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# RUSSIA IN THE AGE OF WARS 1914-1945

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tant to make use of the Comintern as a tool for the defence of Soviet security. The motives for this reluctance were many and varied. They lay partly in the profound political and theoretical implications which using the Comintern as an instrument for the defence of the Soviet Union would have produced: it would have been necessary to substantially re-think Leninist doctrine on war, and a willingness to consider the idea that it was possible to prevent (or at least, delay) war by exerting pressure on "bourgeois" governments, and to do so in close alliance with the Social Democrats. "Class" interpretation of war, on the other hand, left little room for prevention of war. Rejection of the social democrat notion of "social peace" left even less. Acceptance of the idea of social peace was a logical corollary of international peace. But social peace meant giving up the idea of "class struggle" and accepting that it was necessary to work towards international stability rather than overthrow of the international order. To fit the idea of diplomatic manoeuvre into the Marxist doctrine and political practice of the Comintern would have implied laying aside those revolutionary and internationalist principles which constituted its very *raison d'être*.

In any case, Moscow had no interest in accepting the Comintern among the tools to defend its security because it quickly recognised that it could not control it otherwise than with difficulty, nor turn it into an unconditionally loyal subordinate. It was, after all, necessary that the Communist Parties should have a relative autonomy if they were to organise effective mass action on behalf of the Soviet state in their respective countries. Furthermore, coordination between the Comintern and the NKID would have worsened, rather than solved, Moscow's problem of presenting two separate faces to the external world. It would also have tied its hands in foreign policy, reducing the effectiveness of its diplomatic manoeuvres – given the revolutionary spirit the Comintern would presumably have injected.

In the end, therefore, Moscow opted for isolationism. In domestic policies, this meant an autarkic industrial and economic policy, and in foreign policy it implied trying to avoid all involvement in international conflicts. In this context it was inevitable that the Comintern should work in strict subordination to Politburo defence policy, to the extent that it became a tool of the latter. There were various ways in which the Comintern could have been imagined as an instrument for the defence of the USSR. The only feasible way, however, seemed to be to turn it into a purely propagandist organisation with limited aims – feeding the myth that there was "growing sympathy among the working class" of foreign countries for the USSR<sup>67</sup>, for example, or organising agitation and disturbance when it suited Moscow and Soviet national interests. In reality, this was not a real choice between the various possibilities available. Moscow leaders were extremely careful to avoid the Comintern turning into a political tool for preventing conflicts of all kinds. By the end of the 1920s Soviet leaders thought of the Comintern as "a great burden they cannot get rid of"<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> The creating of this myth was criticised by Rakovsky at the 15th Congress (*Piatnadsatyi sezd VKP(b)*, I (1961), p. 210).

<sup>68</sup> This statement was attributed to Togliatti in an anonymous report on the proceedings of the 6th Comintern Congress sent to Trotsky (cited by Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia. Foundations*, Italian translation p. 201).

## Permanent War Scare: Mobilisation, Militarisation and Peasant War

Andrea Romano

The constant presence of war scare in Soviet policy during the "Stalinist revolution" has often been remarked upon by Western historians. Two kinds of interpretation of the phenomenon have traditionally been given: some commentators have stressed the leadership's desire to push through modernisation in order to free the country from the danger of encirclement by the capitalist nations<sup>1</sup>. (We may recall Stalin's famous dictum that the USSR would be "defeated" by the external forces unless it managed, within ten years, to make up the gap of fifty or a hundred years which divided it from the most advanced countries<sup>2</sup>.) The second kind of explanation refers to internecine struggle within the party (the paradigmatic case here is the use of the 1927 scare against Bukharin<sup>3</sup>), or to the need to mobilise the population which accompanied the first five-year plan (the threat from outside helping to weld people together and provide the authorities with legitimacy<sup>4</sup>). Both these approaches focus on crucial aspects of the Stalinist system and see war scare as having roots *outside* the leadership's perception of the danger of war, viewing it as essentially instrumental – a weapon in the leadership's arsenal helping it to pursue industrialisation, dominance in the party, mobilisation of the nation, etc.

The aim of this paper is to suggest that "war scare" (in the sense of a constant presence of the "threat of war" theme exercising a general influence on numerous aspects of domestic policy) was a factor which had an autonomy of its own at the time of the decisive social and political struggle over full collectivisation. So I will ask how the threat of war was perceived by the Soviet leadership, what ideas filtered through about the conflict be-

<sup>1</sup> The classic example of this interpretation is R.C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power. The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941*, London and New York 1990.

<sup>2</sup> "Compared to the advanced countries, we are fifty or a hundred years behind. We must make up this gap in ten years. If we do not manage this we will find our road blocked". I. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, vol. 13, Moscow 1951, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Di Biagio, *Le origini dell'isolazionismo sovietico. L'Unione sovietica e l'Europa dal 1918 al 1928*, Milan 1990, pp. 211-40.

<sup>4</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick's work exemplifies this kind of explanation: a synthesis of her ideas is given in "The Foreign Threat during the First Five-Year Plan", *Soviet Union-Union Soviétique*, 1978, V, pp. 26-35.

tween the state and the countryside, and what heuristic value the idea of a war threat had in Bolshevik political culture in terms of "militarisation" during the years of the "Stalinist revolution".

I will focus primarily on 1930, which was the real turning point in the "class war" which accompanied the collectivisation campaign. For it is in 1930 that events and documentary evidence bring out my basic thesis most clearly:

a) Soviet leaders' perception of the threat of war during the collectivisation campaign changed radically as the nature of the conflict within the country changed – so that, at the time when the internal conflict was fiercest, it ended up becoming part of a "perception of vulnerability" of the regime as a whole.

b) This perception was, on the whole, not derived from a perception of the international situation, nor can it be explained by traditional instrumental uses of the threat of war as a tool of national mobilisation. On the contrary, Soviet leaders tended to be aware that any external attack risked leading to collapse in a situation where the foundations of the state had already been so severely shaken.

c) This "perception of vulnerability" gradually developed among Bolshevik political leaders themselves, but the latter were considerably influenced in their thinking by bodies responsible for national security, and in first place by the military establishment. The Red Army took part in the internal conflict in various ways – often having contradictory roles. It developed its own, independent vision of the risks to national security which the peasant war was creating. Realising this may help us to rethink the traditional historiographical idea that the army was a source of militarisation in the Soviet system<sup>5</sup>.

