

Stalin's Killing Field

Benjamin B. Fischer

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One of the earliest—and certainly the most infamous—mass shootings of prisoners of war during World War II did not occur in the heat of battle but was a cold-blooded act of political murder. The victims were Polish officers, soldiers, and civilians captured by the Red Army after it invaded eastern Poland in September 1939. Strictly speaking, even the Polish servicemen were not POWs. The USSR had not declared war, and the Polish commander in chief had ordered his troops not to engage Soviet forces. But there was little the Poles could do. On 28 September, the USSR and Nazi Germany, allied since August, partitioned and then dissolved the Polish state. They then began implementing parallel policies of suppressing all resistance and destroying the Polish elite in their respective areas. The NKVD and the Gestapo coordinated their actions on many issues, including prisoner exchanges. At Brest Litovsk, Soviet and German commanders held a joint victory parade before German forces withdrew westward behind a new demarcation line.¹

Official records, opened in 1990 when *glasnost* was still in vogue, show that Stalin had every intention of treating the Poles as political prisoners. Just two days after the invasion began on 17 September, the NKVD created a Directorate of Prisoners of War.² It took custody of Polish prisoners from the Army and began organizing a network of reception centers and transfer camps and arranging rail transport to the western USSR. Once there, the Poles were placed in “special” (concentration) camps, where, from October to

February, they were subjected to lengthy interrogations and constant political agitation. The camps were at Kozelsk, Starobelsk, and Ostashkov, all three located on the grounds of former Orthodox monasteries converted into prisons. The NKVD dispatched one of its rising stars, Maj. Vassili Zarubin, to Kozelsk, where most of the officers were kept, to conduct interviews. Zarubin presented himself to the Poles as a charming, sympathetic, and cultured Soviet official, which led many prisoners into sharing confidences that would cost them their lives.³

The considerable logistic effort required to handle the prisoners coincided with the USSR's disastrous 105-day war against Finland. The Finns inflicted 200,000 casualties on the Red Army and destroyed tons of materiel—and much of Russia's military reputation. That war, like the assault on Poland, was a direct result of Stalin's nonaggression pact with Hitler.

The Soviet dictator offered Helsinki “remarkably moderate terms,” in the words of British military historian Liddell Hart, taking only territory needed to defend the land, sea, and air approaches to Leningrad.⁴ The difference between Stalin's treatment of Finland and Poland underscored his imperial ambitions toward the latter. Moscow and Helsinki even exchanged prisoners once hostilities had ceased. (Stalin, however, dealt harshly with his own soldiers who had been in Finnish captivity. At least 5,000 repatriated troops simply disappeared from an NKVD prison and were presumably executed.⁵)

Benjamin B. Fischer is on the History Staff of CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence.

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Stalin was anxious to settle with Finland so he could turn his attention to Poland and the Baltic countries, which the Red Army would soon occupy and the NKVD would “pacify” using terror, deportations, and executions. Militarily, the war was over by late February, though a peace agreement was not signed until March. NKVD interrogations were completed about the same time. The Poles were encouraged to believe they would be released, but the interviews were in effect a selection process to determine who would live and who would die. On 5 March 1940, Stalin signed their death warrant—an NKVD order condemning 21,857 prisoners to “the supreme penalty: shooting.” They had been condemned as “hardened and uncompromising enemies of Soviet authority.”⁶

The Killing Field

During April-May 1940, the Polish prisoners were moved from their internment camps and taken to three execution sites. The place most identified with the Soviet atrocity is Katyn Forest, located 12 miles west of Smolensk, Russia. For years historians assumed that the grounds of an NKVD rest and recreation facility were both an execution and burial site for nearly a fifth of the unfortunate Poles who found themselves in Soviet captivity. Post-Cold War revelations, however, suggest that the victims were shot in the basement of the NKVD headquarters in Smolensk and at an abattoir in the same city, although some may have been executed at a site in the forest itself. In any event, the Katyn Forest is—and will probably long remain—the main symbol of the atrocity, even if it was not the actual killing field.

