“But I Did Not Ask These Questions”: The Soviet Katyn Lie and the Anglo-American Press during the Second World War

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores English-language newspaper reporting on the Katyn massacre during the Second World War. While previous scholars have taken up the subject of Anglo-American complicity in suppressing the Katyn Massacre, there has not been a full examination of the Soviet propaganda put forwards to the Western press during WWII. Firstly, this thesis reexamines the origins of the Katyn massacre in 1940 by highlighting the influence of Soviet foreign policy towards Poland on the Soviet leadership's decision to undertake the massacre. Secondly, this thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of what historians have termed the "Katyn Lie" as it appeared in the Anglo-American press, and the manner in which the Soviets actively utilized the Western press to spread the Katyn Lie abroad. This thesis demonstrates that Soviet-Polish relations formed the overarching link between the origins of the Katyn massacre and the Soviet falsification of the massacre after 1943. This thesis casts further light on the Anglo-American complicity in silencing the truth about the Katyn massacre, along with further demonstrating the importance the Soviets attached to the international perception of it.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee....ii
Abstract....iii
Table of Contents....iv
Glossary of Abbreviations and Terms....v
Acknowledgements....vi
Introduction....1
An Overview of the Katyn Massacre....3
Literature Review....7
The Historiography of Katyn Propaganda....22
Thesis Structure....29
Chapter One: Katyn and Stalinism....31
Introduction....31
Class Cleansing: The Ideological Background of Katyn....35
Katyn and Soviet Foreign Policy....45
Conclusions....53
Chapter Two: The Katyn Lie in the Anglo-American Press....57
Introduction....57
The Initial Reporting and Soviet-Polish Relations....60
The Kościuszko Division....69
The 1944 Burdenko Commission Report....77
Berling's Ceremony....82
Postwar: The Schellenberg Case and Katyn at the IMT....86
Conclusions....90
Conclusion: Remembering Katyn....92
Bibliography....102

Glossary of Abbreviations and Terms:

Anders' Army: armed forces of the Polish Government-in-Exile

Armia Krajowa (AK): Polish underground army in occupied Poland

GULAG: Soviet prison and forced labour camps

IMT: International Military Tribunal

IRC: International Red Cross

KPP: Polish communist party (dissolved in 1938)

NKVD*:* People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (the Soviet secret police)

Polish Government-in-Exile: exile government of the Second Polish Republic

Polish People's Army (LWP): Polish armed forces under Soviet command

Politburo: The highest governing body in the Soviet Union

POW: Prisoners-of-war

PPR*:* Polish Workers' Party

PRL*:* Polish People's Republic

Red Army: armed forces of the Soviet Union

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Wehrmacht: armed forces of Nazi Germany

ZPP: Union of Polish Patriots

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Introduction

On the morning of 21 March 1980, Walenty Badlyak, a veteran of the *Armija Krajowa,* a Polish underground army during the Second World War, chained himself to a water pump in the main square of Kraków and burned himself alive.[1] On his body, he left a metal plate with a note that lamented the corruption of Polish youth and the destruction of traditional Polish culture, beginning with the words "For Katyn."[2] Today, a small monument stands in Kraków's main square at the site of Badlyak's self-immolation, with a plaque in both English and Polish commemorating his act as a political protest against Poland's communist government at the time. At the bottom of the plaque the inscription reads: "Unable to live in a lie, he died for the truth."

In 1980, the words "For Katyn," held immense significance for the Polish public and the government of the Polish People's Republic (PRL). Katyn stood for the massacre of thousands of Polish military officers in the Katyn Forest of Russia in 1940, committed by the Soviet secret police and later blamed on Nazi Germany.[3] For the Polish public and émigré community, Katyn was an unpunished crime, symbolizing an ongoing struggle for truth, justice, and memory in Poland against the current government of the PRL and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Both the PRL and USSR officially maintained that the Katyn massacre was a Nazi crime, yet in practice, Katyn was virtually expunged from public discourse in the PRL through repression and censorship by the authorities.[4] This silence was

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[1] Alexander Etkind, et al., *Remembering Katyn* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 20.
[2] Ibid.
[3] "Katyń" is the Polish spelling of Katyn and is often used in various historical works on the massacre. Throughout this thesis, the anglicized spelling "Katyn" will be used in reference to the massacre for ease of readership.
[4] Ibid., 16 - 17.

