which they lived (Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv, Vilnius, and so on) and to forward any information about human-rights violations. This information-gathering had already started under more difficult conditions in 1968, with the appearance every few months of an underground bulletin called the *Chronicle of Current Events*, which listed any violations of liberty or human rights. In this new context, human-rights violations in the U.S.S.R. swiftly came under international scrutiny, and the secret police in particular were held in check. As opponents of the regime became recognized figures, their arrest could no longer pass unnoticed, and information about their fate could spread rapidly abroad. Significantly, patterns of police behavior were soon linked to the state of détente; arrests were more numerous in 1968–1972 and in 1979–1982 than in 1973–1976. It is still impossible to calculate the number of people arrested for political reasons in the years 1960–1985. Dissident sources listed hundreds of arrests in the worst years; in 1970 the *Chronicle of Current Events* reported 106 sentences, including 21 forcible incarcerations in psychiatric hospitals "as a security measure." In 1971 the figures in the *Chronicle* were 85 and 24, respectively. In 1979–1981, years of international confrontation, almost 500 people were arrested on similar charges.

The phenomenon of dissidence was an expression of radical opposition reflecting a totally different conception of politics, one that counterposed individuality to collectivity. But in a country in which the government had always been opposed to freedom of speech, and particularly to the free expression of opinions contrary to its own, such a phenomenon was unlikely to have a huge effect on society in general. The real change was elsewhere, in the many different spheres of cultural and social autonomy that developed in the 1960s and 1970s, and even more so in the 1980s, with the gradual realization by one part of the political elite that changes as radical as those of the 1950s were once again of prime importance.

**Conclusion**

The preceding chapters do not pretend to offer any new revelations about the use of state violence in the U.S.S.R., or about the forms of oppression exercised by the government during the first half of the Soviet regime’s existence. Such things have been explored for some time now by historians who did not have to wait for the opening of the archives to see the development or scale of the terror. On the other hand, the opening of the archives does allow an account of the terror’s chronological development and of its scale and various forms. Accordingly, the outline presented in the preceding pages constitutes a first step in compiling an inventory of questions that must be asked about the use of violence, its constant recurrence, and its meaning in different contexts.

As such, this research is part of a larger movement that has been under way for a decade now both in the West and in Russia. Since the first partial opening of the archives, historians have been trying to reconcile one brand of historiography, born in unusual circumstances, with the newly available data. For several years now, a number of historians, particularly in Russia; have been publishing material that has formed the basis of many other studies and university courses. Some fields of investigation have been better covered than others, particularly the concentration camps, the confrontation between the
government and the peasantry, and decision making at high levels of government. Historians such as V. N. Eremukhov and N. Bugai have tried to calculate the number of deportations that took place in the Stalinist era. V. P. Danilov in Russia and A. Graziosi in Italy have highlighted the continuity in the clashes between the peasantry and the new regime. Looking at the archives of the Central Committee, O. Khlevnyuk has shed important light on the functioning of the Kremlin "First Circle."

Using such research as a basis for my own, I have attempted to demonstrate how, in the years following 1917, cycles of violence became the norm in the U.S.S.R. These cycles of violence lie at the heart of the social history of the Soviet Union, a history that is still waiting to be written. Building upon earlier efforts to explore the most tragic aspects of this history, I have drawn upon sources that most clearly expose the different forms of violence and repression, the practices involved, and the groups victimized. These sources also reveal the contradictions and inconsistencies, such as the extreme violence of the Leninist discourse regarding Menshevik opponents, who were "all to be shot" but who were usually imprisoned instead; the extraordinary violence of the requisitioning detachments, which at the end of 1922 were still terrorizing the countryside at a time when the NEP had technically already been in place for more than a year; and the contradictory alternation in the 1920s between spectacular waves of mass arrests and huge amnesties to "empty the prisons."

The multiplicity of cases yields an inventory of the forms of violence used, broadening the scope of the investigation into the practices, the scale, and the meaning of mass terror.

