

About the role of the Soviet Union in World War II, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the victory

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Through the recall of extraordinary victories achieved by the Soviet Union, its role in the outcome of the war is weighted and the common falsifications and misrepresentations of the historical truth are refuted.^b

Introduction

As the year of the 75th anniversary of the victory over fascism approached, the distorting and defamatory campaigns about the role played by the Soviet Union in the defeat of fascist Germany and its allies intensified. In these circumstances, it is convenient to show, if only by means of a brief revision, the decisive role of the Soviets in World War II (Díaz Lezcano, 2008).

Development

When Hitler decided to invade the Soviet Union, Germany had immense resources, which allowed it to organize a powerful war machine consisting of 190 divisions with more than 5 million soldiers and some 4,170 tanks, 4,950 aircraft and more than 50,000 guns and other artillery pieces. These forces were organized into three groups of armies, which had the mission of advancing through the south, the center and the north, in the direction of the cities of Kiev, Moscow and Leningrad. Fascist troops penetrated deep and fast into Soviet territory and approached Moscow, due in part to Stalin's erroneous and disconcerting opinion about when Hitler would launch against the USSR (Hobsbawn, 1998).

But despite the lack of preparation and the great human and material losses suffered, the military and civilians offered a tenacious resistance to the invaders. This attitude of heroic resistance limited the rapid advance of the adversary and made possible the colossal feat of dismantling and transferring to the interior of the country a large part of the industries located in the western areas, which would have a decisive influence on the course of the war.

In mid-September, Hitler decided to strike the final blow and occupy Moscow. The German offensive began on October 2, but for two months the troops commanded by Marshal Fedor von Bock did not achieve their objective, although they advanced considerably. The offensive was definitively stopped in early December, with reserve reinforcements mobilized from Siberia and other eastern regions, the Soviets, led by the then General Gueorgui K. Zhukov, went on the counteroffensive and inflicted heavy losses on the Germans.

The victory of the Red Army in the battle of Moscow destroyed the myth of German invincibility and the plans of the blitzkrieg, while strengthening the fighting spirit of the Soviets and other peoples who were facing

fascism. The German generals attributed the defeat to the harsh Russian winter. The "General Cold" argument has been used to this day by politicians and historians to downplay the former feat of the Soviet people during the war.

Despite the defeat in Moscow, the year 1942 was still successful for Germany and its allies. On the eastern front, the fascists managed to occupy an extensive and rich southern region and by October they reached the city of Stalingrad (now Volgograd), from where it was planned to organize a new attack on Moscow following the Volga basin. Meanwhile, Marshal Rommel's forces were advancing in North Africa, despite resistance from the British and American troops, which formed the anti-fascist alliance with the USSR on January. The Japanese continued to expand into Asia and the Pacific, although they faced increasing opposition from the US Army and Navy, commanded by General Douglas MacArthur.

But at the beginning of 1943 the situation on all fronts gradually changed. Germany and its allies began to retreat in the different theaters of operations. This was fundamentally determined by the Soviet victory at the Battle of Stalingrad between late 1942 and early 1943. The Battle of Stalingrad definitely changed the course of the Great Patriotic War and the entire war. Some 2 million soldiers, more than 2,000 tanks and nearly 3,000 aircraft fought there. The Soviets managed to totally or partially annihilate two enemy armies and captured just over ninety thousand prisoners, including the head of the 6th German Army, Marshal Friedrich Von Paulus. It was a tremendous blow from which Germany could never recover materially and psychologically. From that moment on the Red Army went on the offensive throughout the eastern front.

Taking advantage of this the Anglo-American troops were able to deploy extensive operations in North Africa, from November 1942. With superiority in men and military equipment, the Western allies were defeating the resistance of the Italian-German forces, made up of about 200,000 troops, until finally defeating them in May 1943. The most important battle in that theater of operations was that of El Alamein, in the territory of Egypt. And while the war was ending on the African scene, in the Pacific the balance was progressively tilting against Japan clearly manifested in the

Battle of Guadalcanal, concluded in February 1943.