the lie that Badlyak protested through his self-immolation in 1980. In line with the PRL's policy to obscure and silence the truth around the massacre, the PRL authorities made no mention of Katyn concerning his death. Instead, Badylak's death was explained as the act of a mentally ill individual, and any public commemoration of his self-immolation was suppressed by the Polish secret police.[5]

While Soviet authorities silenced and suppressed the history of the Katyn massacre throughout the second half of the twentieth century, they did not fully control the flow of information during the Second World War. The world had first learned of the Katyn massacre in April 1943, when Nazi Germany, which had invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 and was still occupying parts of western Russia, discovered a mass grave of Polish officers in the Katyn Forest, a rural locality 20 kilometers west of the city of Smolensk. After their discovery, German authorities publicized the massacre to the international press to tarnish the image of the Soviet Union. In response, the Soviets began a propaganda campaign to obscure the truth of the massacre and blame the crime on Nazi Germany. In their campaign, the Soviets were readily assisted by Great Britain and the United States, their wartime allies, who upheld the Soviet version of Katyn during the war in their respective official statements and through wartime media control. Historians have since termed the resulting narrative as the "Katyn Lie," which holds that the Katyn massacre was committed by Nazi Germany in 1941.

The Soviet wartime propaganda campaign around Katyn is a remarkable aspect of the massacre that has been underexplored by historians. During this campaign, the Soviets actively engaged with and falsified an atrocity they were responsible for, assisted by the

[5] Ibid., 20.

cooperation of the British and United States governments. This thesis will explore the development and content of the Katyn Lie through the lens of Anglo-American press reporting during the Second World War. These press reports played a crucial role in the development of the Katyn Lie, as the reporting circulated the Soviet version of what happened in Katyn abroad, while the positive and uncritical reporting in the West served to corroborate the Soviet narrative around Katyn. By charting these reports, my aim is to display the content and goals of the Katyn Lie and demonstrate how the Soviets used the Anglo-American press to circulate and corroborate this narrative.

An Overview of the Katyn Massacre

Today, the term "Katyn massacre" refers to four geographically separate mass shootings carried out between April and May of 1940. The background of the massacre was set in August 1939 when the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a pact of non-aggression and cooperation. Commonly known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the treaty contained secret protocols to divide the Second Polish Republic — the Polish state that emerged after the First World War — between Germany and the USSR.[6] Per the German-Soviet agreement, after Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, the Soviets invaded eastern Poland on 17 September, swiftly pushing aside the shattered Polish army and occupying the eastern provinces. The joint Nazi-Soviet occupation proved the end of the Second Polish Republic, with Poland only revived as a Soviet satellite state after 1945.

The victims of Katyn were prisoners captured during and after the Soviet invasion of Poland, including military officers, gendarmes, civil leaders, and police officers. Each group

[6] The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was named after its signatories, Vyacheslav Molotov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs in the USSR, and Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nazi Germany.

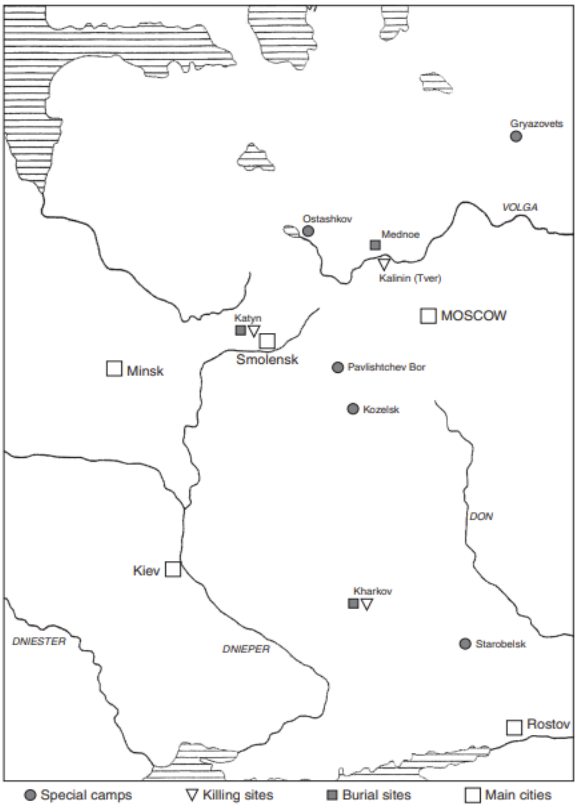
was singled out by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), the Soviet secret police, and was detained in three special prisoner-of-war (POW) camps from September 1939 to April 1940: Ostashkov, in northwest Russia, Starobilsk, near Kharkiv in Soviet Ukraine, and Kozelsk, situated halfway between Smolensk and Moscow in western Russia. As well, other prisoners from 1939 were held in various prisons throughout the occupied Polish provinces, now reconstituted as western Ukraine and Belarus by the Soviets.