The persistence of such practices until Stalin's death and their determining influence in the social history of the U.S.S.R. seem to justify the reexamination of political history to second place, at least in the early stages of such an investigation. In this reconstruction I have tried to synthesis long-acknowledged facts with recently released documentary evidence, which constantly raises new questions. Many of these documents are reports from the grass-roots level, such as the correspondence of civil servants relating to the famine, local Cheka reports on the strikes at Tula, and administrative reports on the status of prisoners in the concentration camps—all of which reveal the concrete reality of that extremely violent world.

Before addressing the major questions at the heart of this study, it is necessary to recall the different cycles of violence and repression.

The first cycle, from the end of 1917 to the end of 1922, began with Lenin's seizure of power, which he saw as a necessary part of civil war. This was a brief phase in which spontaneous social violence was channeled into official structures, which then acted as catalysts in breaking up the old order, a deliberate offensive against the peasantry took shape in the spring of 1918. This offensive, even more than the military confrontations between the Reds and the Whites, was to provide the model for several decades of terror. It destroyed people's faith in the machinery of politics. What is striking is the constant refusal to negotiate despite the high stakes involved, the regime's tenacious hold on power, and its frequent deviations from proclaimed goals, particularly evident in the repressive measures taken against the working classes—the group would have imagined to be the natural ally of the Bolsheviks. In this respect the Kronstadt revolt was a clear sign of things to come. The first cycle did not end with the defeat of the Whites or with the NEP, but was prolonged by the very people it created. It came to an end only with the famine of 1922, which broke the last peasant resistance.

What can one make of the short pause, from 1923 to 1927, between the two cycles of violence? There were some indications that once the civil war was over and the manpower of the secret police was scaled back, a truce of sorts would be established with the peasantry, and a reform of the legal system could be carried out. Despite these palliatives, the secret police not only remained in existence but also preserved their main functions and continued their control, monitoring, and surveillance operations. The pause was notable for its brevity.

Whereas the first cycle of repression was marked by direct and generalized confrontation, the second began with an offensive by the Stalinist group against the peasantry in the context of political in-fighting at the top. The second cycle of violence was perceived as a new beginning by all parties concerned. Politicians again used methods that had been tried and tested over previous years. Violence had become such an everyday occurrence, so much a way of life, that the new terror went on for another quarter of a century. The second war against the peasantry was decisive in institutionalizing terror as a means of government. This was manifested in several different ways. Collectivization made use of preexisting social tensions, reawakening the archaic violence that was lurking beneath the surface in society; it began the system of mass deportations; and it became the proving ground for up-and-coming politicians. Furthermore, by setting up a predatory system that disrupted the cycle of production—in Bukharin's words, "the military and feudal exploitation of the peasantry"—a new form of slavery was invented. This opened the way for the most extreme experiments of Gulagism and the famine of 1933, which in the grand total of deaths under Stalin accounts for the highest number. After that limit had been reached—when there were no peasants left to sow the next harvest, and the
prisons were full—another brief, two-year truce was established, and for
the first time there was an amnesty. But such rare moments of relaxation did
little more than generate new tensions. For example, the children of deported
kulaks had their civil rights restored, but they were not permitted to return
home.

After the war against the peasants, the terror began to manifest differ-
ently during the 1930s and 1940s, changing in intensity and form. The time of
the Great Terror, from late 1936 to 1938, brought more than 85 percent of all
the death sentences handed down during the entire Stalinist period. During
these years the social origins of the victims were often extremely mixed. Al-
though many cadres were arrested and executed, the terror claimed victims
from all social backgrounds, many of whom were chosen arbitrarily when
quotas had to be filled. This blind and barbarous repression, when the terror
was at its height, seems to indicate that some obstacles were simply insur-
mountable, and that liquidation was the only course the state could find to
impose its will.

Another way of investigating the sequence of repressions is to look at the
social groups that were affected. Insofar as different areas of social interaction
became increasingly subject to legislation throughout the decades, several dis-
crete offensives can be discerned. The last one in particular was aimed at the
ordinary people of the country, with the increase in legislation in 1938 focused
almost exclusively on the working classes.

