



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on May 20, 2022

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Terror by Starvation

As the world watches aghast, government lockdowns reflecting the Chinese Communist Party's "zero Covid policy" have left nearly 400 million Chinese immured within their houses and apartments, struggling to survive without food, water, medicine, and other essentials. Shanghai, one of the world's largest and most prosperous cities, has been reduced to a pitiful state, with hundreds, and possibly thousands, of people dying from lack of medicine, food, and clean drinking water, and some even taking their own lives to escape the horrors of starvation within their own apartments. Thousands of trucks bearing food deliveries from outside Shanghai have been blocked from entering the city, and their cargoes of vegetables, fruit, and other essentials have been deliberately destroyed by authorities or left to rot on loading docks. Meanwhile, farmers in one of China's most important agricultural regions, Jilin Province, have been blocked from planting crops because of province-wide lockdowns extending to the most rural villages, leading to fears of widespread famine later this year.



AP Images

All of this madness is being perpetrated, supposedly, in the name of eradicating the highly contagious omicron variant of Covid-19; yet many in Shanghai are beginning to suspect a more sinister motive for the horrors to which they are being subjected — namely, that the Shanghai lockdown and engineered food shortage is being inflicted in order to punish the city and its wealthy, cosmopolitan population long known for bucking Beijing and its fanatical CCP cadres. The immense wealth concentrated in Shanghai certainly poses a significant challenge to the authority of China's increasingly totalitarian dictator, Xi Jinping. The great lockdown of 2022 is looking more and more like an excuse to quell potential resistance from Shanghai and its pro-capitalist elites; only time will tell how far the Xi regime is willing to press to bring Shanghai under the CCP thumb.

Such a scenario might seem preposterous in the 21st century, in one of the world's largest and most advanced cities. Yet the past 100 years have seen numerous examples of man-made famine, of starvation arising from the fanatical implementation of socialist and communist principles, and even of engineered mass starvation used as a cynical tool of repression.



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The Soviet Union

The first modern communist state, the Soviet Union, began experiencing widespread famine almost immediately, across huge swaths of territory and among tens of millions of people. As the inheritors of the vast multiethnic Russian Empire, the Soviet Bolsheviks saw their earliest efforts at collectivization resisted stiffly by both farmers and herdsmen alike, from the sturdy farming villages in the fertile regions of the Ukraine and western Russia to the nomadic herdsmen of central Asia. During the first couple of years after the Bolshevik Revolution, the fledgling Soviet Union was convulsed by a multi-sided civil war, with Bolsheviks squaring off against anti-communist Whites, against anarchists, and against various secessionist factions, leading to wide-scale dislocation, slaughter, and some wartime famine. But the real hardship began as the Bolsheviks vanquished their various adversaries, consolidated power, and began implementing a communist political and social program that was as vindictive as it was radical.

The first to bear the brunt of the Soviet Communist regime's wrath were the Kazakhs and Turkmen of the steppes, who resisted collectivization of their precious herds from the start. In response, the Soviets instituted the policy known as *prodrazvyorstka*, whereby agricultural products such as flocks and grains were confiscated at gunpoint and a very low fixed rate was paid for them to luckless farmers and herdsmen. The policy quickly led to food scarcity and then to starvation on an epic scale all across the vast region now comprised of the independent countries of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; as early as 1919, roughly one-half of all the people in the region were starving. By 1922, as many as 750,000 people had starved to death.

Having learned how to apply the grim science of social engineering by starvation, the Soviets proceeded to unleash it on their most rebellious region, the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic north of the Black Sea, homeland of the Tatars and also many ethnic Germans. The Tatars, a Mongolic people descended from the original Mongol invaders from the time of Genghis Khan and his successors, were despised by the Russian Soviets for their independent spirit, and targeted for special treatment by deploying *prodrazvyorstka* anew. The policy was designed to "level" the incomes of prosperous farmers and other agriculturalists, and quickly led to starvation on an epic scale, especially among the detested "bourgeois"-leaning Crimean Tatars, the ethnic minority that probably suffered proportionately the worst of all Soviet peoples during the first decade or so of Soviet rule. What became known as the "terror-famine" led to as many as two million deaths among the Tatars, or up to 10 percent of their entire population, a shockingly thorough genocide seldom exceeded, percentage-wise, anywhere else in the world during the entire blood-soaked 20th century. Villages and entire regions were left mostly desolate, and orphans proliferated on such an immense scale that existing social services were unable to deal with the crisis.



