

pose in life to wage *jihad* (holy war) and become martyrs in the service of the Baathist ideology. The Syrian state manipulates religion to ensure that the citizens are willing to die for its survival.

Syrian textbooks spell out the spiritual rewards awaiting martyrs in the hereafter, but they also note the material benefits to be delivered in this life. The textbooks teach that the late president Hafez Assad “believed in the [elevated] status of martyrs and provides their families with much attention.” A ninth-grade textbook explains that this presidential care led to the establishment of a special Syrian city called The City of the Martyrs’ Children, where children of martyrs “receive compensation for the motherly and fatherly love they have lost.”

In light of this indoctrination, it is not surprising that Arab volunteers from outside Iraq fought American forces alongside Saddam’s loyalists. Instead of rejoicing at the collapse of one of the world’s darkest dictatorships, these young volunteers, many of them from Syria, chose to defend Iraq in the name of pan-Arab nationalism. They chose glorified slavery over liberation. They could not countenance the defeat of a fellow Arab regime, no matter how brutal and despotic, by America. Like many in the Arab world, they couldn’t digest the shock of seeing liberated Iraqis welcoming Americans.

The biggest task Americans face in reforming the Iraqi education system is not to refurbish schoolrooms or round up capable teachers (Iraq has plenty), but to attend to the content of what is taught: especially to replace the instruction in hate and loyalty to the tyrant with lessons in the meaning of citizenship, the intrinsic value of the individual, and a new Iraqi nationalism hospitable to democratic ideas. This is as big a job as the one we faced after the defeat of Nazism in Europe. Education is the only means of causing the next generation of Iraqis to grow into free men and women. And that alone will bring lasting liberation to Iraq. ♦

Stalin Lives!

At least in his birthplace.

BY MIKE MURPHY



Bettmann/Corbis

Gori, Georgia

I WAS in the Republic of Georgia, mucking about in its upcoming elections and fighting for democratization and the pro-Western New Rights party. While there, I couldn’t resist a quick visit to Gori, the hometown of one Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, aka Josef Stalin.

Stalin grew up poor, living with his parents in a rented 10-by-12-foot room in a small cabin made from rough wood. The cabin still exists, in the same place, except now it sits in front of a huge museum which has grown like a giant granite and marble fungus. The Stalin museum is several stories tall and as wide as a city block. Just looking at it gives you a powerful urge to crush some Kulaks and conquer Finland. At four o’clock on a weekday it was also closed. Ironically, the new mayor of Gori is a proud member of the center-right party I work for, and he was happy to crack open the old socialist funhouse for me.

Electricity shortages are a big problem in Georgia, and keeping the Stalin museum heated and lit is not a priority. It was dark inside. Late

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afternoon light poured in from tall vertical windows, casting a long row of fingerlike shafts down cold and vacant hallways. Along the walls, huge pictures of Stalin hung silently in the shadows.

Several of the dozen or so rather severe women who supervise the place appeared out of a dark corridor. I was content to wander around for a quick look, but rules are rules, particularly in the Stalin museum. The guide snapped her pointer to full length and motioned me to my assigned place at the beginning of the tour route. The guides work from a memorized script and that oration, like the museum, is frozen in time, circa 1973. Nobody here ever got the memo from Moscow about the fall of the Soviet Union. We start at one end of a large hall, looking at photos of the young Stalin, his wolfish eyes apparent even in kindergarten, and watch him age photo by photo. The guide’s metallic narration was the kind of no-nonsense stuff that sounds best coming over the bullhorn in a labor camp. “Comrade Stalin studied hard at school. Here are two poems he wrote in his own hand. He sang in the choir. He had a good voice. He studied theology at the university. He was expelled for revolutionary activ-

ities. He was sent to prison. He escaped. He was exiled to another prison. He escaped. He was sent to another prison north of the Arctic Circle where the guards crippled his left arm.” (A little revolutionary license here: Most historians say Stalin’s bad arm was actually from a childhood case of smallpox.)

The tour proceeds into a long hall filled with comradely photos of Stalin happily smiling with different revolutionary pals from the ’20s and early ’30s. As these pictures pass one after another and his many prematurely expired cohorts are named, a chilling thought comes to mind: The most dangerous

place to stand in the Soviet Union was next to Stalin and in front of a photographer. Every flashbulb begat a death sentence.

The museum is very big on Stalin’s many hard-earned credentials. A large proclamation announces Comrade Stalin’s membership in the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The members of the academy signed it *unanimously*, we are informed. Stalin was promoted *twice*, to grand marshal of the Red Army, for his brilliant military leadership in the Great Patriotic War Against Fascism. There is an entertaining bric-a-brac collection, featuring his famous pipe, a shaving kit, a few uniforms, and a gaudy accordion. Standing in the center of one room is what has to be the most menacing and ferocious table lamp ever created: a 150-pound behemoth of jagged steel crudely hammered into the shape of a Soviet tank crashing into battle.

One very creepy room features a death mask of Stalin made shortly after he died. Looking at it, or rather feeling the Stalin mask icily staring at me, I wanted to tear it into several different pieces and bury each one in



Stalin’s funeral (opposite page); a World War II veteran, outside the Stalin museum (above)

a different continent, just to be sure. The family photo wall, featuring Stalin the Romantic, is small. The narration clanks along briskly: “This is Premier Stalin’s first wife. They were divorced. This is his second wife. She committed suicide. His son Yakov was captured by the Germans. Hitler offered to trade Yakov for a German general, but Stalin refused. ‘All Russian soldiers are my sons,’ Stalin said. Yakov was shot escaping a German prison.” (Another rewrite: Stalin actually despised Yakov, and threw Yakov’s wife into Lubyanka prison after the man was captured.)

The best trinket is outside. Parked next to the museum is Stalin’s old private train car. Steel-plated, it weighs 80 tons. The interior features a kitchen and a few small rooms for his nervous servants and military aide, a private cabin—you can take a picture of his toilet—and a central meeting room finished in dark polished wood and hunter green paint. This command room contains a conference table and about five chairs for staff with the predictable Maximum Leader Chair

at the head. Stalin hated to fly and vastly preferred rumbling along in his armored train. (Knowing that any merciless Iron Ruler is a pitiful second-rater without a private steel-plated train car to tour his impoverished slave state in, Stalin gave one, after the war, to North Korean tyrant Kim Il Sung. His loony son Kim Jong Il still rides around in that train car, terrorizing the Korean people to this day.)

We locked up the museum and got back on the road to Tbilisi. The rough politics of the new Georgia awaited us as this fragile country moves along its bumpy road to democracy.

Once, loads of Soviet tourists filled the museum. Now it’s a tomb, but you still get an uneasy feeling the ghost of Stalin remains. The electricity is gone, the crowds are gone, and soon enough the museum may be gone as well. In a few years, I’ll look for that growling tank lamp on eBay. But when they tear the place down, I hope somebody buries that death mask. Quite deeply, in pieces scattered across different continents, just to be sure. ♦