After 1940, in the context of the Sovietization of the new territories
that had been annexed and the “Great Patriotic War,” a series of repress-
ions resumed. This time there were new groups of victims—the “national-
ists” and “enemy peoples” who subsequently underwent systematic
deportation. The early stages of this new wave were visible in 1936 and
1937, notably in the deportation of Koreans, when the frontiers were being
tightened.

The annexation of eastern Poland and then of the Baltic states in 1939–
1941 led to the elimination of the “nationalist bourgeoisie” and to the depar-
tation of specific minority groups, for example the Poles from eastern Galicia.
This last practice intensified during the war despite the more pressing need to
defend a country facing possible annihilation. The successive deportation of
whole groups—such as Germans, Chechens, Tatars, Kalmyks—also revealed
the expertise that had been developed in these operations in the 1930s. The
practices, however, were not confined to the war years. They continued in other
forms throughout the 1940s as part of the long process of pacification and
Sovietization in the newly annexed regions of the Soviet empire. At the same
time the influx of huge nationalist contingents into the Soviet gulags had an
important influence on the structure and composition of the concentration
camp world. Representatives of the “punished peoples” and nationalist resis-
tance fighters soon outnumbered the Soviet prisoners.

In parallel to that growth, the years immediately following the war saw yet
another hardening of government policy toward various forms of civil behavior,
resulting in a steady increase in the gulag population. The same period marked
the numerical apogee of that population and the beginning of the crisis of the
gulags, which were outdated, paralyzed by multiple internal tensions, and beset
by ever-greater problems of economic inefficiency.

The last years of the Stalinist period, still largely shrouded in uncertainty,
show a series of relapses: a resurgence of latent antisemitism; a return of the
idea of the conspiracy, rivalry, and in-fighting among ill-defined factions; and
the elitist and clique-ridden nature of the secret police and the regional Party
organizations. Historians are led to wonder whether plans were being laid for
a last campaign, a new Great Terror, whose principal victims might have been
the Soviet Jews.

This brief overview of the first thirty-five years of Soviet history under-
scores the continuity of extreme violence as a means of political control of the
society.

The classic question, often raised in this context, concerns the continuity
between the first Leninist cycle and the second Stalinist cycle: to what extent
did the former prefigure the latter? The historical configuration in both cases
is really quite incomparable. The “Red Terror” grew out of the widespread
confrontations of the autumn of 1918. The extreme nature of the repressions
was in part a reaction to the radical character of the times. But the restarting
of the war against the peasantry, which was at the root of the second wave of
terror, occurred during what was basically a time of peace, and was part of a
long-lasting offensive against the majority of society. Besides these important
differences in context, the use of terror as a key instrument in the Leninist
political project had been foreseen before the outbreak of the civil war, and was
intended to be of limited duration. From that point of view, the short truce
ushered in by the NEP and the complex debates among Bolshevik leaders about
possible ways forward seem to indicate the possibility of normalized relations
between the Bolsheviks and society and the abandonment of terror as a means
of government. In practice, however, during this period the rural world lived
in retreat, and the relationship between the government and society was char-
acterized largely by mutual ignorance.

The war against the peasants is the nexus linking these two cycles of
violence. The practices that emerged in 1918–1922 continued. In both periods,
requisitioning campaigns were used, social tensions within the peasantry were
encouraged, and archaic forms of brutality became commonplace. Both executioners and victims had the conviction that they were reliving a previous scenario.

Even if the Stalinist era represents a specific social context in the use of terror as a means of government and social management, questions remain about links with other periods in Soviet history. In that respect the policy of deportation, for example, might have an important antecedent in the de-Cossackization operations of 1919–20. At the moment when Cossack territories were being seized, the government began a deportation operation that affected the entire indigenous population. That operation followed one that had targeted the better-off Cossacks, ending in “large-scale physical extermination” thanks to the overzealousness of local agents. These events could be said to foreshadow the practices of a decade later, albeit on a totally different scale. Both involved the stigmatization of an entire social group, an overreaction at the local level, and an attempt at eradication through deportation. In all of these aspects there are troubling similarities to the practices of dekulakization.