The majority of victims of the massacre were Polish military officers; however, the massacre included a wider array of victims beyond Poles and POWs. For one, many of the victims were not POWs, but were taken prisoner as civilians after the Soviet invasion. Nor were the Polish prisoners considered POWs by the Soviets, as, in Soviet eyes, they belonged to a nation that no longer existed. The massacre was also representative of the multinational makeup of the Second Polish Republic, with Belarussians, Ukrainians, and Jews found among the victims.[7] Socially, the victims came from a variety of backgrounds, including factory owners, judicial and civil leaders, policemen, gendarme, and priests. Many of the military officers were also reservists, holding numerous professional occupations in civilian life, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, and so on. Based on NKVD archives, historians today place the number of victims at 21,857: 4421 from Kozelsk, 3820 from Starobilsk, 6311 from Ostashkov, and 7305 in the Belarusian and Ukrainian prisons.[8] From the three special camps, an estimated 395 prisoners were spared from execution, either for their political

[7] According to Timothy Snyder, some eight per cent of the victims of Katyn were Jews, corresponding to the proportion of Jews in eastern Poland, while Frank Fox estimates some 700 – 800 officers in the three special camps were Jewish. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 140; Frank Fox, "Jewish Victims of the Katyn Massacre," *East European Jewish Affairs* 23, no. 1 (1993): 52. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501679308577736

[8] George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 94. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=308753.

significance or as potential collaborators.[9] Of the victims from the Katyn massacre, none survived to bear witness to the killing sites.



Map of the special camps, the killing sites, and burial sites.[10]

The Katyn massacre remained a well-kept secret by the Soviets until the German discovery of the mass graves in the Katyn Forest in 1943, where the prisoners from Kozelsk, largely Polish military officers, were executed and buried. From this discovery, the Katyn massacre gained its common name, along with the association of its victims as predominantly Polish officers. Joseph Goebbels, propaganda minister of the Third Reich, moved to exploit the discovery in German propaganda by publicizing the massacre internationally, aiming to cause a rift between the USSR, Poland, and the Soviet wartime allies Britain and the United

[9] Ibid., 115.
[10] "Map of special camps and killing and burial sites," in Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, xvi.

States. The discovery of the graves was widely disseminated through German radio, while the German government also called for the International Red Cross (IRC) to investigate the graves. Despite the evidence overwhelmingly showing Soviet guilt, Goebbels' plan failed in causing a rift between the Anglo-Americans and the Soviets, with the former backing their Soviet ally and their claim that the crime was a German one. In September 1943, the Red Army recaptured the Katyn Forest, and Moscow established its own commission to "prove" German guilt for the crime, known as the Burdenko Commission.[11] Unsurprisingly, the Burdenko Commission found Germany guilty of the crime in January 1944. Thereafter, the Soviets maintained the findings of the commission until public pressure from Poland, along with reform within the regime, led to Moscow disclosing its guilt for the crime in 1990.

In Katyn historiography, 1940 and 1943 tend to represent two separate historical events: the former covering the Soviet rationale for the massacre and its historical origins and context; the latter examining Soviet attempts to cover-up the crime, and the ramifications of the German discovery on Soviet relations with Poland and the Western powers. My approach in this thesis is to treat the origins of Katyn and the Soviet Katyn Lie as interconnected events, as I argue that the Soviet propaganda on Katyn can inform our understanding of the massacre's origins. After the German discovery of the Katyn graves, Soviet Katyn propaganda became intimately tied to the issue of Polish-Soviet relations and the Soviet project to install a pro-Soviet regime in Poland after the war. Here, Moscow actively publicized its propaganda on Katyn and Soviet-Polish relations abroad through the Western powers to garner international support and legitimacy for their project. My goal then is to use

[11] The commission was named after Nikolai Burdenko, Chief Surgeon of the Red Army during the Second World War.

