

Lessons of war and peace

During my recent visit to Moscow, I was interviewed by the largest Soviet newspaper, *Trud*. One of the questions posed to me was: "Do you think the Soviet people really want peace?"

I answered, "Yes, of course, because no people have suffered as much as the Soviets."

The *Trud* news team beamed. Smiles quickly faded, however, when I went on to say that the Soviet Union's search for security had produced an over-militarized society that scared the rest of the world.

Soviet security consciousness is, of course, an old, tired saw, but we cannot dismiss it as merely a lame excuse for keeping a huge armed forces. Half way into Moscow from Sheremetevo Airport, you see a stark, moving monument composed of three huge, steel tripods made of railroad tracks — painted blood red. These are bigger-than-life models of anti-tank traps. At precisely this point — within sight of the spires of Moscow — the German Army was finally stopped in the desperate winter of 1941.

On the way into Leningrad from the airport, there is another monument that marks the high-water point of the Nazi advance — also within view of the gilded domes and spires of this splendid city.

A few more miles, a few more divisions, and the Nazis would have taken the USSR's two main cities. It was that close. There are still many in the West who wish the Wehrmacht had gone those few extra miles.

Soviet suffering in what they call the Great Patriotic War is almost unimaginable. According to Soviet figures, 1,710 cities were destroyed, along with 70,000 towns and villages. Thirty-two thousand factories were wrecked and 43,000 libraries burned.

Twenty million Soviet soldiers and civilians died in the war — every 10th person. Of the male babies born in the years 1920-1925, the generation that became soldiers, only 3% survived the war.

Compared to this vast slaughter, the war fought by the western powers was a police action. The Red Army destroyed 606 Nazi divisions, 76% of the total Axis forces, while the Allies accounted for only 24%. During the war, the USSR lost 26 times

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the total number of the *combined* men lost by Britain and the U.S. It was the Soviet Union, not the western Allies, that beat Hitler.

But titanic as they were, they compose the lesser portion of the Soviet Union's losses.

During the Red Terror of the 1920s, when the communists struggled to impose their rule over Russia, two million died. In the nightmare years of Stalin's rule, forced starvation, shooting and death camps killed more Soviet citizens than died in the Great Patriotic War.

Stalin murdered far more victims than Hitler, and over a far longer period. Just how many still remains in doubt, though reliable western scholars now estimate the total at about 30 million. Some estimates run as high as 50 million — a figure that I heard in the Soviet Union.

What's more, Stalin's famines, death factories and execution cellars exterminated the flower of Soviet society. An entire generation of artists, writers and musicians, political leaders and scientists, professional soldiers, administrators and farmers who knew how to grow crops. In short, a genocide of anyone with brains, talent or education. Add to this calamity the millions lost in the Red Terror and two World Wars.

It was, as the British writer Martin Walker says, "a sociological disaster that has no parallel in history." At least in modern history: In medieval times the Mongols inflicted a similar catastrophe on Arab civilization — from which it has not recovered to this day.

One result of this carnage has been an over-militarized Soviet society that has armed itself to the teeth — certainly far beyond any conceivable needs for self-defence. The Soviets are determined that another war will not be fought on their territory, but on someone else's. And the Soviets are also keenly aware that every time Europe has become unified — either under France or Germany — the result has been an invasion of Russia.

So the USSR spends 20 or 25% of its national income on a massive army that scares to death all of its neighbors and which has far too much influence at home. An army which also has the ability to reach the English Channel in 13 days — if the Kremlin so orders.

No, the Soviet people do not want war. I saw first hand the joy provoked by the beginning of the pullout from Afghanistan. Every Soviet family had losses, either in World War II or during the black night of Stalin. The nation is still rebuilding from the disasters of 50 years ago.

If the long-suffering Soviet people decided the question of war or peace, there would be no war. Unfortunately, they do not.