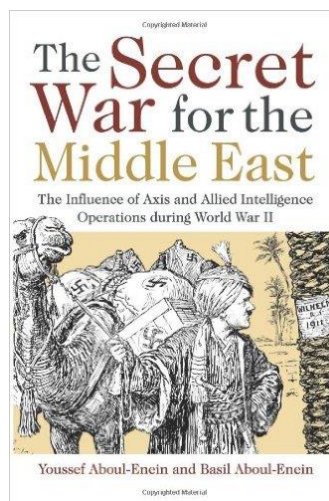


David Stahel. *Operation Typhoon: Hitler's March on Moscow, October 1941*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013.



Youssef Aboul-Enein and Basil Aboul-Enein. *The Secret War for the Middle East: The Influence of Axis and Allied Intelligence Operations during World War II*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013.

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These two fascinating texts are important, and timely, contributions to the strategic and operational history of the Second World War. Both books seek to provide historical context to situate military and political developments in their respective regions. There are a number of points of comparison between the texts, such as the subjects of propaganda, logistics, operations as well as foreign policy, in particular, as they relate to the Axis and Allied powers.

Commander Youssef H. Aboul-Enein, USN, is a lecturer for the National Intelligence University, and is Chair of Islamic Studies at the National Defense University. Aboul-Enein has published several books on the subject of the Middle East in 20th century affairs. His 2010 book *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat* addressed that topic from an ideological perspective. *The Secret War for the Middle East*, written with his brother Captain (retired) Basil Aboul-Enein, USAF, examines Allied and Axis intervention in the region in the lead up to and during the Second World War.

David Stahel, lecturer at the University of New South Wales, Canberra, has written a series of books on the Wehrmacht's campaigns against the Red Army in 1941. Following from the research of revisionist historian David Glantz, Stahel utilizes extensive and newly uncovered archival documents to make his argument that Germany was hopelessly outmatched by the Red Army, which, despite the setbacks of the summer and fall of 1941, quickly rebounded and indeed emerged stronger than its antagonist. Glantz' and Stahel's work complements one other: Glantz' work highlights the experience of the Red Army (see, for example, 2005's *Colossus Reborn: The Red Army at War, 1941-1943*), whereas Stahel's focus is the Wehrmacht. Written for a general audience, *Operation Typhoon* does include some details of the Soviet developments, although the text is primarily focused on the German perspective. Stahel is particularly interested in revising existing historical accounts that favor what he considers limited either-or explanations for the failure of the campaign: either the weather, or Red Army

resistance, or Hitler's interference. Stahel argues for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach (299).

Operation Typhoon follows from two preceding Stahel books detailing the organization and execution of Operation Barbarossa and the battle of Kiev: *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East* (2009), and *Kiev 1941: Hitler's Battle for Supremacy in the East* (2011). Stahel's narrative here is tied primarily to Army Group Centre and its commander, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, who in the period in question had under his command nearly 1.9 million soldiers (300). In this monograph, Stahel transitions from analyzing the major summer battles - Smolensk, Yel'nya, and Kiev in particular - and explores the logistical and operational situation preceding the battle of Moscow. In this way, *Operation Typhoon* sets up the ensuing volume that deals specifically on the battle of Moscow proper (*The Battle for Moscow*, 2015).

Stahel employed several historical comparisons to contextualize his narrative of Operation Typhoon. In addition to the significant comparison with Napoleon's drive to and capture of Moscow in 1812, Stahel also employed Clausewitz' concept of "the country" to frame the situation in Russia, in particular the set-backs suffered by the German army as a result of weather, disease, partisans and faltering supply-lines (9). Key thresholds in the narrative are the staggering battles of Viaz'ma and Briansk, in which millions of soldiers were engaged, the culmination of the operational learning of Bock's Army Group Centre. These enormous encirclement battles were masterpieces of operational planning and execution, and although very costly to the attacker, did destroy over 60 Soviet divisions in 7 armies and captured more than 600,000 Red Army soldiers (162). The destruction of these armies also resulted in significant partisan activity behind the German lines. Furthermore, the delay induced from annihilating these Soviet armies ultimately ground-down the offensive toward Moscow in the last weeks before the onset of the Russian winter, weather for which the Wehrmacht was totally unprepared. Stahel presents a convincing portrayal of Germany's defeat: ideological military thinking in Berlin, the limitations of the German economy, the lack of preparation for a winter offensive, and the Red Army's astounding resilience foredoomed the final German advance on Moscow long before Zhukov began arranging the capital's defenses. Indeed, Stahel suggests that the military problem of the Eastern war were essentially insurmountable as early as August 1941.