Katyn as a lens to examine the Soviet foreign policy towards Poland throughout the Second World War, with Katyn and Soviet propaganda around the massacre highlighting the dramatic changes in Soviet policy between 1940 and 1943. As such, the first half of this thesis concerns the origins of Katyn in 1940, while the second half covers the Anglo-American circulation of the Katyn Lie after 1943. Similarly, the literature review of this thesis will review both the origins of Katyn and propaganda around the massacre in Katyn historiography.

Literature Review

Historical literature about the Katyn massacre can be broadly grouped into works published before or after 1991. Aside from the inability to access Soviet archives on Katyn, non-Soviet writers, many of them Western-based Poles, wrote on Katyn to challenge the Soviet narrative around the massacre. In English-language historiography, prominent studies on Katyn pre-1991 include *Death in the Forest* (1962) by the Polish American historian Janusz Zawodny, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* (1971) by the British writer Louis Fitzgibbon, and *In the Shadow of Katyn* (1976) by Stanisław Swianewicz, a Polish reserve officer who was held prisoner in Kozelsk in 1939 and spared from the executions. Despite the limitations these authors faced in historically analyzing Katyn, their books left an impact on Katyn scholarship that continues to influence contemporary works.

During the 1990s, historians of Katyn gained access to numerous archival documents on the massacre, as the Soviet government officially admitted their responsibility for the crime in late 1990. From this point onwards, historical works on Katyn no longer focussed on demonstrating Soviet culpability. Studies of Katyn after 1991 engaged with the newly released Soviet archival material, allowing for a more comprehensive picture of the massacre to emerge. Some prominent publications include the study by the émigré Soviet social

scientist Victor Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre 'Class Cleansing' as Totalitarian Praxis" (1998); *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940* (2005) by George Sanford, an academic specialist on Poland; and *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* (2007), a multi-author collaboration by Polish, Russian, and American historians of Katyn. Most recently, the British author Jane Rogoyska published *Surviving Katyn: Stalin's Polish Massacre and the Search for Truth* (2021). These works will primarily be analyzed for their discussions on the origins of the Katyn massacre, highlighting the ongoing disagreements between historians. In Chapter One, I will build off the most recent research on the origins of Katyn and offer my own arguments on the massacre's place within a wider context of Stalinist terror.

While all these works deal with Katyn as a whole, two more studies will be covered in the following literature review for their focus on the Soviet propaganda around Katyn. The German journalist Thomas Urban's *Katyn 1940: History of a Crime* (2015) is one of the first studies to look in depth at the Soviet and German propaganda campaigns around Katyn during the war. The American historian Timothy Gleason also takes a specialized approach to Katyn, focusing on English-language press coverage of Katyn in "Decade of Deceit: English-Language Press Coverage of the Katyn Massacre in the 1940s" (2017). The research in Chapter Two of this thesis will expand on that done by Gleason and Urban by enlarging our understanding of the Katyn Lie in the Anglo-American press.

Zawodny's *Death in the Forest: The Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre* (1962) was one of the first English-language histories of Katyn, making it a pioneering study and setting a precedent for future historical works on the massacre. Zawodny had himself fought in the Polish Army in 1939, and later in the AK. After the war, Zawodny emigrated to the United States, studying history, and going on to write various works on Polish history. In his study of

Katyn, Zawodny devotes much of his analysis to demonstrating that the Soviet Union was undeniably guilty of the massacre, before delving into how and why the prisoners were killed. Interviewing some 150 former prisoners of the three special camps who were spared from execution, Zawodny reconstructed their capture and their life in the camps before the executions in April 1940.[12] These interviews formed the primary source base for his study and helped to circumvent the Soviet restriction on archival materials on Katyn. Nevertheless, Zawodny faced greater limitations when he analyzed the Soviet decision-making processes behind Katyn, owing to a lack of relevant archival documents to explain the Soviet rationale.