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Predator-in-chief: The unspeakably monstrous Stalin starved as many as 10 million Ukrainians to death, and millions of other hapless Soviet subjects, in order to sate his unappeasable lust for power.

At the same time that this pogrom by starvation was desolating Tatarstan (1921-1922), Russia itself descended into a more general famine, as the vindictive agents of *prodrazvyorstka* — the dreaded Cheka in particular — began bearing down on refractory elements among the Russian farmers and peasants. The great Russian famine of 1921-1922 appears in hindsight to be a consequence of equal parts malevolent intent and collectivist incompetence. As historian Andrea Graziosi wrote:

In the crisis thus provoked ... the plan transformed itself into something else; that is, into a tool by which the state and its leaders (often meaning the despots at the helm) imposed their will and priorities on the country and determined distribution amid the conditions of extreme scarcity they had created. The economic balance was formally preserved, but because real revenues could not meet expenditures, the latter were “hierarchized.” The expenditures that were least important for the state did not receive real resources, and thus remained only on paper. Defense, steel mills, and big cities continued to receive at least something, and villages, provincial centers, textile mills, pension funds, marginal regions, and so on were left with close to nothing.

Whatever the particulars of its development, the mass starvation killed at least five million people in western Russia and eastern Ukraine, and subjected the survivors to unimaginable horrors, including cannibalism. One Soviet police report frankly acknowledged that starving peasants were “digging up bodies in order to eat them.” An appalled delegate from the International Red Cross, part of an international response to the crisis, reported that babies at a nursery in Odessa had “gouged their heels down to the bone, kicking against their rough blankets while screaming for food.”

By the end of 1922, the worst of the first wave of Soviet famines had abated, leaving a cowed and diminished populace in its wake all across Soviet territories. The Communists, under their leader Lenin, lost little time showing their own people, and the world at large, the lengths to which they were willing to go to bring about their collectivist Utopia. Little did the world suspect that the horrors of those early years of Soviet communism were just the beginning.



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In 1924, Vladimir Lenin died after several years of seriously declining health. Mostly an invalid from 1922 onward, Lenin allowed his most ruthless henchman, Joseph Stalin, to begin assuming control of the machinery of power. By the end of the decade, having eliminated all serious rivals, Stalin began a campaign of terror by starvation that dwarfed all of Lenin's artificial famines put together.

Contrary to popular belief, the great man-made Soviet famine of 1930-1933 did not begin in the Ukraine but rather — once again — in unfortunate Kazakhstan. This time, the famine was so severe that 1.5 million total people perished, of whom 1.3 million were ethnic Kazakhs, more than 40 percent of the entire world population of Kazakhs. In sheer percentage terms, this horrific genocide was probably the worst of the entire modern era. So ceaselessly did the reaper's scythe swing during those three terrible years that the Kazakhs were rendered a minority in their own republic, and did not regain majority status until the 1990s, after the demise of the Soviet Union itself. Because of their independent, nomadic lifestyle, the Kazakh herdsman of the steppes were regarded as significant obstacles to the Soviet Communists' pathological obsession with coercive industrialization and sedentarization. Their nomadic lifestyle being an affront to Soviet regimentation, the Kazakhs were systematically deprived of food and livelihood, often by zealous local officials determined to stamp out perceived resistance to their dictatorial whims. As the specter of starvation spread across the steppes, desperate Kazakhs cannibalized the dead and even murdered and ate the living in desperate bids to survive the horror. By the time the nightmare finally ended, the surviving Kazakhs were reduced to a sedentary and prostrate people, a condition from which they would not recover for the duration of the history of the Soviet Union.



A time to die: The body of one of the millions of victims of the Holodomor, Stalin's program of deliberate starvation in Ukraine in the early 1930s, lies unattended in the city streets, circa 1933.

