

Stalingrad: Decisions Under Fire

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Abstract: Conflict analysis is used to evaluate the potential options players could be expected to use to settle disputes. When compromise is not possible, the options for settling disputes become limited. The Battle of Stalingrad is studied using basic conflict analysis based on an historical summary.

Keywords: conflict analysis, Zukov, Paulus, Operation Barbarossa, Volga River, Stalingrad

Introduction

War places two sides in violent opposition. Barring the successful settlement of conflict by diplomacy, the outcome of war will produce a winner and a loser. When evaluating an historical event, careful analysis of the options each side have at a given point in time may reveal some of the decision making processes that influenced the event's outcome. Can conflict analysis help to understand the factors that influenced the Battle of Stalingrad?

History

In June of 1941 Germany launched Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union. The front reached from the Baltic States in the north to the Black Sea in the south. Despite rapid advances by the Germans using *Blitzkrieg* tactics, the September push into the Soviet motherland had been reduced to a war of attrition and not the war of annihilation Hitler had expected. The Germans had underestimated the level of Soviet preparation and the economic resiliency.¹ Within sight of Moscow, the German Army with already extended supply lines met by another adversary, the oncoming winter. Stalin comments in early November, "the winter promises [the enemy] nothing good." Soviet leadership clearly understood the strategic advantages of winter warfare.² The Soviet defeat of the Germans at Moscow though aided by the harsh winter conditions, was primarily the result of the larger number of Soviet forces and a tremendous civilian effort directed at improving fortifications.³ Operation Barbarossa ended with the German retreat from Moscow in the spring of 1941.

¹ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi - Soviet War 1941-1945*, (London, Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 41-7

² Ibid, p.107

³ G.W. Zhukov, *The Memoirs of Marshal Zhukov*, (New York, Delacorte Press, 1971), pp.344-63

In early April of 1942, Hitler re-directed the German efforts to the agricultural, coal, and oil producing regions of southern Russia. The push would give Germany needed resources and separate the Soviet forces, in Moscow and further north in Leningrad, from critical resources. Stalin's intelligence sources noted the build-up and repositioning of the German forces and responded by moving troops and armaments south along the Don River.⁴ The German advance on the south had by mid-July, captured the region along the Don R. that produced 60 per cent of Soviet Union's coal supply. The German push south continued toward the North Caucasus and the Caspian oil fields. To protect their eastern flank, the Germans sent forces to seize the city of Stalingrad, a key manufacturing center and the major regional port on the Volga River.⁵

The Soviet forces had taken horrific losses during the German offensive but Zhukov saw opportunity in fighting the Germans at Stalingrad. The local Communist Party recruited thousands of citizens to dig fortifications as the Muscovites had done a year earlier. Bitterly fought battles marked the German advance on Stalingrad. On August 23, the German Luftwaffe reduced the city to ruin, the next day German forces tried to seize the city's tank production facility at the converted tractor factory. Armed factory workers joined Soviet soldiers to drive off the Germans.⁶ Hitler responded by ordering General Paulus to take Stalingrad, more German resources were directed towards the effort. By early November, the well-trained German troops under Paulus had pushed the Soviet defenders out of the ruined city and onto the bank of the Volga R. Strong artillery support from across the river bought time for the Soviets as the German press continued.⁷ But excessive German dependence on poorly equipped and trained Italian, Hungarian, and Romanian troops posted to the northern and southern flanks put Paulus's troops in a vulnerable position.⁸

On November 19, the Soviet Operation Uranus, also known as Zhukov's Trap⁹, attacked the weakly defended German flanks in a pincer move. On February 2, 1943, Paulus and 90,000 trapped German troops surrendered in Stalingrad.¹⁰ The course of the war on the Soviet Western Front had changed; the German Army began a long series of retreating battles that ended in Berlin in May 8, 1945 with Marshal Zhukov witnessing the signing of the German surrender to the Soviet Union.¹¹

⁴ Ibid, p. 364

⁵ Maudsley, *Thunder in the East*, p.159

⁶ Zhukov, *The Memoirs of Marshal Zhukov*, p. 374-5

⁷ Maudsley, *Thunder in the East*, pp. 159-61

⁸ Ibid, pp. 164-5

⁹ Fann, William Edwin M.D., Review of Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege, 1942-1943, by Antony Beevor. American Journal of Psychiatry Dec. 2001