Zawodny offered four general propositions as to why the Soviet leadership undertook the Katyn massacre. Zawodny's first proposition was that the prisoners were murdered because they were enemies of the Soviet Union due to their class and social origins. Secondly, he hypothesized that their execution would facilitate a postwar Soviet takeover of Poland by destroying the Polish social elite. Thirdly, the men were executed because they could not be induced to adopt pro-Soviet attitudes. Finally, he hypothesizes that Lavrentii Beria, then head of the NKVD, misinterpreted orders from Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, and executed the men by mistake.[13] To the first point, Zawodny cites the extensive screening process undertaken by the NKVD prior to the mass executions, and notes that some of the prisoners spared came to collaborate with the Soviet regime.[14] This small selection of pro-Soviet officers later formed the nucleus of the Soviet-based Polish Army, known as the Polish People's Army (LWP). The LWP later fought alongside the Red Army against the Germans, helping to facilitate the Soviet takeover of Poland after the war, which gives support to Zawodny's second point.

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[12] Janusz K. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest: The Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), 201.
[13] Ibid., 127 – 128.
[14] Ibid., 146.

Nevertheless, while his second proposition is broadly true, it assumes the Soviet leadership had the strategic foresight to create a puppet Polish state in early 1940, encompassing the Polish heartland occupied by Nazi Germany. As will be discussed in Chapter One, by contrast, evidence indicates that Moscow aimed to entirely extinguish the sovereignty of the Polish state in early 1940, in tandem with the German annexation of western Poland. Only in the autumn of 1940 did the Soviets contemplate raising a Polish state liberated from Nazi occupation. Zawodny's fourth proposition stems from a word-of-mouth story and can be dismissed based on current research.[15]

Zawodny's first and third propositions had the greatest impact on future studies of Katyn, as each roughly defined the two historical approaches to understanding the origins of the massacre. The first proposition involved looking retroactively at Soviet state practice and ideological theory concerning Soviet class enemies: social classes viewed as inherently hostile to Soviet society. In Zawodny's estimation, the Polish officers, along with the other groups executed at Katyn, were executed as they were class enemies in Soviet ideology.[16] Yet Zawodny's third proposition shifted the historical focus to shorter term factors — examining the immediate context of the massacre — in which he focused on the prisoners' time in camps, their interrogations, and attempts by the NKVD to indoctrinate the Poles. Within these shorter-term factors, the failure to indoctrinate the Poles and their interrogations confirmed the Soviet perception that the prisoners were "class enemies." As well, the screening process would determine the select few who were spared from the massacre.[17] The two approaches to

[15] Zawodny explains the fourth point in his notes. It stems from a word-of-mouth rumour that Stalin told Beria to "liquidate" the camps, which Beria took to mean their physical extermination. We can dismiss this as historians now know the extent of Stalin's involvement in the Katyn Massacre. Such a decision could not have been accidental. Ibid., 162.
[16] Ibid., 129 – 130.
[17] Ibid., 143.

the origins of Katyn were not mutually exclusive; future historians would instead assess whether short- or long-term factors were more influential in the origins of Katyn.

Nine years after Zawodny's work was published, Louis Fitzgibbon released *Katyn: A Crime Without Parallel* (1971) and *The Katyn Cover-Up* (1972). Fitzgibbon was not an academically trained historian: his books on Katyn were instead written to bring greater attention to the Katyn massacre in the English-speaking world. Writing in the middle of the Cold War, Fitzgibbon's first book on Katyn aimed to demonstrate Soviet responsibility for the massacre, highlighting the massacre as a condemnation of the entire Soviet regime.[18] More importantly, for this thesis, Fitzgibbon cast judgement on the Anglo-American governments for their complicity in supporting the Soviet cover-up of Katyn.[19] Fitzgibbon's second work, *The Katyn Cover Up,* deals more extensively with the policies of the British and American governments towards covering up Katyn, by focusing on their general silence around Katyn as of 1972. Fitzgibbon's works played a crucial role in drawing public attention to the role of the Anglo-American governments within the history of Katyn, with both books receiving considerable public acclaim in Britain. British public interest in Katyn, stimulated by Fitzgibbon's work, led to the release of British archival documents on the massacre in the early 1970s.[20] Otherwise, Fitzgibbon added little to the discussion on the origins of Katyn, speculating on the Soviet motivation for Katyn with little evidence to back his claims.[21]

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[18] Fitzgibbon makes this clear in his introduction to his first book: "They [the Soviet Union] have not changed their immoral tactics. They have proved this again and again, in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, at the time of writing in Egypt and the Middle East." Louis Fitzgibbon, *Katyn: A Crime Without Parallel* (London: Tom Stacey Ltd, 1971), 13-14

[19] Ibid., 13.