Not long after the horrors unleashed on the Kazakhs, the monster Stalin turned his attention to his most detested foes, the prosperous independent farmers, or "kulaks," who populated Ukraine and parts of western Russia. Most kulaks had risen out of the ranks of abject serfdom thanks to the pre-communist "Stolypin reforms" in the early 20th century, designed to grant upward mobility to the Russian Empire's immense peasant class. As self-emancipated serfs, the kulaks bore witness to the power of market reforms in unleashing the lower classes from institutionalized bondage — a power Russian Communists, whose program required bondage of an even more onerous sort, were anxious to destroy. Accustomed to reaping the benefits of the rich chernozem soil in Europe's breadbasket, the kulaks had long resisted



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collectivization since the Soviet Union's inception. Now, under the iron rule of one of the 20th century's worst monsters, they were about to pay a terrible price.

Ukraine

While historians debate the deliberateness of some of the other Soviet famines, there is little doubt among reasonable scholars that the systematic starvation of the Ukrainians and their neighbors in what is now Moldova, an event known among Ukrainians as the Holodomor, was malice aforethought. The famine was produced in the usual way, by forced confiscation of grain and other foodstuffs and then its redistribution according to a strict rationing system that was both inefficient and ruthlessly stingy. By the winter of 1932, the Ukrainian countryside was full of gaunt, haggard multitudes of the starving, and by early 1933, the entire region had become an open-air mortuary, with corpses stacked like cordwood in many precincts. Up to 10 million perished in what was numerically the worst and most punitive Soviet famine of all, and, as with the Kazakhs, the social conditions descended forcibly into the extremes of human depravity. As historian Timothy Snyder wrote, "The good people died first. Those who refused to steal or to prostitute themselves died. Those who gave food to others died. Those who refused to eat corpses died. Those who refused to kill their fellow man died. Parents who resisted cannibalism died before their children did." In a rare surviving letter from the period, one desperate female doctor confessed to a friend that, while she had not yet become a cannibal, she was "not sure that I shall not be one by the time my letter reaches you." One horrifying eyewitness story out of many, collected by the Harvard University Refugee Interview Project in the 1950s, recounts one of the many thousands of cases of cannibalism documented during the Holodomor and its aftermath:

I was in Kiev [in 1933]. I was at that time in a bazaar ... called the Bessarabian Market. I saw a woman with a valise. She opened the valise and put out her goods for sale. Her goods consisted of jellied meat, frozen jellied meat, which she sold at fifty rubles a portion. I saw a man come over to her — a man who bore all the marks of starvation — he bought himself a portion and began eating. As he ate of his portion, he noticed that a human finger was embedded in the jelly. He began shouting at the woman ... and yelling at the top of his voice. People came running, gathered around her, and then seeing what her goods consisted of, took her to the militia.... [T]wo members of the NKVD went over to her and, instead of taking action against her, they burst out laughing. "What, you killed a kulak? Good for you!" And then they let her go.



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Confiscation: The confiscation and redistribution of grains from kulaks (wealthy farmers) in Ukraine and Russia led to starvation on an epic scale.

The full extent of this appalling historical episode, rivalling in scope the depredations of Hitler's Nazis, was mostly concealed from the outside world for the duration of the Soviet Union's sanguinary lifespan. *New York Times* Moscow Bureau chief Walter Duranty, for example, famously aided the Stalin regime in covering up the Holodomor, in a series of incendiary articles denouncing Westerners such as British journalist and Holodomor witness Gareth Jones for defaming the Soviet regime. In one 1933 article, Duranty smugly and self-contradictorily opined that "any report of a famine in Russia is today an exaggeration or malignant propaganda. The food shortage, however, which has affected the whole population in the last year and particularly in the grain-producing provinces — the Ukraine, North Caucasus, and the Lower Volga — has, however, caused heavy loss of life." For his fulsome reporting, Duranty was showered with praise by leftist literati in Europe and North America, receiving a Pulitzer Prize, among many other accolades. Such willful and callous misrepresentation — which neither *The New York Times* nor the Pulitzer Prize Board has ever condemned — beggars comprehension. But some idea of the depravity of Duranty may be garnered from his misspent youth; before becoming Stalin's most celebrated Western apologist, Duranty was a close friend and associate of British Satanist Alistair Crowley, with whom he participated in magic rituals and even shared a mistress.