If we compare 1927 and 1930 (two crucial moments in the "Stalinist revolution"), it is clear that in these years the peasant war led to a profound shift in the Soviet leadership's perception of the way the domestic context was linked to the international situation. This change in perception was, in turn, connected with changed strategies for social mobilisation, and changes in the place which militarisation had in Bolshevik political culture. I will therefore also discuss the domestic consequences of that phenomenon known as the "war scare of 1927".

### 1927: the classic war scare

The international and domestic background to the "1927 war scare" has already been thoroughly studied<sup>6</sup> (see also Anna Di Biagio's essay in this volume). What I shall discuss is rather the accompanying context of

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Romano, *Contadini in uniforme. L'Armata Rossa e la collettivizzazione delle campagne nell'URSS*, Florence 1999.

<sup>6</sup> J.P. Sontag, "The Soviet war scare of 1926-27", *The Russian Review*, 1975, 1, pp. 66-77; K.D. Slepian, "The limits of mobilisation: party, state and the 1927 civil defence campaign", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1993, 5, pp. 851-68; N.S. Simonov, "'Krepit' oboronu strany sovetov. 'Voennaia trevoga' 1927 goda i ee posledstvia", *Otechestvennaia Istoriia*, 1996, 3, pp. 155-61.

civil and military mobilisation. What was immediately noticeable about the nation-wide campaign which was launched at the time of the scare about a possible Western attack was that it stressed the need for militarisation of the people, rather than an increase in the efficiency of the army as such. So 1927 saw the re-surfacing of the idea that the people should be given basic military training. Soon after the Revolution, the Bolsheviks had dreamt of creating a new army of a socialist state, based on a resuscitated version of the democratic and socialist notion of the "nation in arms", but this ideal had rapidly been set aside, given the pressing need for a traditional military force. The idea had therefore been channelled into bodies which were originally supposed to provide the population with physical, political and military education<sup>7</sup>.

At the beginning of the campaign in January 1927, these bodies were brought together in a single voluntary association for "civil defence", the OSOAVIAKHIM (Association for Support to Defence and to the Chemical and Aeronautical Industries)<sup>8</sup>. OSOAVIAKHIM embodied the campaign, making a qualitative jump in the introduction of the masses to military education. It set about spreading the values of patriotic modernisation, and stressing that industrialisation was necessary for national defence against the dangers of "imperialist aggression"<sup>9</sup>. The mobilisation campaign continued throughout the first half of 1927 outside the military apparatus itself – the authorities repeatedly stressing the need for society as a whole to become more militarily efficient. In the words of a message sent by the Central Committee in June 1927 (i.e., after diplomatic relations with Britain had been broken off), the people were invited to "reinforce the work of the voluntary societies and sports organisations, and to increase the standard of military training among the mass of the party"<sup>10</sup>.

The campaign reached its height in the summer, with the organisation of a "Defence Week" (10-17 July 1927), involving a large number of initiatives both within and without the armed forces. Numerous military exercises were carried out in rural areas, but, above all, the political cadres of local military units were subjected to brief training courses to inform them of the seriousness of the international crisis, and the danger that was facing the Soviet fatherland. As a Red Army Political Directorate (PUR) circular explained, the objective was to make the "military week" into an opportunity to test the efficiency of local units in spreading Bolshevik propaganda and mobilising rural society behind the domestic and international policy

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M. von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship. The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930*, Ithaca 1990, pp. 118-23; A. Romano, "La questione dell'esercito miliziano nei primi anni del potere sovietico", *Società e storia*, 1993, 61, pp. 551-82; G. Shatunov, *Leninskii Vseobuch*, Moscow 1970.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of the civil defence associations, see E. Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers. Modernization and bureaucracy in a mass public organization*, Princeton 1973. The Society for the Support of Chemical and Aeronautic projects, the predecessor of OSOAVIAKHIM, had 90,000 sections in 1926, a third of them in the countryside (these rural sections boasted 301,020 peasant members, a figure which rose to 470,557 in October 1927: see V.F. Klochkov, "Rol Krasnoi Armii v likvidatsii negramotnosti i podgotovke kadrov dlia sela v gody sotsialisticheskogo stroitelstva", *Istoriia SSSR*, 1980, 3, p. 103).

<sup>9</sup> Slepian, "The limits of mobilisation", p. 855.

<sup>10</sup> KPSS o vooruzhennykh silakh Sovetskogo Soiuzu. *Sbornik dokumentov 1917-1958*, Moscow 1958, p. 294.

objectives of the Soviet regime. "It is necessary that the non-permanent soldier should be able, once returned to the countryside after his training session, to correctly explain the current international situation and the tasks which face us concerning the threat of war against the USSR and the resurgent White terror"<sup>11</sup>. Outside the ranks of the military, OSOAVIAKHIM organised a wide range of activities during Defence Week – shooting exhibitions, visits of civilians to military museums and military camps, fundraising initiatives, lotteries, etc.<sup>12</sup>. These initiatives sealed the new organisation's function as a means of giving the masses the elements of a military education.

"Defence Week" thus provides an excellent example of the type of wider mobilisation which Soviet leaders organised at this time. The idea was to mobilise the urban and rural masses around "the socialist fatherland in danger"; the campaign was a test of mobilisation which fitted into the kind of operations suited to that "propaganda state" which had emerged out of the civil war<sup>13</sup>. It is significant, then, that Voroshilov himself (in the central press) termed Defence Week "a week of spiritual mobilisation of the masses". "Defence Week has turned out to be a great political campaign. Millions of workers and peasants, in spite of loving peace just as much as the Soviet government of workers and peasants loves peace, have nonetheless forcibly stated that, if necessary, they will be capable of mercilessly repulsing the enemy"<sup>14</sup>.

However, in wider terms of the "civilian rear", the real results of the internal mobilisation campaign fell badly short of the objectives the regime had set itself. Immediately after the authorities had first launched the alarm, a wave of genuine panic could be seen in numerous areas – sufficiently striking to surprise observers in the civil defence bodies. A report sent to the CP Central Committee by the information section of OGPU noted many of the classic signs of eve-of-war collective panic – such as hoarding of food and the drying-up of commerce.