Stahel utilizes a number of selections from personal accounts, both from the commanding officers and soldiers at the front, to suggest a disparity of opinion regarding the success or failure of the war effort. Stahel stressed that the Soviet command was also prone to failing to learn from its mistakes, and the failure to grasp the operational lessons of Kiev, and the opening battles of Barbarossa, indicated serious deficiencies in Red Army leadership. It was this deficiency, in part, that contributed to the catastrophes at Viaz'ma and Briansk (301). Nevertheless, by November 1941, Bock's offensive was stalled at three separate points: at Tula, Kalinin and at Mozhaisk, outside Moscow. The ability to win the battle but lose the war is what makes these accounts particularly fascinating, and Stahel argues that the Wehrmacht suffered from an overly intensive focus on the operational context to the exclusion of strategy.

The operations and battles described in the text are accompanied by a detailed series of maps, drawn from David Glantz' collection (for example, see Glantz's forthcoming *Barbarossa Derailed: The Battle for Smolensk 10 July - 10 September 1941* Volume 4 – Atlas), as well as illustrations and black and white photographs. The intriguing dust-cover photograph of Hitler, Keitel, Mussolini, Jodl and Ugo Cavallero pondering the strategic situation in April 1942 is also notable.

Youssef and Basil Aboul-Enein's *The Secret War for the Middle East* provides a different, but equally important, perspective on Axis and Allied strategy. Written for a professional military audience, the book is filled with pertinent information regarding the complex, and frequently ignored, role of the Middle East in the geopolitics of the interwar and wartime periods. The book is composed of a series of case studies, each examining the political background, followed by the major military, naval and air operations that ultimately shaped the Middle East during the war. Starting with Palestine and Iraq, the narrative then proceeds to Syria, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Afghanistan and finally Egypt. The context of Axis and Allied political maneuvering in each case is followed by a case study examining the outcome of Axis and Allied military operations related to each country.

The text frequently engages with controversial subjects. One example is that of the hundreds of Arab nationals held in German concentration camps, despite professed Nazi doctrine regarding supposed sympathy with the Arabs (74). Another controversial example is that of Arab volunteers in the German army (72). According to the authors, the dominant narrative is that the Axis missed an opportunity to capitalize on anti-colonial sentiment in the Middle East. This was the position of General Franz Halder, chief of staff until 1942, who after the war was able to emphasize failings in the east. Interestingly, Halder's thinking resembled that of military historian Basil Liddell Hart and his observations regarding the indirect approach to strategy. Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch had devised a similar strategy in July 1940 that became known as Operation Sunflower: a proposal to force the United Kingdom to split its forces between the Mediterranean and the British Isles (187). Likewise, Grand Admiral Erich Raeder of the *Kriegsmarine* endorsed a comparable approach to the Middle East, as a way to cripple the United Kingdom, while simultaneously providing the German war-machine with access to the supplies of oil it desperately required (79).

Both the Axis and Allies are targeted for criticism in their strategic thinking, with Churchill as a particular contender in this regard. Churchill's advocacy for an offensive in Egypt in 1941, in contrast to the focus on securing the Middle Eastern states to the Alliance, is described as having "failed miserably," along with the simultaneous proposal to retake Crete (93). Although the subject of the book is primarily at the scale of regional and international politics, it is refreshing that the authors also include details of military movements to support their case: notable examples include RAF and army operations in the suppression of the Axis backed Iraq revolt in Operation Sabine during the summer of 1941 (55, 67), and Operation Exporter, the brief Allied campaign to recapture Syria and Lebanon from Axis-Vichy control in June and July 1941 (95).