The largest tank battle of the entire war took place in Kursk. 6,500 battle tanks participated, in addition to 4,000 aircraft and just over 2 million soldiers. The Germans lost the bulk of their troops, some 30 divisions, and almost all the military technique used. From that moment on, the Soviets took the strategic initiative on the entire eastern front.

With this advantage the Anglo-American allies landed seven divisions on the Italian island of Sicily, thus executing the “Husky operation”, which Churchill had conceived as a first step to organize an offensive in the Balkans with the objective of avoiding the safe Soviet advance in that area (*Correspondence*, 1957). But the situation on the peninsula made it advisable to move to the continental territory, an action that precipitated the collapse of the Mussolini regime, replaced on July 25 by the government of Marshal Pietro Badoglio. In the northern territory occupied by the Germans the so-called Social Republic was formed, headed by Mussolini, freed from its confinement by a Hitler commando.

Interpretations

Many Western historians and political leaders have attributed decisive weight to the successful operations of the Allies in North Africa and Italy, in which barely 1 million men participated, considering the two contending sides. These forgers of history come to compare the battles of Alamein and Sicily with those fought at Stalingrad and Kursk, giving them similar or greater importance. In reality it was the USSR fighting which facilitated the victories of the Allies on the African and Italian stages. The bloody fighting fought on the eastern front retained more than 70% of the forces and resources of the Germans and did not allow the transfer of troops.

Since Stalingrad and Kursk Hitler lost the strategic initiative, the fascist alliance was weakened and the spirit of resistance and faith in the victory of all peoples was strengthened. Prestigious personalities such as the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, highlighted the extraordinary importance of those battles. The decisive role played by the USSR forced the Western allies to draw up joint plans with Stalin, finally accepting the Soviet demand to open a second front in Western Europe. The importance of the new front, which would not open until June 6, 1944, through the Normandy landings, has been exaggerated by Westerners to the point of considering it the decisive action of the Second World War in Europe.

In December 1944, taking advantage of a momentary interruption in the fighting on all fronts, Hitler decided to launch an offensive in the Ardennes area. The western allies went to the USSR to advance its winter offensive. Despite the tremendous effort that this represented, the Soviet military managed to anticipate its decisive offensive in ten days, which practically

saved the Anglo-American troops from certain defeat. The forgers of history either fail to mention this fact or grossly misrepresent it. The offensive advanced a front of more than a thousand kilometers, from the Baltic to the Carpathians that penetrated deep into Germany.

In this atmosphere the Yalta Conference in Crimea took place, which brought together for the second time the heads of the three great allied powers. The fact that the meeting took place on the territory of the Soviet Union was an explicit recognition of their extraordinary role in the struggle.

After Yalta, the target for all the allies was Berlin. The Anglo-American armies managed to cross the Rhine river at the end of March and began their advance towards the German capital. The Red Army, after liberating Austria, began a powerful offensive on Berlin, involving 3 army fronts, 8,000 aircraft and more than 6,000 tanks. On April 30, almost at the same time that the Soviet flag was being hoisted at the top of the Reichstag, the Führer’s suicide occurred. Consequently, during the night of May 8 to 9, the representatives of the German high command signed the unconditional surrender. Shortly before, German troops had surrendered in northern Italy, as well as in Holland, Denmark, and Czechoslovakia. Thus ended the war in Europe.

Conclusions

The price paid by the Soviet people to rid humanity of fascism was enormous. They contributed 26 million deaths, 2 million missing and almost 20 million injured, many with total disability. To this must be added the disappearance of more than 80,000 cities and towns of all kinds and hundreds of thousands of kilometers of railways, roads and bridges, as well as other infrastructure works and economic facilities. A minimum of honesty must lead to recognize those realities and the great epic and sacrifice that Russians and millions of people around the world remember every May 9.

Notes

- a. Email: fragoso@infomed.sld.cu
- b. Original version of this article is (Díaz Lezcano, 2020).

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