After the speeches by Comrades Voroshilov and Bukharin at the 15th Moscow party conference had been published in the press, rumours of imminent war began to spread among the urban and rural population in many regions of the USSR. In some places, part of the population was gripped by a state of panic. The people tried to hoard basic goods – salt, petrol, flour, etc. Sometimes, minor shortages of certain goods were seen by the people as a sign that war was near. Peasants in frontier regions tried to exchange Soviet money for gold. In certain areas a 5-ruble gold piece would be exchanged for 10 or 12 rubles in paper money. There were cases in which peasants refused to sell grain or livestock for Soviet money, with the consequence that the flow of these goods onto the markets decreased<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> *Partiino-politicheskaia rabota v Krasnoi Armii. Dokumenty 1921-1929 gg.*, Moscow 1981, p. 425.

<sup>12</sup> See RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 32, d. 113, l. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. P. Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State. Soviet methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*, Cambridge 1985.

<sup>14</sup> K.E. Voroshilov, *Pravda*, 17 July 1927, later reprinted in *Oborona SSSR*, Moscow 1937, pp. 125, 130.

<sup>15</sup> Simonov, "Krepit' oboronu strany sovetov", p. 157.

Panic seems to have been equally common among peasants and among workers, in the countryside and in the factories. The press was quick to cry out against "profiteering peasants" and shopkeepers who took advantage of rumours of war to put their prices up<sup>16</sup>. However, there were plenty of examples of workers engaging in similar behaviour. In one report (sent by a worker to the newspaper *Rabochaia gazeta*, and subsequently passed to Voroshilov), the OSOAVIAKHIM propaganda on the modernisation of military technology turned out to have had unexpected results: "workers are prey to an extraordinary panic; everywhere on the production line and during work-breaks you hear that war is near – not a war like 1914-17 but a chemical war of the latest fashion, with gases to poison armies and civilians for hundreds of kilometres around"<sup>17</sup>.

Much more alarming for the Soviet authorities was the news which was filtering in with regard to the people's willingness to take up arms to defend the "socialist fatherland". Especially in the armed forces, observers were worried not only by the fact that the prospect of patriotic mobilisation was far from welcomed, but also by the evidence that the prospect of war was setting off a wave of anti-Soviet feeling. In March 1927 the Information Department of the PUR commented laconically that the hard core of the opposition to war came from the countryside, and that this fact needed to be remembered by the military leadership: "Among peasants, who make up the largest part of the population of the USSR, and thus the largest part of the Red Army's reserves, war is not popular. The peasants do not want to fight"<sup>18</sup>. The report continued with the remark that, while the mass of the peasantry might not want to fight, it was the counter-propaganda of the "class enemy" in the countryside which was particularly pernicious, for the *kulaki* might use war as an opportunity to get rid of the Soviet regime.

The *kulak* element is decidedly opposed to any war. According to data coming from Moscow, *kulak* leaders are making propaganda encouraging desertion, and they are threatening to settle scores with the Communists. In a village in the district of Bronnitsk a *kulak* declared: "The Bolsheviks want to go to war again. Only Komsomol members will go to the front — we will desert again. If there is war, war communism will come back; but if they take the grain from us, we will do everything possible to oppose them. We are not in 1918 now"<sup>19</sup>.

Finally, the wave of panic inevitably had effects on the lower ranks of the Red Army. In the weeks when there was a rush towards buying up staple goods in the towns and villages, soldiers started to show "exaggerated and excessive tension" about the war rumours which followed Bukharin's and Voroshilov's declarations. As the report of the PUR notes, these sol-

<sup>16</sup> For example a cartoon in *Izvestia*, 12 February 1927, criticised a classic speculator-shopkeeper who had multiplied the prices of his goods by ten.

<sup>17</sup> RGVA, f. 33987, op. 1, d. 666, l. 4.

<sup>18</sup> RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 354, l. 12.

<sup>19</sup> RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 354, l. 13. Similar threats to strike back against Communists if there was a war were made in working-class circles in a number of towns. An OGPU report in August 1927 recorded statements such as "I hope there is a war: we will take up arms and make a second revolution", "If there is a war first we will get the directors, then we will go to fight", etc. (Simonov, "Krepit' oboronu strany sovetov", p. 157.)



diers' worries were "inevitably increased by letters coming from the villages asking when they were going to be sent to the front, and asking for news about stocks of goods"<sup>20</sup>.

In 1927, therefore, there was a wide-ranging campaign of militarisation of civilians – a campaign launched by the regime on lines which, by that time, had become established as the standard mode of operation of the 1920s Bolshevik propaganda state. At the same time the people also followed the pattern of reaction which had become traditional in the framework of a state-peasant dialectic under the NEP – coming together and expressing fear and resentment at the rumours of war which had been started instrumentally as part of internal party struggle. To this extent, the 1927 events fitted well into the pattern laid down by the Soviet state in the 1920s in the field of mass propaganda – with the armed forces allowing themselves to act as a more institutional cover for civilian bodies (especially OSOAVIAKHIM). 1927 was thus an (unsuccessful) attempt at bringing people together around the patriotic ideal, an attempt to achieve that "reciprocal intermingling of socialist and militarist values" characteristic of "proletarian Sparta"<sup>21</sup>.

### 1930: the hidden war scare

The background to the new war scare which took hold three years later was thoroughly different. Recent scholarship and archive discoveries have made it increasingly clear that the first months of 1930 were "the final (open and collective) act of the civil war between peasants and the Soviet authorities"<sup>22</sup>. The decision to cut the Gordian knot in which agrarian policy had become entangled after the ending of the NEP by introducing full collectivisation and de-kulakisation was the result of a conscious decision on the part of the Soviet leadership to open up a home front. It was consciously decided to jack up by several notches the conflict with the countryside, in an attempt to resolve once and for all the problem of exerting economic and cultural control over peasant society<sup>23</sup>. The strategic plan remained that which had been agreed upon at the time when the NEP was wound up in 1927-28, and in these plans industrial modernisation had been seen as necessary because of a particular vision of the international situation. Nonetheless, the decisive moves in 1930 were taken essentially against the background of exclusively domestic politics – the struggle between the Soviet state and the countryside.