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 НАРОДНЫЙ КОМИССАРИАТ
 ВНУТРЕННИХ ДЕЛ
 - марта 1940 г.
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ГОДАРИНУ С Т А Л И Н У

В лагерях для военнопленных НКВД СССР и в тюрьмах западных областей Украины и Белоруссии в настоящее время содержится большое количество бывших офицеров польской армии, бывших работников польской полиции и разведывательных органов, членов польских националистических к-р партий, участников десантных к-р повстанческих организаций, перебежчиков и др. Все они являются заклятыми врагами советской власти, проникнутыми ненавистью к советскому строю.

Военнопленные офицеры и полицейские, находясь в лагере, пытаются продолжать к-р работу, ведут антисоветскую агитацию. Каждый из них только и ждет освобождения чтобы иметь возможность активно включиться в борьбу против советской власти.

Органами НКВД в западных областях Украины и Белоруссии вскрыт ряд к-р повстанческих организаций. Во всех этих к-р организациях активную руководящую роль играют бывшие офицеры бывшей польской армии, бывшие полицейские и заградники.

Среди задержанных перебежчиков и нарушителей гос-

Каменкин-М.
Каланович-М.

Memorandum on NKVD letterhead from L. Beria to “Comrade Stalin” proposing to execute captured Polish officers, soldiers, and other prisoners by shooting. Stalin’s handwritten signature appears on top, followed by signatures of Politburo members K. Voroshilov, V. Molotov, and A. Mikoyan. Signatures in left margin are M. Kalinin and L. Kaganovich, both favoring execution.

The Katyn Forest massacre was a criminal act of historic proportions and enduring political implications. When Nazi occupation forces in April 1943 announced the discovery

of several mass graves, propaganda minister Josef Goebbels hoped that international revulsion over the Soviet atrocity would drive a wedge into the Big Three coalition and buy

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Germany a breathing space, if not a victory, in its war against Russia. (A headline in the May 1943 *Newsweek* read: “Poles vs. Reds: Allied Unity Put to Test Over Officer Dead.”) But Goebbels miscalculated. Despite overwhelming evidence of Soviet responsibility, Moscow blamed the Germans, and for the rest of the war Washington and London officially accepted the Soviet countercharge. When the Polish government-in-exile in London demanded an international inquiry, Stalin used this as a pretext to break relations. The Western allies objected but eventually acquiesced. Soon thereafter, the Soviet dictator assembled a group of Polish Communists that returned to Poland with the Red Army in 1944 and formed the nucleus of the post-war government. Stalin’s experience with the Katyn affair may have convinced him that the West, grateful for the Red Army’s contribution to the Allied military effort, would find it hard to confront him over Poland after the war.

Professor Stanislaw Swianiewicz was the sole survivor of Katyn. He was waiting to board a bus to the forest area when an NKVD colonel arrived and pulled him out of line. Swianiewicz was an internationally recognized expert on forced labor in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, who had been born in Poland when it was still part of the Russian empire, and had studied in Moscow. He ended up in Siberia, and after the war emigrated to the United States, where he taught economics at the University of Notre Dame. At least one CIA analyst remembers the professor from his days in South Bend.

Those who died at Katyn included an admiral, two generals, 24 colonels, 79 lieutenant colonels, 258 majors,

654 captains, 17 naval captains, 3,420 NCOs, seven chaplains, three landowners, a prince, 43 officials, 85 privates, and 131 refugees. Also among the dead were 20 university professors; 300 physicians; several hundred lawyers, engineers, and teachers; and more than 100 writers and journalists as well as about 200 pilots.⁷ It was their social status that landed them in front of NKVD execution squads. Most of the victims were reservists who had been mobilized when Germany invaded. In all, the NKVD eliminated almost half the Polish officer corps—part of Stalin’s long-range effort to prevent the resurgence of an independent Poland.

Recent historical research shows that 700-900 of the victims were Polish Jews.⁸ Ironically, the Germans knew this, and it complicated Goebbels’ effort to portray the atrocity as a “Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy”—a mainstay of the Nazi regime’s anti-Semitic propaganda.

Katyn in America

Katyn created a big echo in the United States. Dozens of books have been written on the subject—the Library of Congress has catalogued 19 new ones since 1975—and several Web sites on the Internet are devoted to it. There is a Katyn memorial in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, and one

Web site belongs to a Baltimore group trying to raise funds to erect a monument there. Several states and many cities have issued commemorative proclamations. The most recent was signed by New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman, who designated 15 September 1996 “Katyn Forest Massacre Day.” The commemorative statement is available on the Internet. In 1988, Alaska chose 30 April as a “Day To Remember Katyn.” A Web site maintained by the Archaeological Institute of America tracks excavations at Katyn and two other execution sites, one at Mednoye (near the former city of Kalinin, now Tver’, in Russia) and the other near Kharkiv (formerly Kharkov), Ukraine.