[20] Stanisław Swianewicz, *In the Shadow of Katyn: "Stalin's Terror,"* trans, Witold S. Swianewicz, 3rd ed. (Witold Publishing: Pender Island, 2002), 226 – 229.

[21] For example, Fitzgibbon states that "they [the Soviets] were out to destroy what they regarded as Poland's 'supermen.' Their motive was naked imperialism." Later, he links Katyn to the Marxist-Leninist worldview, in that "according to the Marxist 'laws' of historical materialism they [the Polish elite] must disappear as soon as

Nevertheless, his works were crucial in drawing further public attention in Britain and the United States to the history of Katyn.

Finally, the memoir of Stanisław Swianewicz, *In the Shadow of Katyn* (1976), was one of the most significant writings to emerge on Katyn prior to 1991. *In the Shadow of Katyn* was originally published in Polish, in Paris, in 1976, and was translated to English later in the 1990s. Much of Swianewicz's work has found its way into Katyn historiography: both his historical analyses of the massacre and his firsthand experience in Soviet captivity. Swianewicz's account was exceptional as he was one of the few prisoners spared from the massacre. As a reserve officer in the 1939 invasion of Poland, Swianewicz was captured by the Red Army, imprisoned at Kozelsk, and was set to be transported to the Katyn Forest in April of 1940. While in transit to the execution site, Swianewicz was stopped immediately outside Smolensk on NKVD orders; thereafter, he was taken away to the Lubyanka prison in Moscow. Remarkably, Swianewicz was spared from execution, yet sentenced to eight years to the GULAG — the Soviet system of forced labour camps — for "cooperation with the Polish Intelligence Services."[22] In reality, Swianewicz was an economist and his alleged work for Polish intelligence was a dissertation he wrote on the Soviet economy prior to the war. Swianewicz was later released in July 1941 under agreement between the Soviet government and the Polish Government-in-Exile. His memoir serves both as a recollection and a historical reflection on Katyn after 30 years from the perspective of a scholar and near-witness to the massacres.

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possible." Likewise, Fitzgibbon links Katyn to the purges of Soviet military officers in 1938 to illustrate a precedent to Katyn. None of these three points are substantiated in detail. Fitzgibbon, *A Crime Without Parallel*, 12 – 13.

[22] Swianewicz, *In the Shadow of Katyn,* 108.

Swianewicz engaged with Zawodny's work on Katyn and offered his own reflections on the origins of the massacre, positing that the decision was connected to trends in Soviet foreign policy in early 1940. Specifically, Swianewicz speculated that there was a connection between Katyn and the 1939 German-Soviet alliance, suggesting that the pact had some bearing on Stalin's decision to execute the Polish officers. Swianewicz writes on the change he had experienced in Soviet attitudes towards the surviving Poles in the second half of 1940, perceiving that Soviet authorities had relaxed their treatment and handling of the Polish prisoners in contrast to 1939.[23] As further evidence of this change, Swianewicz notes that some 1000 Polish officers and cadet officers who had escaped to Lithuania were imprisoned after the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states in June 1940, but were not executed by the NKVD thereafter.[24] In his view, the German conquest of France in the summer of 1940 changed Soviet attitudes towards the Poles, who were now a potential military asset to the USSR. As for early 1940, Swianewicz speculates that the Polish officers were an obstacle to the Soviet-German alliance, as the officers openly advocated for an independent Poland and war with Germany.[25] As Swianewicz elaborates, Moscow believed that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact would be long-lasting, while an independent Poland would have trespassed on German territorial expansion, causing a rift or even a rupture in a long-term Soviet-German alliance.[26] While present scholarship has largely dismissed the idea that Katyn was

[23] Ibid., 251.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 250.
[26] Ibid., 251.

meant to placate Nazi Germany, historians continue to examine the influence of Soviet foreign policy on the decision behind the massacre.[27]

Taken together, the works of Zawodny, Fitzgibbon, and Swianewicz have impacted the study of Katyn in various ways: Zawodny's was the first in-depth history of Katyn, Fitzgibbon stimulated interest in Katyn in the English-speaking world, and Swianewicz offered invaluable reflections on the massacre from the position of a survivor and scholar. Nevertheless, these studies were limited by the Soviet restriction on archival materials relating to the Katyn massacre, along with these authors' need to address the ongoing Soviet claims that the massacre was committed by the Germans. Making the truth of Katyn known to the world was an important task, yet it narrowed research on Katyn to this focus, just as the lack of archival materials narrowed the scope of possible research. The lack of archival material on Katyn was also part of a broader restriction on Soviet archives relating to Stalinism and Stalinist terror, making it difficult to situate the massacre within a wider historical context. With the liberalization, and subsequent collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991, the need to prove Soviet complicity vanished. Moscow's liberalization also led to the release of Soviet archival documents around Katyn, considerably expanding the scope of scholarship on Katyn and Stalinism.