The campaign of full collectivisation involved very extensive social surgery: about 1,800,000 peasants were deported to the most remote areas

of the Soviet Union between 1930 and 1931<sup>24</sup>, between 200,000 and 250,000 fled the countryside and all their property, and sought refuge in the cities, while another 400,000 households were uprooted but decided to stay in their own area<sup>25</sup>. 390,000 people were arrested (most of them subsequently sent to prison camps), and about 21,000 were sentenced to be shot<sup>26</sup>. In response to this wave of repression resistance in the countryside was widespread. The fact that Stalinist leaders remembered collectivisation as one of the hardest tests the party ever faced was due mainly to the harshness of the clashes in the first months of 1930. For the first and last time since 1921, peasants went beyond the passive, "everyday forms of resistance" which they had used against the "extraordinary measures" of 1928-29, and organised active resistance on a massive scale. The scale of resistance is clear even from crude data contained in recently-opened archives. According to OGPU, there were 11,335 peasant demonstrations in the first five months of 1930 (as against 1,307 for all of 1929, and 709 in 1928). In 1930 numbers of demonstrators were estimated for 10,071 demonstrations – giving a total of 2,468,625 demonstrators. Apart from the demonstrations, there were 13,794 "acts of kulak terrorism", at the expense of 3,155 victims among Bolshevik activists and Soviet officials<sup>27</sup>.

I will not deal with the overall dynamics of the 1930 conflict here, nor with the reasons why the peasants lost, but will concentrate on the so-called "retreat" in March and April, when Soviet leaders made public statements which threw responsibility for "excesses" committed in the campaign onto local officials, and stressed the "voluntary" character of peasants' entry into *kolkhozy*. This "retreat" undoubtedly had instrumental motives behind it (it was necessary to ensure that the fields were sown in spring, and the central authorities needed a new basis for legitimisation). Nonetheless, it is also worth looking at the context in which the leadership made a sudden decision to slow down the pace of collectivisation. For it is clear that the leadership did have an original perception of the foreign and domestic dangers which were bearing down on the Soviet regime – a fear that the combined pressure of peasant resistance and foreign intervention might bring about collapse of the regime.

So when Stalin had recourse (in a speech defending the decision to "retreat") to the word "abyss" (*propast*) to refer to the danger the regime was facing, he was not using an empty metaphor<sup>28</sup>. Quite the contrary, he was revealing the serious worries which the internal crisis was causing the party leadership at the end of February. And in this state of anxiety, concerns about the domestic situation and the foreign situation were inextricably linked. The spread of peasant revolts thus combined with the danger com-

<sup>24</sup> Cf. V.N. Zemskov, "'Kulatskaia ssylka' v 30-e gody", *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, 1991, 10, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> V.P. Danilov, N.A. Ivniitsky, eds, *Dokumenty svidetelstvuiut. Iz istorii derevni nakune i v khode kollektivizatsii, 1927-1932 gg.*, Moscow 1989, pp. 46-7.

<sup>26</sup> O. Chlevnjuk, *Stalin e la società sovietica negli anni del Terrore*, Perugia 1997, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> V.P. Danilov, A. Berelowitch, "Les documents du VchK-OGPU-NKVD sur la campagne soviétique", *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 1994, 3, pp. 671-5; Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, pp. 136-40.

<sup>28</sup> "It is difficult to stop in time those who rush headlong towards an abyss, and lead them back to the right path", I. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, vol. XII, Moscow 1949, p. 213.

<sup>20</sup> RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 354, l. 13 ob.

<sup>21</sup> M. von Hagen, "The Rise and Fall of the Proletarian Sparta: Army, Society, and Reformism in Soviet History", in N. Naimark, D. Holloway, eds, *Reexamining the Soviet Experience. Essays in Honour of Alexander Dallin*, Boulder 1996, p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, New York 1996, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. A. Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War. Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1917-1933*, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, pp. 44-5.

ing from abroad to form one single scenario of threats bearing down on the security of the Soviet state. We find significant traces of this vision in a series of documents drawn up at the time when the retreat was decided. Firstly, we may examine the terms in which the Central Committee described the decision to party organisations a few weeks later:

The news which the Central Committee received in February of large-scale peasant revolts in the central zone of the Black Earth Region, in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Siberia, and in the Moscow region, brought to light a situation which could only be described as threatening. If measures had not been taken immediately to avoid distortions of the party line, we would now be facing a full-scale wave of rural uprisings, at least half our lower-level officials would have been killed by peasants, the sowing would have been ruined, the establishing of the *kolkhozy* would have failed, and our domestic and international position would be in danger<sup>29</sup>.

However, still clearer illustration of the background to the "abyss" mentioned by Stalin is provided by a Politburo decision of 11 March 1930 – at the peak of the peasant resistance, and one of the moments in which the regime was in greatest difficulty. The day after the Central Committee had sent all party organs the instructions "On the struggle against deformations of the party line in the *kolkhoz* movement"<sup>30</sup> (this was the official title given to the change in policy), it devoted part of its session to discussing rural resistance in the Ukraine and Belorussia. The decision which emerged from the meeting was classified as "exceptionally secret", and thus to be communicated "only to members of the Central Committees of the Ukrainian and Belorussian Parties, and to the plenipotentiary representatives of the OGPU". It expressed unequivocal alarm.

According to information in our possession, there is reason to believe that if there are significant rebellions of *kulaki* in the western regions of Ukraine and Belorussia – especially if, linked to the coming deportation of counter-revolutionary elements of Polish *kulaki* and spies away from the border areas, the Polish government could decide to intervene<sup>31</sup>.

The Politburo advised iron measures of repression and prevention of peasant revolts, in accordance with what was described twice (in the space of a few lines) as the "fundamental objective" – that is to say, to "prevent at all costs any mass demonstration in the frontier regions". It was therefore necessary to "implement with the utmost determination the Central Committee directive on the struggle against distortions of the party line (10 March), especially in the frontier regions of the Ukraine and Belorussia". It was specified that "within a week, an adequate number of expert Bolshevik officials must be transferred to the frontier areas to cooperate with local party organisations". And finally, "the operational members and ma-

<sup>29</sup> Danilov, Ivniitsky, eds, *Dokumenty svidetelstvuiut*, p. 390.

<sup>30</sup> On 10 March the resolution was telegraphed to party organisations in the country, and was subsequently published with the date 14 March: *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 5, Moscow 1985, pp. 101-4.

<sup>31</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 8, l. 114.

noeuvre troops of the OGPU" needed to be "reinforced in terms of numbers and quality"<sup>32</sup>.