Katyn played a convoluted role in US politics and US-Soviet relations. Two US servicemen, brought from a POW camp in Germany, were at Katyn in 1943, when Berlin held an international news conference there to publicize the atrocity. The ranking officer was Col. John H. Van Vliet, a fourth-generation West Pointer. After returning to Washington in 1945, he wrote a report concluding that the Soviets, not the Germans, were responsible. He gave the report to Maj. Gen. Clayton Bissell, Gen. George Marshall’s assistant chief of staff for intelligence, who deep-sixed it. Years later, Bissell defended his action before Congress, contending that it was not in the US interest to embarrass an ally whose forces were still needed to defeat Japan.

In 1944, President Roosevelt assigned Capt. George Earle, his special emissary to the Balkans, to compile information on Katyn. Earle did so, using contacts in Bulgaria and Romania. He too concluded that the Soviet Union was guilty. FDR

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rejected Earle's conclusion, saying that he was convinced of Nazi Germany's responsibility. The report was suppressed. When Earle requested permission to publish his findings, the President gave him a written order to desist. Earle—who had been a Roosevelt family friend—spent the rest of the war in American Samoa.

As the Cold War heated up, Katyn became a shibboleth in US politics. In 1949, an American journalist assembled a committee of prominent Americans, which included former OSS chief Gen. William Donovan and future DCI Allen Dulles, to press for an official inquiry, but it went nowhere. Then came the Korean war and concern that Communist forces were executing American GIs. “Katyn may well have been a blueprint for Korea,” one Congressman declared.⁹ In September 1951, the House of Representatives appointed a select committee to hold hearings. It was chaired by Rep. Ray J. Madden and was popularly known as the Madden Committee. Although not without political or propaganda overtones, the hearings were the most comprehensive effort to date to gather facts and establish responsibility.¹⁰ The committee heard 81 witnesses, examined 183 exhibits, and took more than 100 depositions. The hearings gave Democrats a chance to deflect charges of having “betrayed” Poland and “lost” China at Yalta and offered Republicans an opportunity to court voters of Polish and other East European ancestry who traditionally favored Democrats.¹¹

Before disbanding the select committee, Madden tried to get the UN to bring the Katyn massacre before the

International Court of Justice and sought Congressional support for a joint Senate-House inquiry.¹² But the political will to do so was lacking. Stalin's death, the rise of a new leadership, and the end of the Korean war seemed to auger a thaw in US-Soviet relations.

Meanwhile, the Soviets obliterated references to Katyn on maps and in official reference works. Then, in 1969, Moscow did something strange that many believe was further calculated to confuse the issue further: it chose a small village named Khatyn as the cite for Belorussia's national war memorial. There was no apparent reason for the selection. Khatyn was one of 9,200 Belorussian villages the Germans had destroyed and one of more than a hundred where they had killed civilians in retaliation for partisan attacks. In Latin transliteration, however, Katyn and Khatyn look and sound alike, though they are spelled and pronounced quite differently in Russian and Belorussian. When President Nixon visited the USSR in July 1974, he toured the Khatyn memorial at his hosts' insistence. Sensing that the Soviets were exploiting the visit for propaganda purposes, *The New York Times* headlined its coverage of the tour: “Nixon Sees Khatyn, a Soviet Memorial, Not Katyn Forest.” (The *Times* probably got it right. During the Vietnam war, the Soviets frequently took visiting US peace activists to Khatyn.)

While Katyn was taboo in the USSR and Poland, numerous books and articles appeared in the United States and the UK. The standard scholarly work was written by Dr. Janus K. Zawodny, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1988, the National Endowment for the Humanities sponsored a Polish translation of his *Death in the Forest* for distribution in Poland. Later, the Reagan and Bush administrations both released previously classified records bearing on Katyn. These were the first official US efforts since the House hearings aimed at documenting Soviet responsibility.