In 1988 the media liberalization under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy led to the relaxation of censorship in communist Poland, catalyzing growing Polish public pressure on Soviet authorities to release the truth on Katyn.[28] Over the next three years,

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[27] The historian George Sanford considered such an explanation "far-fetched," either for Katyn being a gauge of Nazi-Soviet friendship, or an orientation towards continued Nazi-Soviet cooperation. Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 84 – 85.

[28] Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 245. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm7z7.1

the Soviet government admitted its culpability for the crime, accompanied by the release of archival documents on Katyn to Polish historians. Many of these documents came from the NKVD archives, concerning the handling of the Polish prisoners from their time in the special camps to their transportation and execution. In December of 1991, the "smoking-gun" document was released from Soviet archives: a Politburo memorandum from 5 March 1940 on the decision to undertake the Katyn massacre.[29] With Soviet archival restrictions lifted, historians could now accurately record the number of victims of the massacre as well as the fates of prisoners from Ostashkov and Starobilsk.[30] Moreover, the number of the identified victims of the massacre expanded from 15,000 to nearly 22,000, as the Politburo memo revealed that 7,300 victims were executed across various prisons in Ukraine and Belorussia in tandem with the prisoners from the three special camps. Moreover, other newly released archival materials dealt with the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and the wider repression and deportations in occupied eastern Poland. Today, the executions in Belarus still remain largely uninvestigated owing to the intransigence of the current Belarussian government to investigate its Stalinist past.[31] Nevertheless, the documents released after 1990 have allowed historians to greatly reappraise and expand our understanding of the Katyn massacre.

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[29] Ibid., 254.

[30] Prior to the release of the Soviet archival documents, the fates of the prisoners from Ostashkov and Starobilsk remained unknown to historians and the outside world. While widely assumed to be have been executed, the locations of the graves and the methods of execution were not disclosed until after 1990.

[31] In 1994, the Belarussian president Alexander Lukashenko refused to have the NKVD massacre at Kurapty, near Minsk, investigated, the victims of which included Polish prisoners from the spring of 1940. Lukashenko also initially maintained the Stalinist line that Katyn was a German crime. Today, Belarussian history of the Second World War remains highly reminiscent of past Soviet histories: highly censored and glorified, with the Katyn massacre among the topics omitted. David Marples, '*Our Glorious Past': Lukashenka's Belarus and the Great Patriotic War* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2014), 20, 214. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=5782811.

Victor Zaslavsky's article "The Katyn Massacre: 'Class Cleansing' as Totalitarian Praxis" (1998), was one of the first works to offer a reappraisal of the Katyn massacre and its wider place in the history of Stalinism. A significant portion of Zaslavsky's article includes new details and revelations from the Soviet archives, such as the NKVD policies and handling of the Polish POWs after their capture. Notably, Zaslavsky's article highlights that, towards the end of January 1940, most NKVD personnel assumed that the Polish prisoners would be condemned to eight years of forced labour.[32] This revelation helped to pinpoint the decision-making behind Katyn to between February and March of 1940, yet raised the major question as to why the prisoners were ultimately shot.[33] Drawing on Soviet archival documents, Zaslavsky locates the decision behind Katyn within the draconian security measures of the Soviet state applied onto occupied eastern Poland. Using the language of NKVD documents, Zaslavsky concludes that the Polish prisoners were "members of the nation which in the future could have led a struggle for its rebirth."[34] Likewise, Zaslavsky drew a connection between Katyn and the Soviet defeat in their war against Poland in 1920, in which Joseph

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[32] Victor Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre: 'Class Cleansing' as Totalitarian Praxis," trans, Joseph Cardinale, *Telos,* no. 114 (1999): 81. http://journal.telospress.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/content/1999/114/67.full.pdf+html.