The disconnect between Germany's high command and the situation on the ground, a prominent feature in the failure of Operation Typhoon as expressed by Stahel, is reiterated here by the observation that, in February 1942, Hitler was preparing plans for the invasion of not only Afghanistan, but also India and Iran (156). Indeed, British sources expected an Axis offensive through Turkey as early as November 1941, if the Soviet Union collapsed (177). Operation Torch, in November 1942, changed the paradigm in the Mediterranean by introducing the United States to the North African

theatre, a development that forced the Axis to reorient towards North Africa to the exclusion of the Middle East.

Throughout the text the authors are keen to note the relevance of these subjects for coalition military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan today. The efforts by the Third Reich to build up Afghanistan's military, and the RAF bombing of tribal regions in Waziristan, in particular, are suggestive of modern parallels. Indeed, as the authors observe in their conclusion, there is evidence that al-Qaida had in mind some of these historical cases when it prepared its own training manuals (189). Historical parallels and context are all the more pressing now with the emergence of new threats such as ISIS.

The Secret War for the Middle East also includes two Appendixes: the first containing excerpts from Goebbels' diary for 1942 -1943, exploring the theme of propaganda that played such a significant role in the Middle East. The second, "Lessons from the 1941 Anglo-Iraqi Revolt," is a particularly fascinating document regarding mechanized and combined armed operations produced by Mahmood Al-Durrah, until recently the Iraqi Army's official historian (195). Several maps and a full index accompany the text.

These two books provide fertile grounds for comparisons. In particular, the theme of propaganda is significant. Stahel included numerous quotations sourced from Goebbels' *Sondermeldung* and provided examples of counter-propaganda from Soviet and Western sources. Likewise, Youssef and Basil Aboul-Enein discussed the efforts of Berlin and Rome to capture anti-colonial and pro-Axis sympathy in the Middle East. Indeed, both Axis and Allies went to great lengths to capture sympathy in the Middle East through propaganda. First, "Radio Baghdad came on line [then] in March 1936 the Palestine Broadcasting Service aired from British-mandated Palestine delivering programs in Arabic, Hebrew, and English; the transmitter was in Ramallah. In April 1940 Radio Tehran delivered Farsi programs, music, and shows to the Iranian masses" (Chapter 2: The Palestine Question). Egypt was another area where Italy and Germany alike went to great lengths to produce pro-Axis sentiment through propaganda (165). Operations could also serve as propaganda. For example, the Italian efforts to

strategically bomb Allied oil production in Bahrain, although they produced little operational success, were a propaganda coup for the Italian Air Force, the Regia Aeronautica (145). Stahel, in a similar vein, described the deployment of Vichy French and other national forces with the Axis during Operation Typhoon, which, although small in scale, bolstered the German claim to broad support against the Bolsheviks (277).

Another important point of comparison is the significance of logistics, and intelligence estimates of enemy logistics, which were crucial in both the case of the Middle East and the Soviet Union. The Aboul-Eneins noted the importance of Italian military intelligence for providing Erwin Rommel with information on British logistics (168), and Stahel observed the significance of Britain's Ultra decryption for supplying the Soviets with information on German deployments (273). Both texts also briefly addressed naval affairs, with the naval situation in the Red Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, discussed in *The Secret War*, representing Axis efforts to interdict Allied supply-lines with surface raiders and submarines (142). Likewise, Stahel discussed the convoys of Allied lend-lease supplies dispatched to ease pressure on the Soviet economy as its factories were being relocated farther east (234).

Although both texts utilize biographical and autobiographical material, in terms of sources, there is here an important point of contrast between the two texts. Where Stahel relied largely on archival documents, accompanied by secondary sources, Youssef and Basil Aboul-Enein are reliant, in general, on rare secondary sources, including hard-to-find documentary collections, although only infrequently on archival sources. Both texts include complete bibliographies and are fully indexed.

In summary, these are two highly detailed, professional texts, essential for understanding the interrelated nature of Axis and Allied strategy during World War Two. Both texts offer a combination of meat-and-potatoes military history, as well as illumination of the broader strategic framework. The texts emphasize the importance of historical context, and nuance, as opposed to black and white explanations. Both texts raise serious questions regarding existing narratives that warrant further examination from historians and policy analysts alike.

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