The horrors visited on the Soviet Union by Joseph Stalin were not mere blind vindictiveness, but the realization of a program, horrifying in its consistency and inflexibility, whose avowed purpose was to accelerate collectivization and quash resistance by all necessary means, a program that Stalin dubbed the "Great Turn" or "Great Break" (*Velikiy Perelom*). Broadly speaking, this "Great Turn" consisted of three major areas of emphasis, the first two being accelerated collectivization and industrialization. The third area, less widely appreciated, was what the Russians called "*Kul'turnaya Revolyutsiya*," or "Cultural Revolution." In the name of this movement, the horrors of mass starvation in the name of collectivization were enormously augmented by wholesale purges of political rivals, intellectuals, artists, scientists — in a word, all who dissented, publicly or privately in any degree, with Stalin's all-encompassing plan of subjugation.



China

Although the horrors of the Holodomor and the many other engineered famines of Lenin and Stalin, as well as Stalin's sweeping purges, were discreetly hidden from or downplayed in the Western press, they attracted an admirer and imitator in an altogether different part of the world: Chinese Communist revolutionary leader Mao Tse-tung. By the 1920s, thanks to the zeal of Soviet agents such as Mikhail Gruzenberg (also known as Borodin) in the Far East, the communist movement had taken root in the Republic of China. The Chinese Communist Party was originally set up in Shanghai, and its first central conference, attended by Mao (who was operating out of the southern Chinese city of Changsha at the time) and a small circle of associates, was held in Shanghai in July of 1921. Eventually, Mao and his followers assembled an army and began prosecuting a long civil war against the Chinese government and its leader, Chiang Kai-shek, taking advantage of the chaos occasioned by the Japanese occupation and subsequent world war to gradually conquer territory. Following the communist takeover of Mainland China in 1949, Mao moved quickly to expand and consolidate power, invading and conquering two sovereign neighboring countries (Tibet and East Turkestan) while unleashing the usual reign of terror among his own people. His position secured, as he supposed, Mao then unveiled a comprehensive plan to implement thoroughgoing communist collectivism in China. Known to posterity as the "Great Leap Forward" (*Dà Yuè Jìn*), Mao's program, like so many Chinese products even in our time, was in effect a Western knockoff — in this case a rather close imitation of Stalin's "Great Turn." Driven by a desire to outdo their Russian exemplars, the Chinese Communists repeated all of the horrifying "mistakes" of the Soviets, on an even larger and more merciless scale, with even more horrific results.

Although the best-known images from that dark time are of the summary executions of dissidents and the ecstatic rallies of the Chinese Communist faithful, the real story of the Great Leap Forward is the mute testimony of the tens of millions of corpses of those starved to death by a government that first confiscated their rice paddies and property, and then mismanaged China's newly collectivized multitudes into perhaps the worst famine in human history. No one knows how many in China perished in the Great Leap Forward, or to what degree it was cynically and deliberately concocted by Mao and his inner circle of mass murderers. Modern estimates plausibly reckon the number of victims in the many tens of millions. In addition to the usual forced confiscation and redistribution of rice and other foodstuffs, coupled with the creation of collective farms, the Great Leap Forward featured such absurdities as the "Smash Sparrows Campaign" (*Dǎ Máquè Yùndòng*), an effort to exterminate all sparrows from China on the grounds that they competed with humans for rice and other grains. Following Mao's orders, millions of Chinese trapped, killed, and otherwise slaughtered millions upon millions of sparrows — only to discover that the sparrows also kept the legions of crop-destroying insects in check. With the virtual eradication of sparrows, insect pests proliferated rapidly, and widespread crop destruction by grasshoppers and other pests resulted.



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Mad Mao: Mao Tse-tung's "Great Leap Forward," which resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of Chinese, primarily by starvation, was a deliberate imitation of Stalin's "Great Turn."

Like Stalin before him, Mao also entertained fever dreams of a comprehensive Cultural Revolution (*Wénhuà Dàgéming*), which was carried out beginning in the mid-1960s, a few years after the end of the disastrous Great Leap Forward. As with Stalin's Cultural Revolution, the Chinese edition resulted in far-reaching purges of any and all deemed enemies of communism, and as with the Great Leap Forward, the Chinese version of a Russian innovation proved even more lethal. Mao and his followers not only targeted high-profile intellectuals and political rivals; they prosecuted the revolution down to every village across China, purging tens of millions more, from allegedly corrupt local officials, to teachers with too-independent a frame of mind, to farmers, merchants, and even schoolchildren deemed insufficiently committed to Mao's revolutionary cause. Yet again, the twin specters of both starvation and cannibalism reared their malignant heads, with the latter being deliberately encouraged in some areas as the ultimate act of revolutionary retribution against cultural dissidents. The Cultural Revolution and its symphony of suffering ended only with the death of Mao himself in 1976, after which China took a superficially different turn, opening its doors to foreign diplomacy and trade.