The 11 March motion was also doubtless framed bearing in mind the operations of ethnic homogenisation which were currently in progress in the USSR's western frontier regions alongside the campaign of de-kulakisation. To add to all this conflict, there were also the demonstrations of thousands of Polish citizens of the USSR, who were demanding to be allowed to emigrate<sup>33</sup>. But the edges of the resolution extended far beyond the specific issue of national tensions intermingled with collectivisation of the countryside: one can sense the underlying vision of state security – a vision where the danger of an external threat was seen as closely linked to that of a worsening of the conflict in the countryside.

It was so urgent to stop the "rush towards the abyss" not just because peasant resistance was so widespread, nor just because the party had such difficulty in containing the revolts, but also because there was the perception that the regime risked being swept away from the outside at a time that it was being seriously shaken at its foundations. In the leadership's vision of things, it was a priority to prevent any link-up taking place between the collapse of the state's internal legitimisation, the growth of active resistance, and the appearance of threats from abroad. This was a new version of "war scare" – a version which differed from the 1927 panic in that it was not related either to any objective increase in tension on the international scene, or to internal party struggles. On the internal stage, after the final defeat of Bukharin and his group, no-one could dream of rivaling the Stalinist elite in control over power. And, on the international stage, the end of 1929 even brought important improvement in relations with Great Britain; for, after the election of a Labour government, diplomatic relations were re-established (it was the breaking-off of diplomatic relations in 1927 which had helped to feed the war scare). And with Poland negotiations were proceeding for a trade treaty (which was eventually signed in 1932).

Notwithstanding all this, among Soviet leaders the perception that there was a danger of war was quite marked. This was noted by international commentators who had the chance to obtain information and observe the mood among Soviet leaders. The secret dispatches which the British ambassador in Moscow, Ovey, sent in the weeks of the peasant revolts and the retreat in *kolkhoz*-isation policy, contain repeated references to Soviet worries on this score. On 8 February Ovey mentioned a "considerable increase in the temperature in the Soviet Union, where the authorities seem in the grip of feverish alarm about the security of their country". On 10 March Ovey describes how Litvinov, the new Commissar for Foreign Affairs, seemed "seriously worried by the idea of some hostile initiative"; in particular, Litvinov apparently stated that "in Poland there were widespread moods inclined to take any opportunity to attack his country". On 28 March, finally, Ovey says that "in all the recent meetings I have had with him, Litvinov has regularly expressed his fears about the

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Cf. T. Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing", *Journal of Modern History*, December 1998.

machinations of the capitalist powers leading up to an attack on Russia"<sup>34</sup>.

In 1930 the fear of an attack against the Soviet Union was a fear present within the leadership: there was no press campaign, the leadership simply used the semi-secret channels of Politburo instructions. And the roots of the panic were essentially the interpretation which the leadership itself made of the domestic crisis. This interpretation drew on the isolationist paradigm (which by this time had become well established). But it also drew on the pre-modern obsession with revolts at the periphery of the empire. (So it should be noted that Poland reverted to being the old frontier bogey – albeit under the new term “outpost of imperialism”<sup>35</sup>.)

It is true that it had become an established tradition to use alarm over the inevitable imperialist attack to keep people in line on the home front, but this does not seem to have been any more true in this case than at other times. What emerges most clearly is rather a mixture of features which formed an important part of Bolshevik culture in the years of the Stalinist revolution – acute awareness of the internal and external fragility of the whole system, at a time when society was being forced to undertake a great leap in production and culture.

I believe that this “vision of fragility”, which was rooted in the genetic sense of insecurity generated by the consolidation of the Soviet system during a time of civil war<sup>36</sup>, was reinforced by the messages coming from the military – worried as the latter were about the effects internal strife might have on the country’s security in general. For it was the military chiefs (whose job it was to look after the country’s security) who had first become aware of the security deficit caused by the campaign of collectivisation and the worsening of the peasant war.

The idea that senior military figures may have had a direct influence on the decision to beat a “retreat” is not a new one, for it has surfaced several times over the decades in the contradictory historiographic *topos* constituted by the role of the Red Army in the collectivisation of the countryside. In the case at issue it has been suggested that military leaders opposed the Stalinist line of de-kulakisation out of fear that the army rank and file (being made up primarily of peasants) might turn their arms against Soviet power. So Deutscher’s classic biography of Stalin portrayed Voroshilov as a critic of forced collectivisation<sup>37</sup>. (Deutscher was probably

<sup>34</sup> E.L. Woodward, R. Butler, eds, *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, second series, vol. VII, London 1958, pp. 97, 115, 121.

<sup>35</sup> In a work entitled *Will there be War?*, published precisely in 1930, Voroshilov described Poland as a “poor country weighed down by military expenditure”, the tool of “the great robbers who are preparing a fresh attack on the USSR, but prefer not to act directly but rather through the hands of others”, Voroshilov, *Oborona SSSR*, pp. 394-5.

<sup>36</sup> On the recurrence of visions of civil war in the Bolshevik Party, see A. Graziosi, “Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes et politiques gouvernementales à travers les rapports du GPU d’Ukraine de février-mars 1930”, *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 1994, 3, pp. 437-72.

<sup>37</sup> Deutscher argued that “Voroshilov could not ignore the effects of collectivisation on army morale”, and claimed that he had exerted pressure in the attempt to ensure that at least the soldiers of the military district of the Far East were exempted from collectivisation. I. Deutscher, *Stalin. A political biography*, quotation from Italian translation, Milan 1969, p. 508.

influenced by Trotsky’s imaginative but unlikely hypothesis, outlined in a number of letters written from exile, that Voroshilov and Budennyi were planning to lead a “Bonapartist” plot against Stalin<sup>38</sup>.) More recently, other commentators (drawing on Western diplomatic documents) have claimed that army leaders exerted strong pressure on Stalin himself to ease off the collectivisation campaign. Citing a British diplomatic report, Davies claims that Voroshilov “told Stalin that he washed his hands of responsibility for what could happen in the army if he continued along the road of brutal and indiscriminate collectivisation”<sup>39</sup>. Haslam puts forward a still more detailed hypothesis, on the basis of an Italian diplomatic report, which asserts that Gamarnik attacked Stalin directly over de-kulakisation, with the support of the former head of the PUR, Bubnov, during a Politburo meeting at the end of February, and even managed to outvote Stalin at an official vote of the party’s highest body<sup>40</sup>.

