as well as in its integration into NATO and the international negotiations on European and Western defense cooperation in the 1950s. From 1964, he was President of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

In the Third Reich, the “propaganda ministry” was one of the most notorious. NATO therefore decided to set up a similar structure based on this ministry, namely the “Psychological Warfare Department”. Former subordinates of Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945), one of Hitler's most loyal, closest and bloodthirstiest collaborators, were recruited from the aforementioned ministry. Goebbels' close friend Eberhard Taubert (1907–1976), a member of the NSDAP since its foundation, was appointed chief advisor to the department. After the war, he managed to escape to South America, from where he returned a few years later with the help of the German secret service BND and was recruited for NATO. The “Psychological

Warfare Department" is still active today.

The NATO Air Force was led by Gerhard Barkhorn (1919–1983), a German aviator and commander of the Luftwaffe during the Second World War. With 301 victories in aerial combat, he was the second most successful fighter pilot of all time. He surrendered to the Americans in April 1945 and what followed was a "real" career that was also possible for those living in the United States of America (USA) or Canada who openly admitted to having participated in German criminal operations or boasted of having served on the Eastern fronts. They became the founders of a military alliance called NATO.

The Soviet general **Georgi Konstantinovich Zhukov** (1896–1974), politician, marshal and four-time hero of the Soviet Union, who defended Moscow in 1941, took part in the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942, Kursk in 1943, the Belorussian summer offensive in 1944 and the Battle of Berlin, is considered one of the best commanders and strategists of the Second World War. After the capture of Berlin and the raising of the Soviet or proletarian flag on the *Reichstag* on May 2, 1945, Zhukov declared, while informing the world of Hitler's suicide: **"We have liberated Europe from fascism, but they will never forgive us for it."**

Just as the fight against communism was a priority for the Nazi-led NATO, the USA also implemented this doctrine militarily. The Soviet Union was too competitive in terms of weapons technology, so peace prevailed in Europe from 1950 to 1990, the war was "only" cold. But elsewhere it was hot, in Korea (1950-1953), Vietnam (1955-1975), Laos (1959-1975) and Cambodia (1967-1975). The conflicts in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are referred to as the Vietnam War or American War in Vietnam and are considered the second Indochina War (after the French term Indochina). In all three countries, the USA fought with allies and local supporters against communism, which was establishing itself as an alternative to the (until then) ruling powers. The USA supported the latter, while the Soviet Union and China supported the new social movements. The First Indochina War with the Vietnam War as a prelude (1945-1946) began in 1946 as the French War in Vietnam and ended with the French defeat in 1954, as did the Second Indochina War as the American War in Vietnam, which began in 1955 and ended in 1975 with the withdrawal of the USA and its allies, many deaths and destroyed infrastructures – the consequences of which are still visible today.

When the Soviet Union invaded the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in 1979 at the invitation of the ruling Afghan Communist Party to support the fight against the Mujahideen, i.e. the Taliban, the insurgents received help in the form of men, equipment and money from the United States and Pakistan, but also from other countries. A 10-year conflict followed, from which the Soviet Union was forced to withdraw in 1989, partly due to internal changes and the policy of reconciliation and peace, and soon afterwards disbanded; communist rule in Afghanistan continued for another two years.

In October 2001, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, for which the Taliban were blamed, the United States invaded Afghanistan in cooperation with Great Britain, Australia and the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. This was the beginning of a war on terror that expanded with the invasion of Iraq (2003), Libya (2011) and Syria (2011). The aim was to overthrow the Taliban-led Islamic Emirate and establish the US-led Islamic Republic three years later. The Taliban and their allies were driven out of the main population centers until the Taliban overthrew the Islamic Republic in a 2021 offensive and re-established the Islamic Emirate. The USA fled Afghanistan, leaving behind not only the dead and the destruction, but also all the weapons stationed there. It was the longest war in US military history, surpassing the Vietnam War by about six months. Both lasted 20 years.

In 1999, for the first time in history, the US bombed Yugoslavia without a UN mandate, for 2 months, 2 weeks and 3 days, i.e. 79 days. They also tested the destructive effects of depleted uranium without caring about the consequences – besides the wounded and dead, there was also a significant increase in cancer cases in the region – in order to establish the largest and easternmost NATO military base in Europe in Kosovo, which is otherwise under the auspices of the UN. We lost our "freedom" back then.

Also without a UN mandate, NATO attacked Iraq in 2003 under the leadership of the USA (Slovenia also joined the "coalition of the willing" by signing the Vilnius Agreement in order – according to politicians –

to secure its admission to NATO in 2004), in which President Saddam Hussein (1937-2006) was also killed and after which then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (1937-2022) was asked whether half a million dead Iraqi children, more than died in Hiroshima, were worth the price, to which she replied: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price — we think the price is worth it." People died as a result of the war and US sanctions, a total of around 1 million.

NATO's military intervention in Libya and Syria followed in 2011 in an effort to change the regimes. The assassination of President Omar Muammar el-Gaddafi (1942-2011) triggered chaos in Libya, which is still ongoing. The authorities in Syria, on the other hand, after four years of killing the population and devastating the country, asked for help from the army of the Russian Federation, which intervened in 2015 to defend the legitimate government and the president, while the United States continues to occupy part of the oil-rich territory, as it does in Iraq, although the authorities of both countries have already asked them to withdraw several times.