Ethiopia

As the horrified fascination with which the Western world viewed the atrocities of the Soviet Union and China receded in the 1980s, another spectacle of mass starvation by design captured the world's attention — although, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it was by no means acknowledged at first as a man-made catastrophe. From 1983-1985, the attention of the entire world was riveted on the East African nation of Ethiopia and a horrific famine that left over one million dead. Adding to the horror was the vivid news documentation of the event; for the first time, a famine was humanized by enterprising photojournalists canvassing Ethiopia's vast refugee camps for the dead and dying, affronting the senses of all decent human beings with pitiful photos of grotesquely emaciated children crawling with blowflies and being stalked by opportunistic vultures. Global public outcry over such images led to such events as the famous Live Aid rock concert, in which many of rock music's then-brightest stars gathered for an unprecedented benefit concert on behalf of the victims of the Ethiopian famine.

Amid all the outpouring of concern, few took the time to wonder how Ethiopia could suffer so greatly in a modern world of plenty. As usual, the reality was a lot more sinister than news reports of drought and



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crop failure tended to suggest. For years, Ethiopia had been under the iron rule of one Mengistu Haile Mariam, an appalling communist dictator who had overthrown Ethiopian emperor and dynast Haile Selassie in 1974 in a bloody Marxist revolution. Mengistu's blood-soaked rule had followed the usual Marxist playbook: close and cuddly ties with the Soviet Union, embrace of communist orthodoxy, wars of conquest waged against neighboring states, seizure of all farmland and manufacturing by the state, and, of course, the inevitable purges against enemies real and perceived. In Mengistu's horrifying regime, the purges included as a terror tactic even the mass murder of children, pitiful and helpless victims whose corpses were left strewn in the streets of Addis Ababa to be devoured by dogs and other animals.

Horrible as all these things were, the famine was worse still. One region of Ethiopia, Tigre, was at the center of a robust insurgency against the Mengistu regime. After a season of unusually low rainfall, crops failed in Tigre, Wollo, and other adjacent areas, triggering international calls for aid. But most of the aid shipments flown into Ethiopia were confiscated by the Mengistu government in a cynical attempt to starve the rebellious regions into submission. As with the excesses of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, the full scope of Mengistu's involvement in Ethiopia's planned famine did not come out until after the dictator's ouster in 1991. In May of that year, Mengistu was forced to flee the country, and his long Marxist reign of terror finally came to an end. He was convicted in absentia for the deaths of as many as two million Ethiopians, most (though not all) of them victims of his artificial famine. In an ironic twist, the convicted author of the Ethiopian genocide is alive and well and living in Zimbabwe, still enjoying the fruits of his nefarious career at the approach of his 85th birthday.

Lessons for Today

Too often discussions of 20th-century genocide are confined to the gas chambers, gulags, and firing squads. But there was an agent more lethal than any of these; the terrifying effigy of mass starvation, deliberately contrived by some of the most evil men ever to walk the face of this fallen Earth. For the purveyors of genocide, mass starvation is at once simpler and more insidious than purges by tanks and bullets. To quell resistance by naked force, men, military supplies, and unwavering official will are called for, with armed revolt in the ranks an ever-present risk. To achieve the same by starvation, however, it is necessary only to destroy or withhold food and its means of production — generally a much simpler task than eradicating a hostile military force or convincing armed underlings to mow down recalcitrant unarmed civilians. Against armed oppressors on an open battlefield men willingly leave their families to fight and, if necessary, sacrifice their lives, but against hunger, parents submit and beg rather than helplessly watch their children perish.

In comparison with the horrors of the 20th century, the current crises in China and the United States — where growing fears of food shortages increasingly inform local politics — may seem insignificant. Shanghai, to be sure, is not yet 1980s Tigre or 1930s Kiev. But the willingness of radical leftist regimes of the past to resort to the ultimate tool for enforcing compliance should give us pause as we contemplate what the radical Marxists in our midst — let alone in Communist China — might be willing to resort to nowadays, if they had sufficient means, motive, and political opportunity.



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