Old habits die hard. In the summer of 1998, a US corporation sponsored an exhibit of World War II photographs from the Russian Army Museum at the Ronald Reagan Building in downtown Washington. Incredibly, in a souvenir program sold at the exhibit, the Russian exhibitors repeated the Soviet lie that the Nazis, not the NKVD, had murdered Polish prisoners at Katyn.¹³

A Terrible—and Partial—Truth Emerges

For 50 years, the Soviet Union concealed the truth. The coverup began in April 1943, almost immediately after the Red Army had recaptured Smolensk. The NKVD destroyed a cemetery the Germans had permitted the Polish Red Cross to build and removed other evidence. In January 1944, Moscow appointed its own investigative body, known as the Burdenko Commission after the prominent surgeon who chaired it. Predictably, it concluded that the Polish prisoners had been murdered in 1941, during the German occupa-

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tion, not in 1940. To bolster its claim, the commission hosted an international press conference at Katyn on 22 January. Three American journalists and Kathleen Harriman, the 25-year-old daughter of US Ambassador Averell Harriman, attended. After viewing exhibits of planted evidence, they endorsed the Burdenko Commission's findings. (Ms. Harriman later repudiated her 1944 statement before the House select committee.) Eight days later, the Soviets held a religious and military ceremony attended by a color guard from the Polish division of the Red Army to honor the victims of "German-fascist invaders." A film was made and shown for propaganda purposes.

Katyn was a forbidden topic in post-war Poland. Censors suppressed all references to it. Even mentioning the atrocity meant risking reprisal. While Katyn was erased from Poland's official history, it could not be erased from historical memory. In 1981, Solidarity erected a memorial with the simple inscription "Katyn, 1940." Even that was too much. The police confiscated it. Later, the Polish Government, on cue from Moscow, created another memorial. It read: "To the Polish soldiers—victims of Hitlerite fascism—reposing in the soil of Katyn."

Then came Mikhail Gorbachev and *glasnost*. In 1987, the Soviet president signed an agreement with the head of Poland's military government, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, for a joint historical commission to investigate "blank spots," that is, censored subjects, in the two countries' troubled history. Polish historians tried unsuccessfully to include Katyn on the agenda. The commission did

provide a forum, however, for Polish historians to press their Soviet counterparts for access to official records, even if to confirm the Burdenko Commission's conclusions. (There were, after all, "court historians" on both sides.) Gorbachev had a chance to address Katyn during a July 1988 state visit to Warsaw, but dodged the issue.

Pressure was building on the Soviets, however. Prominent Polish intellectuals signed an open letter asking for access to official records and sent it to Soviet colleagues. A month after Gorbachev's visit, demonstrators paraded in the streets of Warsaw demanding an official inquiry. The Kremlin had to do something; it chose to deceive. In November, the Soviet Government announced plans for a new memorial at Katyn commemorating Polish officers "[who] together with 500 Soviet prisoners...were shot by the fascists in 1943 as our army approached Smolensk." This was not true, and the change of dates was a further obfuscation, but more important was the subliminal message directed to the Poles: Russia and Poland were both victims of German aggression, something neither country should forget.¹⁴

In early 1989, three top Soviet officials sent Gorbachev a memorandum warning him that the issue was becoming "more acute" and that "time is not our ally."¹⁵ Some form of official admission, even a partial one, would have to be made. At a Kremlin ceremony on 13 October 1990, Gorbachev handed Jaruzelski a folder of documents that left no doubt about Soviet guilt. He did not, however, make a full and complete disclosure. Missing from the folder was the March 1940 NKVD execution order. Gorbachev laid all blame on Stalin's secret police chief, Lavrenty Beria, and his deputy. (This was a safe move, because Beria and his deputy had been branded criminals and summarily shot by Stalin's successors.) Gorbachev also failed to mention that the actual number of victims was 21,857—more than the usually cited figure of 15,000. By shaving the truth, Gorbachev had shielded the Soviet Government and the Communist Party, making Katyn look like a rogue secret police action rather than an official act of mass murder.