The archive papers on the Politburo’s activity during the crucial days of the “retreat” (which have become available since these various works were written) tell a very different story<sup>41</sup>. The meeting of 25 February 1930 is particularly worth examining in detail, for it was then that the idea of slowing down the pace of collectivisation began to take concrete form within the Bolshevik leadership, with a motion “On the results of the report of 20 February on progress in preparations for spring sowing of crops”<sup>42</sup>. This motion expressed concern about the delay in the agricultural calendar, and the possibility was raised that the setting-up of further *kolkhozy* might be put off for the time being. This was the moment that the road was opened for Stalin’s article on “dizziness from success”. It was in this meeting that there was discussion of soldiers and de-kulakisation. However, this did not take the form of a clash between politicians and military men, as imagined in the historiographical *topos* I have referred to. The point discussed was not even that of the extent to which the army in the countryside should take part in the “elimination of the *kulaki* as a class”, but rather the much more low-key one of whether “Red partisans” should be exempted from confiscation of property and deportation. (Exemption had already been granted to the families of members of the Red Army in the 30 January motion which launched the collectivisation campaign.) The Politburo did

<sup>38</sup> Cf. R.A. Medvedev, *Oni okružhali Stalina*, Moscow 1990, p. 240.

<sup>39</sup> R.W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive. The Collectivization of Soviet Agriculture 1929-1930*, London 1980, p. 260.

<sup>40</sup> J. Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-33. The Impact of the Depression*, London 1983. Haslam’s version of events is accepted also by Von Hagen (*Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, p. 319).

<sup>41</sup> However it is worth noting that these same archive documents reveal a surprising capacity on the part of Western secret services to obtain information about meetings of the Soviet government’s highest body – at least with regard to who attended. For they show that it was true that at both the Politburo meetings held in the second half of February, Bubnov and Gamarnik were indeed present – even though they must have been invited specially, since they were not members. (Cf. *Stalinskoe politbiuro v 30-e gody. Sbornik dokumentov*, Moscow 1995, p. 184). At the 15 February meeting the presence of Bubnov and Gamarnik was due to the fact that one of the items on the agenda was how to celebrate the 12th anniversary of the Red Army (this fell on the 23 February, and formed one of the most important holidays in the Revolutionary calendar. During the Politburo meeting, official slogans were approved for the celebrations) (RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 776).

<sup>42</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 777, l. 15-7.

in fact approve a motion put forward by Voroshilov, to add a clause to the plans for de-kulakisation to the following effect:

Former red partisans and genuine former fighters in the civil war (those who took part in battle, were wounded or distinguished themselves in other ways) are also exempt from the provisions for confiscation and deportation. Confiscation and deportation can only be used against this category of persons if they have turned into *kulaki* and struggle actively against collectivisation, or form part of counter-revolutionary groups. However, to avoid errors, it should be ensured that each individual case be examined by the local governing body of the party<sup>43</sup>.

It did in fact frequently happen that in the anti-*kulak* campaign, the local authorities attacked peasants who had played a leading role in the civil war on the Soviet side. When these men had returned home they were accorded various economic privileges which allowed them to acquire relative affluence. In the logic of the *pogrom* which characterised the campaign against *kulaki*, this was enough for local officials to brand them as *kulaki*, and therefore to confiscate their property. Now, since they often possessed charisma and were able to mobilise local support, former red partisans were not infrequently leaders of the peasant revolts. But, in any case, the presence of people who had excelled in the defence of the "socialist fatherland" was obviously a weakness for Bolshevik plans to demonise *kulaki*. And more generally, it contradicted the legitimating and citizenship-conferring function of military service in the Soviet army.

Voroshilov's worries were thus understandable, and his proposal was presumably willingly accepted by Bolshevik leaders. But things amounted to no more than this – an extremely minor correction to the criteria of de-kulakisation (and one which was approved at the same time as a drastic slowing down in the pace of the campaign was in any case being decided upon). There was no question here of discussing the strategies, or the role of the army in full collectivisation of the countryside. Nor was there any question of discussing the reaction at the various levels of the Red Army to the violent attack which the regime had launched in the countryside.

So there was no *diktat* of the military to the civilian leadership, no explicit pressure from Red Army generals on the party leadership, and still less any motion where Gamarnik outvoted Stalin. The idea of a kind of "settling of scores" between politicians and military leaders in the tense days around the "retreat" seems to have been unduly influenced by an *ex post* view of relations between the civilian and military powers at the end of the 1920s, and in particular by the supposedly "praetorian"<sup>44</sup> traits which some commentators of the post-war scene have seen in relations between the party and armed forces (which are seen as having divergent priorities)<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 8, l. 84.

<sup>44</sup> The reference is to Huntington's classic analysis, which mentions societies where specialised groups tend to intervene directly in the political sphere, and where "military intervention is usually a reaction to the radicalization of social conflict [...] combined with a collapse of efficiency and of the legitimacy of all political institutions", S.P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven 1968, p. 216.

<sup>45</sup> The clearest statement of this idea is provided by R. Kolkowicz, *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party*, Princeton 1967. For a re-working of the original thesis, see

At this time, less than ten years after the end of the civil war, the line separating military and civilian leaders was still blurred. This was not so much because the army was seen as an explicitly political tool (although this remained a constant throughout the Soviet period, even when the USSR was undergoing radical transformation), but rather because there was not yet sufficient institutionalisation to produce any thorough-going division of roles, between which power could be shared out<sup>46</sup>. This institutionalisation, in fact, was only fully accomplished after the Second World War. It may be useful to draw on the instruments of political science once again, and describe civilian-military relations during the Stalinist revolution as a special, late case of "subjective civilian control" over the armed forces – in other words, a system where there is direct control by politicians over the functional autonomy of the military domain and an "exaltation of the power of civilian over military groups"<sup>47</sup>. I say a late version, because the forms of minutely detailed control introduced during the civil war had outlived their usefulness, as a new class of fully-Sovietised commanders came through. However, at the level of the leadership, we cannot say that the system had disappeared, given that the top political and military leaderships continued to overlap.