□ <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/158/12/2099>

¹⁰ □ Baird, Jay W., "The Myth of Stalingrad." The Journal of Contemporary History, July 1969. JSTOR. Western Washington Univ. Lib., Bellingham, WA. Jan. 24, 2008

□ <http://www.links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022->

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¹¹ Maudsley, *Thunder in the East*, p. 423

The point in time picked for an analysis of this conflict is early November 1942. Despite the enormous scale of the Soviet-German war front, both Stalin and Hitler focused tremendous human and material resources to the conflict in Stalingrad. The Germans were in a less favorable position because of the long supply lines they had to maintain and the prospect of another winter deep in Soviet territory. The Soviets, in contrast not only gained advantage through the diminished German situation, but had since April, been moving armaments, supplies, and troops to the east banks of the Volga in preparation of springing “Zhukov’s Trap.” The Germans were further hampered by poor intelligence estimates of the Soviet strength and will to fight.¹² Both sides had more than one million men and nearly 10,000 artillery guns and mortars. With 675 tank and assault vehicles, the Soviets had a slight advantage over the Germans.¹³ Perhaps the most significant factor in determining the options available to both sides were that both Hitler and Stalin had issued fight at all cost orders. Hitler’s Directive No. 41 that authorized the German push towards southern Russia contained “stand fast” orders that eliminated retreat as a possible option.¹⁴ Stalin responded with his similar ‘Not One Step Backwards’ order (No. 227) in late July.¹⁵

Conflict Analysis

The players are the Soviets (USSR) and Germany. The options for both sides are limited by non-feasible outcomes due to the win or lose nature of this war and the conditions imposed by the autocratic leadership of Hitler and Stalin. Options such as “retreat” or “surrender” do not exist in this conflict. The Soviets can hold their position or attack the Germans. The Germans can either continue the siege with current intensity or call in support to intensify the siege.

The most preferential Soviet outcome would be that they attack while the Germans continue the siege at the current intensity. The second most preferred Soviet outcome would be that they hold their position while the Germans continue their siege at the current intensity. For the Soviets, either holding position or attacking while the Germans call in support, are less preferred but still acceptable due to the oncoming adequate supplies, superior intelligence capacity, and the approaching winter.

The German’s most preferred outcome is that they call in support while the Soviets hold position. Next in the German preference, order would be that they call in support while the Soviets attack. Less preferential to the Germans are that they continue the siege at the current intensity level and the Soviets either hold their position or attack.

¹² Zhukov, *The Memoirs of Marshal Zhukov*, p. 397

¹³ Ibid, p.398

¹⁴ Maudsley, *Thunder in the East*, p. 149

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 169

The Soviets are in the stronger position. German misperceptions of Soviet troop strength and the Soviet willingness to follow Stalin's 'Not One Step Backwards' order resulted in too few troops and supplies to counter "Zhukov's Trap." Many of the German misperceptions were based on Hitler's "micro-management" of the push to obtain the resources of southern Russia.¹⁶

Research Findings

Possible States:

<u>Option</u>	<u>Outcomes</u> ¹⁷			
USSR				
Hold Position	1	0	1	0
Attack	0	1	0	1
Germany				
Continue Siege	1	1	0	0
Call in Support	0	0	1	1
Decimal Form ¹⁸	5	6	9	10

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 163

¹⁷ N.M. Fraser and K.W. Hipple, *Conflict Analysis*, (Amsterdam, North-Holland, 1980), pp. 11-12. In this binary system, O = No-Action, 1 = Action,

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 14. The decimal form is the converted value of the binary sequence. Each sequence of 0s and 1s that form a potential outcome is calculated. For example:
 $(1,0,1,0) = 1 \times 2^0 + 0 \times 2^1 + 1 \times 2^2 + 0 \times 2^3 = 5$, $(0,1,0,1) = 6$, $(1,0,0,1) = 9$, $(0,1,0,1) = 10$

Soviet Preference Vectors:

<u>Soviet Options</u>				
Hold Position	0	1	1	0
Attack	1	0	0	1
<u>German Options</u>				
Continue Siege	1	0	0	1
Call in Support	0	0	1	1
Ordinal Ranking	4	3	2	1
Decimal Form	6	5	9	1

German Preference Vectors:

<u>Soviet Options</u>				
Hold Positions	1	0	1	0
Attack	0	1	0	1
<u>German Options</u>				
Continue Siege	0	0	1	1
Call in Support	1	1	0	0
Ordinal Ranking	4	3	2	1
Decimal Form	9	10	5	6

Stability Analysis:

Overall Stability $x \quad E \quad E \quad x$

USSR

Player Stability	r	s	s	u
Preference Vector	6	5	9	10
UIs		6	6	6
			5	5
				9

Germany

Player Stability	r	s	s	u
Preference Vector	9	10	5	6
UIs		9	9	9
			10	10
				5

The stable states for the Soviets are outcomes 5 and 9; the German stable states are 10 and 5. Equilibria exists at outcomes 5 and 9 since both outcomes are stable to both sides in the Stalingrad conflict.

The conflict analysis suggests that conflict could be reduced if the Soviets hold their position and the Germans continue their siege at the current level, or if the Soviets hold their position and the Germans call in support. Neither outcome actually happened.

More advanced conflict analysis methods may generate historically correct findings but conflict analysis methods as explained by Fraser and Hiple may be best suited to settling disputes rather than war. Dispute settlement is based on the sides or players moderating behavior to reach a desired outcome. War, as practiced at Stalingrad, can only be won or lost. The situation that amounts to a kill or be killed condition removes any value of the equilibric outcomes; neither outcome seems likely to produce a clear winner.

Conclusion

The conflict at Stalingrad ended with the Soviet victory. The tremendous expenditure by both sides in human and material resources indicates the importance both the Germans and Soviets placed on achieving victory. War is fought not only at the battlefield but also on the home front. Boin et al in the *Politics of Crisis Management* list five critical tasks that address political dimensions of crisis. The linear progression of crises within the political framework is described: sense making, decision making, meaning making terminating, and learning.¹⁹ Not just the armies of states are involved in war, the public also plays a role in such struggles.

Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were autocratic regimes. Hitler and Stalin carefully controlled and shaped the release of information their citizens received from Stalingrad. Meaning making through tight media control was needed to maintain public support for the continuing war efforts. Casting the situation “in such a way that their efforts to manage it are enhanced” is far easier in the absence of democratic processes.²⁰ Media in autocracies can manipulate the truth and blend it with political needs to alter the public sense of reality.

¹⁹ Arjen Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*, (New York, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005). P.10

²⁰ Ibid, p.13

The German's propaganda effort during the early stages of the Stalingrad conflict stressed the tremendous pace of advance and the high level of Soviet casualties. Even before the Soviet offensive, reports of the high casualty rate among German troops were leaking from the front back to Germany. When the pace of advance slowed, the German propagandists took a more cautious approach so as not to encourage the idea that the war did not require a degree of sacrifice.²¹ The efforts of the propaganda campaign were shifted to trying to blunt the reports of the dismal conditions being experienced by the troops at Stalingrad.²² When the Soviet offensive occurred, Hitler ordered all public information from Stalingrad stopped though this did not alter the public perception that Germany had been defeated. The German public's view of Hitler's effectiveness as a military leader suffered from the defeat.²³

While the German propaganda delivery was reduced by their defeat at Stalingrad, the Soviets increased their propaganda efforts. The Soviet propaganda was directed mainly towards waging psychological war on the German public with radio broadcasts and falsified letters from prisoners of war. The Soviet propaganda further undermined Hitler's propaganda program.

Crisis Analysis as described by Fraser and Hiple, and crisis management as described by Boin et al., provided a good framework to carefully examine the Stalingrad conflict but neither can accurately account for the extreme factors that define war. The Cold War analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis is based on the premise that neither side will take an overly aggressive action because of the potentially devastating effect of nuclear war. Stalingrad was a different situation; the destruction of the other side is the desired outcome for both sides.

²¹ Jay M. Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad," *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol.4, No. 3, (July, 1969) pp. 188-9

²² Ibid, p. 194

²³ Ibid, pp. 200-3

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