New Evidence From an Old Source

The next major discovery turned up in an unexpected place—the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. While conducting research on Katyn at the Archives in spring 1990, a Polish-American art and antiques expert named Wacław Godziemba-Maliszewski was given a copy of an article entitled "The Katyn Enigma: New Evidence in a 40-Year Riddle" that had appeared in the Spring 1981 issue of *Studies in Intelligence*. It was written by CIA officer and NPIC analyst Robert G. Poirier, who used



Largest of seven mass graves. Five layers of 500 murdered Polish officers buried here by the Soviets.

imagery from Luftwaffe aerial photo-reconnaissance during World War II to uncover evidence of the original crime and a Soviet coverup during 1943-1944.¹⁶ The imagery, selected from 17 sorties flown between 1941 and 1944 and spanning a period before, during, and after the German occupation of the Smolensk area, was important evidence. Among other things, it showed that the area where the mass graves were located had not been altered during the German occupation and that the same area displayed physical changes that predated the Germans' arrival. It also captured the NKVD on film bulldozing some of the Polish graves and removing bodies. Poirier speculated

that the corpses had been removed and reburied at another site.

At the National Archives, Godziemba-Maliszewski located the same imagery that Poirier had used. He also found additional shots of Katyn and the other two execution sites at Mednoye and near Kharkov. He discovered much additional imagery, new collateral evidence, and eyewitness testimony, resulting in important new conclusions about what actually happened at Katyn.

After completing further research, in January 1991 Godziemba-Maliszewski turned over copies of the imagery and Poirier's article to scientists at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. They in turn passed the

information to the Polish Ministry of Justice. The Ministry had to be convinced that the article and photographic evidence were bona fide and that Godziemba-Maliszewski was not, as some suspected, a CIA agent! Stefan Sniezko, Poland's deputy general prosecutor, then gave an interview to the German newspaper *Tagesspiegel* [*Daily Mirror*], published on 12 May 1991. This was the first public disclosure of the Luftwaffe imagery and its utility for identifying burial sites in the USSR.

The disclosure had an immediate impact in Germany, where media interest in Katyn had been running high since the 1980s, and in the USSR as well. Armed with this "smoking gun," a Polish prosecutor

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assigned to investigate Soviet crimes flew to Kharkov (now Kharkiv), where the Ukrainian KGB, under watchful Russian eyes, assisted in identifying a series of sites, including Piatikharki, where prisoners from the Starobelsk camp had been executed. Ironically, for a second time the German military had provided evidence, albeit unwittingly, of Soviet complicity in the massacre.

The new evidence put additional pressure on the Soviet Union and later the Russian Federation to reveal the full truth. In 1992, Moscow suddenly “discovered” the original 1940 execution order signed by Stalin and five other Politburo members—in Gorbachev’s private archive.¹⁷ Gorbachev almost certainly had read it in 1989, if not earlier.¹⁸ In October 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin presented a copy of the order along with 41 other documents to the new Polish president, former Solidarity leader Lech Walesa. In doing so, he made a point of chiding his arch enemy Gorbachev, with whom he was locked in a bitter domestic political battle. During a 1993 visit to Warsaw’s military cemetery, Yeltsin knelt before a Polish priest and kissed the ribbon of a wreath he had placed at the foot of the Katyn cross.¹⁹ In a joint statement with Walesa, he pledged to punish those still alive who had taken part in the massacre and make reparations—a promise that has not been kept. Meanwhile, Soviet and Polish teams were permitted to excavate at Katyn and the other two sites, on a selective basis, where Polish prisoners had been executed. In 1994, a Soviet historian published a book that for the first time called Katyn a “crime against humanity.”²⁰

The Pendulum Swings Back

Katyn is a wound that refuses to heal. In May 1995, officials from Russia, Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus announced their intention to end an official probe into “NKVD crimes” committed there and at other sites.²¹ But even that announcement revealed “new” information that had long been known in the West. Stalin’s secret police had committed crimes against some 11,000 Poles living in western Ukraine and western Belorussia after the USSR had incorporated those regions, and murdered more than 3,000 Polish prisoners in panic killings when Germany attacked in June 1941.

With the official investigation complete, Yeltsin appeared a few days later at a ceremony to lay the cornerstone for a Polish cemetery at Katyn. Those expecting an expression of contrition were disappointed. Yeltsin told his audience that “totalitarian terror affected not only Polish citizens but, in the first place, the citizens of the former Soviet Union.”²² He added that 10,000 bodies of the “most varied nationalities” had been found there. (The NKVD had used the forest as a killing ground in the 1930s.) Yeltsin’s

plea that the tragedy “not be allowed to divide our nations and be the subject of political games” fell on deaf ears. Less than two weeks later, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman warned Poles still insisting on an apology not to exploit the memorial service to sow “distrust between Russia and Poland.”²³ He too could not resist remarking that “totalitarian rule” had “killed, among others, millions of Russians.”