What happened between February and March 1930 (i.e., in the weeks when it was decided to slow up the assault on the countryside) was something different from just a Soviet version of the traditional conflict between military and civilian visions of what should be the role of the military in domestic affairs. It was rather that, in the context of the crisis of the regime, the entire political leadership became contaminated by a vision of national security which came *de facto* from the military. During the 1930 crisis it was military leaders who became aware that, if the system was to hold together in the face of what they perceived as a situation of instability and internal and external threat, it was necessary to maintain a clear specificity of the military institution. This was not because military chiefs had any pre-existing belief in any idea of the functional purity of the Red Army; it was rather linked to an idea of the country's security risks which emerged among military chiefs in February. As peasant resistance grew, pressure increased from many of the regional military commands which found themselves having to deal with the emergency. And it was this which produced a perspective of general crisis among military leaders, a vision which subsequently affected the political leadership.

Between December 1929 and January 1930 Red Army chiefs threw the army into "active participation" in the collectivisation campaign. Their role was ambiguous since it was supposed to combine a technical contribution in the training of agricultural managers, the setting up of military *kolkhozy*, to be manned by soldiers who had left the army, and active support for the

also Id., "Military intervention in the Soviet Union: Scenario for a post-hegemonial synthesis", in R. Kolkowicz, A. Korbonski, eds, *Soldiers, Peasants and Bureaucrats: Civil-Military Relations in Communist and Modernizing Societies*, London 1982, pp. 109-38.

<sup>46</sup> This is the theory of T.J. Colton, *Commissars, Commanders and Civilian Authority. The Structure of Soviet Military Politics*, Cambridge 1979.

<sup>47</sup> S.P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State. The theory and politics of civil-military relations*, New York 1957, p. 80.



“liquidation of the *kulaki* as a class”<sup>48</sup>. However, already by the beginning of February the reality of the campaign had persuaded the military leadership to rethink its official participation in the “class war”. The fact that peasant resistance became more widespread was significant in shaping this change of attitude, but the crucial factor was the rapid slide into a situation where many army units were co-managing the operations of de-kulakisation, and the accompanying repression. For many local party organisations, as well as the OGPU, put pressure on local military units to help them out. In addition, some local army officers had interpreted “active participation” as an invitation to turn the army into the armed wing of the regime’s repressive force. All this led top military staff to fear that the army would lose its specific function as an organisation of national defence. Increasing stress began to be placed on *boevaia podgotovka* – military preparation – rather than on support for civilian bodies engaged in the collectivisation campaign and de-kulakisation. And this was before the new perspective of national emergency emerged among the political leadership.

From this point of view, it is useful to examine a number of particularly significant moments in the process whereby the perspective of the military leadership altered. First of all, we may consider an exchange of opinions between the Head of the Political Directorate of the Red Army, Yan Gamarnik, and a number of military commanders most closely involved in the struggles in the countryside. On 31 January the political directorate of the Volga military district proposed to the districts of the Ukraine, Transcaucasia and Northern Caucasia that “a socialist competition should be held between the districts for spring sowing, collectivisation, the training of cadres and the liquidation of *kulaki* as a class”<sup>49</sup>. The competition was thus to be held precisely in those districts containing the highest proportion of areas earmarked for full collectivisation. The results were supposed to be announced on 7 November, when a PUR jury would award the prize of four tractors to the winning district. The character of the proposal was fully in line with the radical positions taken up by Volga military district (where overall coordination had been set up between civil and military authorities to manage the collectivisation campaign), although reference was made to the letter of recent PUR instructions, which mentioned “socialist emulation” as a method to be used in political work<sup>50</sup>. The district of Northern Caucasia sent Gamarnik notice of their refusal to take part in a proposal which, as Kozhevnikov argued in a letter dated 14 February 1930, “contradicted the instructions of the RVS and the PUR”:

The situation in Northern Caucasia is so tense and peculiar that I do not believe it is possible to transform the district into an agricultural academy. We have therefore refused to take part in this socialist competition, even though we do

<sup>48</sup> Cf. A. Romano, “Contadini in uniforme”, and A. Romano, N. Tarkhova, eds, *Krasnaia Armiia i kollektivizatsiia derevni v SSSR (1928-1933 gg.)*. *Sbornik dokumentov iz fondov RGVA*, Naples 1996.

<sup>49</sup> RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 178, l. 69.

<sup>50</sup> On 15 January the PUR put out a directive “On reinforcing the leadership of the party and the further spread of socialist competition and shock methods in the Red Army”. This included the suggestion that local party bodies should “make use of socialist emulation in all branches of the Red Army”, *Partiino-politicheskaia rabota v Krasnoi Armii*, pp. 42-3.

not want to remain behind in preparing the district for collectivisation, and even though we are working concretely for the liquidation of the *kulaki* as a class, not to mention military training<sup>51</sup>.

Kozhevnikov added that he “hoped our refusal will not be interpreted as an opportunist gesture”. He need not have worried unduly. He soon received a letter where Gamarnik expressed the position he had been mulling over during the previous weeks. (The letter, dated 19 February, was sent to the head of the political directorate of the Volga district, but copies were sent for information to the other districts involved in the proposal.)

Your invitation [...] to organise a socialist competition between four districts, and the campaign which you have started regarding this emulation, clearly risks throwing in the shade the main objective of the Red Army (increasing the quality and speed of military preparation). Your invitation does not even mention the main objective – military preparation. [...] In addition, the formulation you suggest is clearly out of place – “a competition for the liquidation of *kulaki* as a class”. How can the army conduct a competition on the question of the liquidation of *kulaki* as a class? [...] The PUR sees the proposal you have sent to the other districts as totally inappropriate<sup>52</sup>.

It is significant that Gamarnik’s criticism was aimed at the head of the district where collaboration between civil and military authorities in the collectivisation campaign had gone furthest. His letter thus sent an explicit signal of support to those commanders who had reluctantly accepted, rather than enthusiastically embraced, the entry of the army into the vortex of de-kulakisation. The new priority was operational efficiency of the military units. It was this which had to be placed at the centre of political work, alongside training activities, so as to avoid a shift occurring in the functions of the army.

