Germany and Soviet Russia: Territorial Expansion, Political Conflict, and War

Germany and Soviet Russia had a complicated relationship that included cooperation, territorial expansion, ideological conflict, and war. The Soviet Union did conduct military invasions and seize territory in Eastern Europe before Germany invaded Soviet territory in June 1941. These events must be distinguished from the later German-Soviet war.

1. August 1939: The German-Soviet Pact

On August 23, 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, also known as the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. Both governments publicly agreed not to attack each other, while secret provisions divided parts of Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence and established plans for partitioning Poland.

The agreement allowed Germany to attack Poland without immediately facing a Soviet military response. It also allowed the Soviet Union to pursue territorial expansion in areas assigned to its sphere of influence. The agreement was a strategic arrangement between two governments with competing long-term objectives.

2. September 1939: The Partition of Poland

Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, beginning World War II in Europe. On September 17, Soviet forces invaded eastern Poland from the east. Germany and the Soviet Union subsequently divided and occupied Polish territory.

These actions deprived Poland of its sovereignty and subjected its population to occupation by two neighboring powers. The Soviet invasion was a military act of territorial expansion, distinct from Germany's later invasion of the Soviet Union.

3. 1939–1940: Soviet Territorial Expansion

The Soviet Union used military force and political coercion to expand its control over neighboring territories.

- **Finland:** The Soviet Union invaded Finland on November 30, 1939. The Winter War ended in March 1940 with Finland ceding territory to the Soviet Union.
- **Baltic states:** In 1940, the Soviet Union occupied Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and incorporated them into the Soviet Union.
- **Romanian territories:** In 1940, the Soviet Union seized Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from Romania.
- **Eastern Poland:** The Soviet Union occupied and annexed the territory assigned to it under the German-Soviet agreement.

These actions demonstrate that Soviet foreign policy involved military force, territorial expansion, and the extension of political control.

4. June 22, 1941: Germany Invades the Soviet Union

On June 22, 1941, Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, a massive invasion of Soviet territory. The German leadership sought to destroy the Soviet communist government, seize land and resources, and establish German control over territories in Eastern Europe.

Nazi ideology portrayed communism as an enemy and incorporated racist and antisemitic objectives into the invasion. German military and occupation policies resulted in mass killings, starvation, forced labor, and the persecution of civilians and prisoners of war.

The invasion violated the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. The Soviet Union then fought to defend its territory and eventually began a major counteroffensive against German forces.

5. 1941–1945: The Soviet Counteroffensive and the Defeat of Nazi Germany

The Soviet military gradually pushed German forces out of Soviet territory and advanced through Eastern Europe into Germany. Soviet forces captured Berlin in 1945, contributing decisively to Nazi Germany's defeat.

The Soviet advance also established Soviet military and political dominance over much of Eastern Europe. After the war, several countries in the region came under communist governments aligned with Moscow, with varying degrees of local control and Soviet coercion.

These developments raised separate questions about national sovereignty, occupation, political freedom, and the imposition of communist rule.

When Was Stalin?

Joseph Stalin lived from December 18, 1878, to March 5, 1953.

- **1878:** Born in Gori, Georgia, then part of the Russian Empire.
- **1917:** The Bolshevik Revolution brought the Bolsheviks to power in Russia.
- **1922:** Became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
- **1924:** After Vladimir Lenin’s death, Stalin consolidated his power.
- **1928 onward:** Expanded forced collectivization and rapid industrialization, accompanied by widespread repression.
- **1939:** Signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany on August 23.
- **1939–1940:** The Soviet Union invaded eastern Poland, fought Finland, and occupied the Baltic states.
- **June 22, 1941:** Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, beginning the massive German-Soviet war on the Eastern Front.

- **1945:** The Soviet Union helped defeat Nazi Germany and established dominant political influence across much of Eastern Europe.
- **1953:** Stalin died in Moscow on March 5.

People died as a result of Stalin's policies throughout his rule of the Soviet Union, particularly from the late 1920s through 1953. There was no single event or year: deaths occurred during forced collectivization, famine, political purges, executions, forced labor in prison camps, and deportations.

Timeline of Deaths Under Stalin

Dates and estimates below refer to deaths within the Soviet Union under Stalin's rule, not exclusively to executions.