Some Poles undoubtedly took offense at Yeltsin’s effort to commemorate Katyn as a common Russian and Polish tragedy and blame it on “totalitarianism.” Moreover, the Russian president refused to apologize and did not follow up on his pledge to punish still-living culprits and pay reparations. Meantime, resentment by extreme nationalists and Communists in the Duma was increasing. In January 1996, a book with the provocative title *The Katyn Crime Fiction*, written in Polish under the pseudonym “Juri Micha,” began circulating in the Duma and was placed on sale in the Russian parliament’s bookstore. It repudiated Gorbachev’s 1990 admission (without mentioning Yeltsin’s elaboration two years later) and repeated the old Stalinist charge of German guilt.

The book came at a bad time for Godziemba-Maliszewski, who was completing a study based on new information, some of it obtained through the Freedom of Information Act and the good offices of former national security adviser Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski. His manuscript included declassified satellite imagery and maps as well as eyewitness statements, personal photographs, stills from a documentary film, and other items. It also contained a detailed study and reinterpretation of Luft-

waife imagery. The manuscript was entitled "Katyn: An Interpretation of Aerial Photographs Considered with Facts and Documents," and it eventually appeared as a special issue of the Polish journal *Photo-Interpretation in Geography: Problems of Telegeoinformation* with parallel texts in Polish and English.²⁴

Before the manuscript went to press, the Polish editor, with an eye toward Moscow's retrenchment on the Katyn question, insisted on deleting 20 pages of text and notes and other material. The editor also dropped a tribute to analyst Poirier, presumably on the grounds that it would give the manuscript an unacceptable CIA imprimatur.

New Allegations

And so the story stood until fall 1998, when Moscow made a bizarre move. In September, Procurator General Yuri Chayka sent a letter to Poland's minister of justice demanding an official inquiry into the deaths of Russian soldiers captured during the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1921. The letter asserted that 83,500 internees had died "in Polish concentration camps as a result of cruel and inhuman conditions." Chayka added: "The information we have allows us to conclude that genocide was applied to Red Army POWs."²⁵ Poland officially rejected the allegation but not before offering to cooperate in a joint search of Polish and Russian archives for additional information. (The offer was not accepted.)

This was the first time Moscow had raised such an allegation at an official level, but such charges had been circulating in Russian circles for some

time. A rumor heard in Warsaw in the early 1990s claimed that Gorbachev had ordered his staff to find a "counterbalance" to Katyn. The rumor has not been confirmed, but after the first Katyn disclosure in 1990 the Soviet (and later Russian) press occasionally cited alleged abuses in Polish POW camps. Headlines such as "Strzakowo—A Polish Katyn" and "Tuchola—A Death Camp" were typical but attracted little notice.

Then, in July 1998, the Moscow paper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [*Independent Newspaper*] ran a front-page article claiming that tens of thousands of prisoners had died as a result of shootings, starvation, and exposure. This article formed the basis of Chayka's demarche.²⁶ It went beyond previous assertions that Russians and Poles both were victims of Stalinism: "The present position of Warsaw resembles the former position of the USSR, which failed to confess the Katyn crime for a long time.... It would be good if Poland followed in Russia's footsteps and pleaded guilty to the savagery [against Red Army soldiers]." The case for moral equivalence had been replaced by a claim to moral superiority.

No one knows for certain what prompted the new charge, but it may have been a preemptive reaction to more revelations about Katyn and new evidence of Soviet crimes in Poland. In 1997, a Russian and a Polish archivist collaborated on a compendium of documents entitled *Katyn: Prisoners of an Undeclared War*.²⁷ Then, in 1998, a Russian-Polish research team issued a series of previously classified secret police reports with the title *Eyes Only for J.V. Stalin: NKVD Reports from Poland, 1944-1946*. The reports detailed a second wave of terror unleashed during the postwar

occupation, showing that the crimes committed during 1939-1941 were not an aberration but part of a single imperial design. Soon thereafter, a group of Polish members of parliament spent 10 days in Russia, trying unsuccessfully to obtain an official acknowledgment that the Soviet Government had engaged in genocide. In the meantime, more graves filled with Polish corpses were found near Tavda and Tomsk, east of the Urals.