Gamarnik repeated his lesson a few days later (26 February) when he wound up the meeting of the PUR officials who had inspected the districts where tension was most acute. He argued that “a very major shift towards the reinforcing of military training” was necessary, and that this shift had to be underlined in the military press<sup>53</sup>. Directly afterwards, Gaik Osepian, Head of the Agit-Prop Department of the PUR, referred to the problem of the “compassion for the families of *kulaki*” which was widespread among soldiers and officials, and announced that his section was preparing an initiative which had the “objective of reinforcing class hatred of *kulaki*”. However, Gamarnik cut him off with a phrase which left no room for doubt, and which closed the discussion: “We can even do that, but only if we make sure there is no Medyn-type mobilisation”<sup>54</sup>. (In those weeks Medyn<sup>55</sup> had become the example of what to avoid in the involvement of the military in the de-kulakisation campaign: for this

<sup>51</sup> RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 178, l. 28.

<sup>52</sup> RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 178, l. 68.

<sup>53</sup> RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 293, l. 118-8 ob.

<sup>54</sup> RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 293, l. 119.

<sup>55</sup> On the case of Medyn, see Romano, Tarkhova, eds, *Krasnaia Armiia i kollektivizatsiia derevni v SSSR*, pp. 272-85.

village in the Moscow region had been sacked by a military unit.)

Just after the Politburo's resolution on the frontier zones, Voroshilov made another statement – similarly stressing military efficiency as a real security emergency – and this helps to clarify the perception of danger which was current in the Red Army hierarchy. In a letter he sent to Gamarnik on 17 March<sup>56</sup>, he outlined a scenario which was extremely similar to that traced in the Politburo and expressed the same concern that the internal fragility of the regime might be exploited by external enemies:

The international situation of the USSR, in this spring of 1930, is not turning out at all positively. The lies published in the foreign press by political and social representatives of the bourgeoisie about our domestic situation and the collectivisation of the countryside, the incredibly inflated rumours about anti-religious discrimination in the USSR, the hopes placed in *kulaki* and peasant revolts, etc., are stoking up the activism of certain militaristic circles. The very serious economic crisis in Poland and Rumania, together with the general political uncertainty which exists in most of the capitalist countries, may constitute a climate favourable to a decision to undertake military adventures.

Voroshilov's letter is in no way instrumental but expresses acute awareness of what he sees as a situation which constitutes a general threat to the regime – the same perspective which, as we have seen, the party leadership formulated in the same days. Voroshilov accompanied this outline of the international situation with a request to Gamarnik, the head of the army's political apparatus, to cooperate in mobilising the whole of the defence machine on the line of military defence. He argued that it was necessary to "adopt strict measures to bring the military units up to a state of operational readiness, and to keep them at this level for the whole of the summer of 1930". At the same time he believed it was necessary to "reorganise the whole of political-educational work [...] to guarantee the maximum operational vigilance of the military units". There was no room for any ambiguity over what the role of the Red Army should be in the current phase of the internal crisis: Soviet Russia was under threat from outside, and the Red Army needed to play its role.

The positions taken up by Gamarnik and Voroshilov show that the Red Army's "retreat" from active participation in the class war (which anticipated and accompanied the retreat of Soviet political leaders) was motivated by concerns about the functional efficiency of the army rather than by worries about the political reliability of the troops. This is worth emphasising once more, for, as I have noted, the traditional hypothesis is that the supposed opposition of military leaders to collectivisation was due to fear that peasant troops might actively revolt against Soviet power<sup>57</sup>. In reality, there was no repetition in 1930 of what happened in March-October 1917, when the collapse of the Tsarist regime's legitimacy had led to a crumbling of the

<sup>56</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 74, op. 2, d. 93, l. 39-39 ob.

<sup>57</sup> A recent article has re-affirmed this thesis, stating that "in 1930 the loyalty of the Red Army was in doubt" (R. Reese, "Red Army opposition to forced collectivisation, 1929-1930: the army wavers", *Slavic Review*, 1996, 1, p. 25).

<sup>58</sup> On this process, cf. A. Wildman, *The End of the Imperial Russian Army. The old army and the soldiers' revolt (March-April 1917)*, Princeton 1980, in particular pp. 155-6.

army under the pressure of agrarian revolt<sup>58</sup>. This was not just because there was no external military front, nor because the repressive effectiveness of the Soviet state was much greater than that of its predecessor. It is true that the rural revolt had deep effects within the army, and greatly exacerbated the conflict between political officials and "peasants in uniform" which had been one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Red Army's internal structure for years (this is, indeed, a characteristic which is significant in itself, and is useful in explaining the clash between the Soviet state and the peasants). However this discontent shared the general limits of the peasant resistance – above all, the fact that it was scattered and unable to unite, and the fact that it was vulnerable to repression. So although the Red Army proved to be still less capable in 1930 than it had been before of transforming peasants into reliable supporters of the Soviet edifice, and even showed some signs of internal strain, on the whole it was capable of weathering the storm of the peasant revolt<sup>59</sup>.

The essentially functional reasons which led the military leadership to embrace a vision of the Soviet state in danger (a vision which infected the civilian leadership during the emergency of the March "retreat") should lead us also to reflect on the militarisation of Bolshevik political culture during the "Stalinist revolution". From this point of view, the "hidden" war scare of spring 1930 contains a paradoxical shift in the terms of reference: for when the party induced a militarisation of the social conflict in the countryside, the leaders of the Red Army responded by a kind of "militarisation of the military institution". The shift in the attention of the political leadership towards the danger that the system might collapse (for it is this, rather than its instrumental aspect, which was the real distinguishing trait of the March retreat, and this which lay behind the vision of the "abyss" envisaged by Stalin) was linked to the surfacing of specifically military worries about security (worries which might almost be characterised as pre-modern, given the prominence of fear of revolts at the country's borders). These concerns had been gradually consolidating among Red Army leaders at the time of the revolt in the countryside.

This necessarily means that we need to re-think the role played by the Red Army as an active subject in militarisation of the political culture, and in the construction of the Stalinist system as "militarised socialism". Even though the test constituted by the 1927 mobilisation did produce a full-blown military-political ideological profile of a "proletarian Sparta", in 1930 (which was the real crisis threatening the stability of the mature Soviet system – a fact which should not be obscured by the fact that the emergency was overcome) civilian and military powers were involved in a different ball game. In this latter game, it was not enough to mobilise the propaganda state of the 1920s; perceptions and actors belonging to the later history of the "total security state" which emerged with Stalin's revolution were already in play.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. A. Romano, "Peasant-bolshevik conflicts inside the Red Army on the eve of dekulakization", *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 1996, 52, pp. 93-120.