Period	What happened
1929–1932	Forced collectivization of agriculture and deportation of millions of peasants; many died from hunger, exposure, and disease.
1932–1933	Major famines across the Soviet Union, including Ukraine and Kazakhstan, caused millions of deaths.
1936–1938	The Great Terror involved mass arrests, executions, and imprisonment of perceived political opponents and ordinary citizens.
1939–1941	Repression and deportations in territories annexed by the Soviet Union, including eastern Poland and the Baltic states.
1941–1945	World War II on the Eastern Front caused enormous military and civilian losses. These deaths should be distinguished from people killed by Stalin's domestic policies.
1946–1947	Another major famine affected the Soviet Union.
1948–1953	Political repression, imprisonment, and deportations continued until Stalin's death on March 5, 1953.

How Many People Died?

Historians' estimates vary depending on which deaths they include. Estimates commonly range from several million to around 20 million or more when famine, executions, forced labor, deportations, and other deaths associated with Stalin's policies are included.

One important distinction is that people executed, people who died in labor camps, and people who starved during policy driven famines are different categories. Their deaths should be counted carefully to avoid double counting or treating every wartime death as a direct result of Stalin's policies.

Conclusion

The historical relationship between Germany and Soviet Russia cannot be reduced to a single claim that one side was always attacking the other.

Before 1941, the Soviet Union used military force to expand its territory in Eastern Europe while cooperating with Nazi Germany under the 1939 pact. Germany initiated the full scale German-Soviet war by invading the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The Soviet Union subsequently defended its territory, defeated German forces in a prolonged and devastating war, and expanded its own influence across Eastern Europe.

The essential distinctions are between territorial aggression against neighboring states, Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, the Soviet military counteroffensive, and Soviet political domination in Eastern Europe after the war. Each must be evaluated in its historical context.

Historical sources: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *The Soviet Union and the Eastern Front*, *German-Soviet Pact*, and *Invasion of the Soviet Union, June 1941*.

- https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-soviet-union-and-the-eastern-front
- https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-soviet-pact
- https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/invasion-of-the-soviet-union-june-1941

Hitler and Stalin: A Comparison

Hitler and Stalin both presided over mass atrocities, but the comparison depends on what you measure: total deaths, genocide, ideology, or the methods used to kill people.

Hitler vs. Stalin

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)

- Led Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945.
- His regime and collaborators murdered six million Jewish people in the Holocaust.
- They also murdered millions of other victims, including Soviet prisoners of war, Polish civilians, Roma, and people with disabilities.
- Nazi ideology explicitly promoted racial hierarchy, conquest, and the destruction of entire populations.

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953)

- Dominated the Soviet Union from the late 1920s until 1953.
- His government carried out political executions, forced deportations, and mass imprisonment.
- Forced collectivization and policy driven famines caused millions of deaths.

- Historical estimates of deaths directly attributable to Stalin's repression and policies vary substantially, depending on which categories are counted.

So, Who Caused More Deaths?

It is difficult to compare total numbers fairly because estimates use different time periods and categories. Historian Timothy Snyder, examining archival evidence, estimated that Nazi Germany killed more noncombatants than the Soviet regime did, while emphasizing that Stalinist repression also caused millions of deaths.

The key distinction is that Hitler's regime carried out the Holocaust, a systematic attempt to annihilate Europe's Jewish population, alongside other mass murders. Stalin's regime inflicted mass death through state repression, forced collectivization, famine, executions, and deportations. Neither the number of victims alone nor one category of atrocity fully captures the historical comparison.

Estimated Totals Compared

Counting method	Hitler / Nazi Germany	Stalin / Soviet Union
Regime related civilian deaths and mass murder	About 11 million in Snyder’s estimate	Roughly 6–9 million in narrower estimates
Broader estimates including famine, repression, forced labor, and deportation	Millions more beyond narrower categories; totals depend on definitions	Around 15–20 million in some broader estimates
All World War II deaths	60–80 million worldwide; not all attributable to Hitler alone	The Soviet Union lost about 27 million people in the war; not all attributable to Stalin

Union of Saint’s Guidance

Moderate Conservatism is a champion way to stay centered without going off into extremes.

Remembering our virtues: peace, preservation, progress, and protection.

Remembering our values: peace, love, and forgiveness as the highest form of love. Politics can make people react in ways that are harmful. Stay the course, but also remember that we always reserve the right to protect and safeguard ourselves and our families.

Union of Saints does not support any war on Americans, including extreme ideologies that open us up to harm or communist warfare that supports foreign invasion. We support boundaries and borders. We recognize political subversions where they are. We stand bravely together as Americans. We support our military. We love our freedom.

We are choosing to support Republicans on many issues because we spent years on the left, sorting through case research, and arrived at our conclusions. We align dominantly with truth, safety, order and justice.