Russians cannot look at Katyn without seeing themselves in the mirror of their own history. Thus official Moscow resists using the "g" word (genocide) to describe the atrocity. When Gorbachev's advisers warned him in 1989 that Poland's demand for the truth contained a "sub-text...that the Soviet Union is no better—and perhaps even worse—than Nazi Germany" and that the Soviet Union was "no less responsible" for the outbreak of World War II and the 1939 defeat of the Polish Army, they were also thinking of undercurrents in their own country.²⁸ Russian intellectuals were already beginning to equate Communism with fascism and Stalin with Hitler. Reports of vandalized war memorials and looted battlefield cemeteries underscored growing popular disillusionment with the cult of triumphalism built around Stalin and the USSR's victory over Nazi Germany.²⁹ Now some Russian revisionists go so far as to claim that Hitler's invasion launched a preventive war aimed at forestalling Stalin's plan to strike Germany first—a view that even Western historians reject.³⁰

In June 1998, Yeltsin and Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski agreed that memorial complexes under construction at Katyn and Mednoye, the two NKVD execution

sites on Russian soil, should be completed before 2000. But that is not likely to end the controversy. Two days earlier, speaking at a ceremony in the Ukrainian village of Piattikhatki, the site of the third killing field, Kwasniewski declared that Poland has a duty to continue speaking the truth about Katyn. Until Russians and Poles reach some mutual understanding about their past, Katyn will continue to cast a shadow over their futures.

NOTES

1. For photographs of the parade, see Olaf Groehler, *Selbstmörderische Allianz: Deutsch-russische Militärbeziehungen, 1920-1941* [Suicidal Alliance: German-Russian Military Relations, 1920-1941] (Berlin: Vision Verlag 1993), pp. 21-22, 123-124. These photographs were intended for official use only, since German policy was still officially anti-Communist. Relations between the Red Army and the Wehrmacht were genuinely friendly, based on mutual hostility toward Poland and years of secret collaboration after World War I. In addition to Groehler's book, see Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations, 1922-1941* (Columbia University Press, 1997).

The parade was organized by Col. (later Gen.) Semyon Krivoschein and Gen. Heinz Guderian, both outstanding tank commanders who would go on to distinguish themselves in the Soviet-German war. Guderian's panzer group was the first German force to reach the outskirts of Moscow in 1941. Krivoschein's tank corps was the first to reach Berlin in 1945 and capture Hitler's headquarters. His 1939 encounter with Guderian almost cost Krivoschein his life in April 1945, when a SMERSH military counterintelligence detachment searching Nazi archives discovered a photograph of

Krivoschein and Guderian shaking hands. The Soviet general was questioned and released, probably because he was Jewish and therefore an unlikely Nazi spy.

2. Nataliya Lebedeva, "The Tragedy of Katyn," *International Affairs* (Moscow), June 1990, p. 100.
3. In October 1941, Stalin sent Zarubin to Washington as his NKVD *rezident* (station chief) with orders to cultivate agents of influence in the US Government. He remained until 1944, and he and his wife Elizabeth, an NKVD captain, launched the Soviet effort to penetrate the Manhattan Project and steal US atomic secrets. Zarubin's daughter, Zoya Zarubina, herself a former intelligence officer and translator, may be familiar to some readers from her appearance in the first segment of the CNN series *Cold War*.
4. As cited in Albert Axell, *Stalin's War Through the Eyes of His Commanders* (London: Arms and Armour, 1997), p. 55.
5. Lebedeva, "The Tragedy of Katyn," p. 105.
6. For a translation of the order, see Allen Paul, *Katyn: Stalin's Massacre and the Seeds of Polish Resurrection* (Annapolis, MD: the Naval Institute Press, 1996), pp. 353-354. The same order identified an additional 18,632 prisoners, including 10,685 Poles, being held in NKVD jails in western Ukraine and Belorussia (formerly eastern Poland) for possible execution. A KGB memorandum of February 1959 cites 21,857 as the total number of executions during the April-May 1940 action. See Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy of an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), p. 220. The killings probably continued after May 1940, and the total number of victims may have exceeded 27,000. Ongoing excavations in Ukraine and Russia are turning up more Polish corpses, so this number may increase.