US foreign policy was and is of course consistent. What Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928-2017) wrote in 1997 in the book *The Grand Chessboard*: "The defeat and collapse of the Soviet Union was the final step in the rapid ascendance of a Western Hemisphere power, the United States, as the sole and, indeed, the first truly global power. [...] It is imperative that no Eurasian challenger emerges, capable of dominating Eurasia and thus also of challenging America," escalated in 2014 in the US-backed coup in Ukraine, first destabilizing Ukraine and triggering a civil war between the Ukrainian authorities and the Russian minority, and then sparking a conflict involving not only Ukraine and the Russian Federation, but also the "collective West" under the leadership of the NATO pact or the dictates of the US, which includes Slovenia as a member of the pact and the EU.

The words of the American writer Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), which he published in the newspaper *Pravda* on February 23, 1942, after the defeat of Operation Barbarossa, are receding further and further into the distance, but have not been forgotten: "Anyone who loves freedom owes such a debt to the Red Army that it can never be repaid." In his New Year's greeting on January 3, 1943, also in *Pravda*, he added: "In 1942, you saved the world from the forces of barbarism and resisted alone, almost without help." It was shortly before the end of the Battle of Stalingrad, when the Soviets had already encircled the aggressors, consisting of the German, Romanian, Hungarian, Italian, Croatian (under the Ustasha flag of the Independent State of Croatia – NDH) and Ukrainian armies, and there was no more help for them. On January 7, 1943, the terms of surrender were announced via airplanes and loudspeakers, followed by the capitulation on January 31 and the final surrender on February 2. This was the first of Hitler's armies to surrender, which effectively happened on the 10th anniversary of Hitler's assumption of power (January 30, 1933).

Even after the end of the Second World War in Europe, the West's appetite for the Soviet Union did not diminish for a moment. Quite the opposite. The war was still going on (it ended on September 2, 1945 with the surrender of Japan) when the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill ordered the development of plans under the name Operation Unthinkable in May 1945. Two related plans for a possible future war were developed by the British Chiefs of Staff Committee against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). One plan envisaged a surprise attack on the Soviet forces stationed in Germany in order to "impose on Russia the will of the United States and the British Empire", according to the document. The operation was not carried out for various reasons, and the code name was reused for another plan, a defensive scenario in which the British were to repel a Soviet advance towards the North Sea and Atlantic after American forces had withdrawn from the mainland. When the Labor Party came to power in 1945, the plan, which is considered the first Cold War contingency plan for the war against the Soviet Union, ended up in the archives. Both plans were kept top secret and only made available to the public in 1998.

After the Potsdam Conference (July 17 to August 2, 1945), the American General Dwight D. Eisenhower drafted the Plan Totality in August 1945 on behalf of the American President Harry S. Truman (1884–1972). He predicted a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union with 20 to 30 atomic bombs and named 20 Soviet cities that were to be destroyed by the first nuclear attack. This was a disinformation ploy, because after the two atomic bomb attacks on Japan in August 1945, Hiroshima on August 6 and Nagasaki on

August 9, the USA no longer had any nuclear weapons that it could use. They had used up all their fissile uranium and a large amount of plutonium. The plan was part of Truman's "gigantic nuclear bluff", which primarily served to mislead the USSR government.

Under the leadership of General Omar Bradley (1893-1981), the plan Operation Dropshot was drawn up in 1949, which the USA would implement in the event of war with the Soviet Union. It consisted of three parts, namely the first on the outbreak of war and defense, the second with assessments of the political, economic and military factors, the third on the American counter-offensive and the victory of the West. It also mentions Yugoslavia and describes the front line, which was to run from Scandinavia across Europe along the Adriatic to Crete and Iskenderun and further east. The war was planned for January 1, 1957. It was worked out in the greatest secrecy and the public only found out about it in 1977.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union had no plans to invade its former allies immediately after the war.

Harry S. Truman declared at the time of the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, i.e. at the beginning of Operation Barbarossa: "If we see that Germany is winning the war, we ought to help Russia; and if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible." The Americans financed the German military industry. They entered the war in French North Africa with Operation Torch, a major Allied amphibious operation from November 8–16, 1942, when the Battle of Stalingrad was already in its final stages and the Soviet Allies were seeking a second front against the Germans. It was a compromise operation that fulfilled the British objective of securing victory in North Africa and allowed US forces to take up the fight against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy on a limited scale.

The anti-war composition *LAIBACH KUNST : UNTERNEHMEN BARBAROSSA* by the group Laibach, consisting of partisan motifs by the sculptor, painter and illustrator Nikolaj Pirnat (1903-1948), transported a monumental carpet from Afghanistan in 2024 with its "Operation Barbarossa" – also on a donkey – and neither devastated the landscape nor destroyed cities, wounded or killed. Perhaps it's the flying one...

– Peter Tomaž Dobrila

P. S.

Declassified documents from the **Russian State Military Archives** show that **England** and **France** decided in early **1940** to go to war against the **USSR**, to strike from **Finland** and the **Caucasus** and to establish a "Russian national government".

This information was obtained by the Soviet secret service and kept in the **Russian State Archives** and has now been published by the Russian **Presidential Library**.

But they were overtaken by Germany when it attacked and occupied France from May 10 to June 25, 1940 and marched into Paris on June 14, 1940. It then bombed major cities in Britain from July 10, 1940 to May 11, 1941 and Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, because the population resisted Yugoslavia joining the Axis powers when Yugoslav officers sympathetic to the Western Allies staged a coup d'état on March 27, 1941. The rebellion angered Hitler so much that he ordered the suspension of preparations for Operation Barbarossa and ordered an immediate attack on Yugoslavia in Directive No. 25. The Germans and their allies prepared the invasion of around two million well-armed soldiers, who attacked the country from the direction of Italy, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. The German Air Force attacked Yugoslav military airfields and then diverted to Belgrade. More than 20,000 people were killed in the successive air raids, while around 1.7 million Yugoslav men and women died in the Second World War.

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