If one examines in a wider sense the phenomenon of exclusion and isolation of enemy groups, and the consequent creation of a camp system during the civil war, one is forced to acknowledge that there are indeed important differences between the two cycles of repression. The camps that were developed and used during the civil war in the 1920s bore little resemblance to those of the 1930s. The great reforms of 1929 not only led to the abandonment of normal systems of detention, but also laid the foundation for a new system characterized above all by the idea of forced labor. The appearance and development of the gulag system point to the existence of a grand plan for the exclusion of a certain segment of the population, and the use of that segment in a project to transform the economy and society as a whole. Several elements point clearly to the existence of such a grand design, and have been the object of important studies. First, there is the extent to which the terror was a well-planned and well-orchestrated phenomenon. The use of quotas stretched from dekulakization to the Great Terror, a fact that can be interpreted as being part of such a plan. The archives confirm an obsession with numbers and statistics that permeated administrative organs from top to bottom. Regular, perfectly balanced statistics evince an obsessive preoccupation with the mathematical dimensions of the repression process. While such figures can never be entirely trusted, they do allow historians to reconstruct periods of intensity in the phenomenon. The chronology of the various waves of oppression is better understood today, and supports the theory of an ordered series of operations.

Conclusion

To a significant degree, however, reconstruction of the entire series of repressive procedures, of the chain of command, and of the methods of implementation counteracts the theory of a well-conceived, long-term plan. Looking at the planning of repressions, one can see that chance played a huge role and that cracks appeared at all stages of the operations. The deportation of the kulaks is a case in point. They were often deported with no destination in mind, and their “abandonment in deportation” is a clear indicator of the prevailing chaos. Likewise, the “campaigns of emptying” the camps suggest a lack of planning. In the transmission and execution of orders, troops often went too far too soon and were guilty of “excessive zeal” or “deviation from the path” at a grass-roots level.

The role of the gulags is also extremely complex and seems to become more so as research progresses. In contrast to the vision of a Stalinist order in which gulags were the hidden but entirely representative face of the regime, documents now available suggest contradictory interpretations. The successive arrival of repressed groups often promoted disorganization rather than efficiency in the system. Despite an extremely elaborate system of classification of the detainees, boundaries between different categories were fragile and often illusory. Moreover, the question of the system’s economic profitability remains unanswered.

To contend with these contradictions, improvisations, and illogicalities, several hypotheses have been put forward to explain the frequent recourse to mass repression and the way in which violence and terror seemed to create their own logic.

Historians have stressed the role played by improvisation and the general lack of focus in directing “the Great Moment” of modernization and the unleashing of the Stalinist cycles of repression. Often the authorities would step up the intensity of terror so that they could persuade themselves that they were in control of volatile situations. They were quickly caught up in an extreme spiral of violence that almost immediately became self-perpetuating. The scale of this phenomenon escaped contemporary historians and is only now beginning to be understood. The process of repression itself, seemingly the only possible response to the conflicts and obstacles confronted by the authorities, generated uncontrollable movements that fueled the terror.

The central place of terror in the political and social history of the U.S.S.R. poses increasingly complex questions today. Current research seems to negate many of the conclusions previously drawn by Sovietologists. While historians still seek a general and definitive explanation of the whole phenomenon, it is extremely resistant to understanding. More progress
is being made in understanding the mechanisms and dynamics of the violence itself.

Many gray areas remain, particularly regarding the everyday behavior of people reacting to the violence. If one wishes to find out who the executioners actually were, then it is the whole of society that must be questioned—all those who took part in the events, not just the victims.

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World Revolution, Civil War, and Terror

Stéphane Courtois, Jean-Louis Panné, and Rémi Kauffer