There were many more Polish victims of Stalin's crimes. During 1940-1941, the NKVD unleashed a reign of terror, arresting, torturing, and killing thousands of Poles and inciting national and ethnic violence among Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, and Belorussians in the former eastern Poland. Some 1.2 million Poles were deported to Siberia and Central Asia, where many died in transit or in exile. See Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

7. Lebedeva, "The Tragedy of Katyn," pp. 102-103. The social and professional profile of the other two groups was similar.
8. See Frank Fox, "Jewish Victims of the Katyn Massacre," *East European Jewish Affairs*, 23: 1 (1993), pp. 49-55.
9. The NKVD filmed executions carried out in Smolensk, either at the local prison or in the basement of its headquarters. During the Korean war, the Soviets gave North Korea a copy of the film for instructional purposes.
10. US Congress, House of Representatives, Select Committee on the Katyn Forest Massacre. *The Katyn Forest Massacre: Hearings before the Select Committee on Conduct an Investigation of the Facts, Evidence and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre*, 82d Congress, 1st and 2d Session, 1951-1952, 7 parts. (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1952).
11. Representative Madden's district included a substantial Polish-American population in Gary, Indiana. The hearings began in a campaign year.
12. In 1946, the chief Soviet prosecutor at the Nuremberg Tribunal tried to indict Germany for the Katyn killings but dropped the matter after the United States and the UK refused to

- support it and German lawyers promised to mount an embarrassing defense.
13. See Benjamin J. Stein, "Can We Talk?" *American Spectator*, November 1998, p. 66.
14. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union constantly reminded Poland, which had absorbed much of Germany's former eastern regions, that it was the Poles' sole protection against German revanchism.
15. Pavel Sudoplatov and Anatoli Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness—A Soviet Spy-master* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1994), pp. 278-279, n14.
16. Godziemba-Maliszewski's lifelong interest in Katyn was personal as well as scholarly. A relative of his, an uncle of his father's, was among the victims.
17. The document's survival is in itself an interesting story. In March 1959, the head of the KGB recommended to Nikita Khrushchev that all records of the execution of Polish soldiers and civilians be destroyed, arguing that they had no operational or historical value and could come back to haunt the Soviet Government. For reasons that remain unclear, Khrushchev refused. A rumor that has never been confirmed claims that Khrushchev wanted to reveal the truth about Katyn, but Polish leader Wladislaw Gomulka rejected the idea because it would discredit the Polish Communist Party, which had fabricated evidence to implicate the Germans and exculpate the Soviets. The rumor is probably not true, however; even while acknowledging some of Stalin's crimes, Khrushchev was always careful not to implicate the Communist Party. Volkogonov, *Autopsy of an Empire*, p. 220.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Yeltsin almost certainly was emulating former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, who, in December 1970, fell to his knees after placing a wreath at a Warsaw memorial commemorating the Nazis' destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. A press photo of the event became one of the most poignant images of the Cold War.
20. N. Lebedeva, *Katyn: prestuplenie protiv chelovechestva* [*Katyn: A Crime Against Humanity*] (Moscow: Izdatel'skaia gruppa Progress: Kul'tura, 1994).
21. Warsaw PAP in English, 1658 GMT, 31 May 1995.
22. Warsaw PAP in Polish, 1017 GMT, 4 June 1995.
23. Moscow ITAR-TASS in English, 1523 GMT, 15 June 1995.
24. Mr. Godziemba-Maliszewski kindly sent me a copy of his study after reading a monograph I had written for the Center for the Study of Intelligence. Copies are available from the author, whose address is PO Box 343, Bethel, Connecticut 06801. The price is \$60.00.
25. The letter was given to the press. See Wojciech Duda and Czary Chmyz, "Back to the Past," *Zycie*, 12-13 September 1998, p. 1.
26. Yuri Ivanov, "The Tragedy of the Polish Camps," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 16 July 1998, pp. 1, 6.
27. R. G. Pikoia and Aleksander Gieysztor, eds., *Katyn': plenniki neob'iavlennoi voiny* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond "Demokratiia," 1997).
28. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living & the Dead: The Rise & Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 180.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 203. The graverobbers were looking for artifacts to sell to military collectors.
30. See, for example, B. V. Sokolov, "Did Stalin Intend to Attack Hitler?" in *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11:2 (June 1998), pp. 113-141. The author's answer is yes. In an introductory note, the US editors expressed their disagreement with this view.