[33] This, Zaslavsky further corroborates: "The decision to eliminate the Polish officers matured within the Soviet leadership toward the end of February 1940. There are no memoirs concerning the decision-making process or informal discussions among Politburo members, but the fact that the first document, approved March 2, 1940, dealt with the fate of prisoners' relatives indicates that the decision to shoot the officers, formally approved by the Politburo on March 5, 1940, had been taken toward the end of February." Ibid., 82.

[34] Ibid., 83.

Stalin played a major role,[35] suggesting that since then, Stalin had a "particular aversion and diffidence toward the Poles."[36]

However, Zaslavsky locates the ultimate decision behind Katyn in Soviet ideology, whereby specific social classes were eliminated in a process he termed "class cleansing."[37] According to Zaslavsky, Marxist-Leninist ideology provided a general framework in which society was broken into "socially friendly" and "socially alien" elements: the latter were an obstacle to social progress, and thus were destined to disappear.[38] Katyn, Zaslavsky states, was another instance of the policy of class-cleansing, standing alongside the wider repression of eastern Poland after the Soviet occupation.[39] As Zaslavsky concludes, in comparison to other events of Stalinist terror, such as the Holodomor genocide in Ukraine or the hundreds of thousands of executions in the 1937 Great Terror, Katyn "loses its exceptional character and becomes an everyday crime of Stalinism."[40] Zaslavsky thus argues that the long-term factors behind Katyn were more influential in deciding the massacre, and that the massacre continued an inevitable practice of Soviet state terror towards its ideological enemies.

Nevertheless, Zaslavsky's view of Katyn as an unexceptional crime has not been unchallenged. The work of George Sanford in his monograph *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*

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[35] The Soviet-Polish War was fought between the USSR and the Second Polish Republic between 1918 and 1921. At the beginning of the war, Soviet forces successfully pushed the Polish Army to the gates of Warsaw but were driven back in a successful Polish counterattack in August 1920, effectively securing Polish victory in the war. During the invasion, Joseph Stalin served as a member of the military council of the Southwest Front, one of the two Soviet army groups attacking into Poland. When ordered to give support to the northern thrust onto Warsaw on 11 August 1920, Stalin refused to send reinforcements until 20 August, by which time the Poles had successfully counterattacked the drive on Warsaw. Historians have since viewed Stalin's refusal to reinforce the drive on Warsaw as a major factor in the Soviet defeat in the Polish-Soviet war. Stephen Brown, "Lenin, Stalin and the Failure of the Red Army in the Soviet-Polish War of 1920," *War & Society* 14, no. 2 (2013): 35 – 36. https://doi.org/10.1179/war.1996.14.2.35

[36] Zaslavsky, "The Katyn Massacre," 83.

[37] Ibid., 84.

[38] Ibid., 84, 103.

[39] Ibid., 85.

[40] Ibid., 89.

of 1940 (2005), challenges the arguments presented by Zaslavsky. Sanford's study was the first full-length English-language book on Katyn that made extensive use of the NKVD archival materials released after 1991. Much of Sanford's source material came from Russian documents translated into Polish after a period of intensive archival collaboration between Russian and Polish historians in the 1990s on Katyn.[41] Through this work, Sanford crafted a meticulous history of Katyn, extensively describing the chain of events for the Polish prisoners that led from their capture in 1939 to their execution in 1940.[42] The second half of Sanford's book goes into detail on the reverberations from the German discovery of Katyn in 1943, focusing on the policies of the Anglo-American and Soviet governments in controlling the truth on Katyn from 1945 to 1991.

In relation to Zaslavsky, Sanford offers a differing point of view on the origins of Katyn. Addressing the place of Katyn within wider Soviet history, Sanford's view is that the "1940 massacre cannot be explained in terms of larger historical outcomes. One has to focus strictly on the context of the time."[43] In this context, Sanford places Katyn within the "Soviet policy to … destroy Polish political, social and cultural influence entirely, and to disperse the Polish population throughout the USSR."[44] In contrast to Zaslavsky, Sanford also places the individual decision-making of Joseph Stalin at the center of the origins of the Katyn massacre, motivated not by ideological and personal considerations, but measured *realpolitik*.[45] Sanford

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[41] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 2.
[42] Using witness testimony from two NKVD personnel involved in the special camps, along with evidence from exhumations of the Kharkiv and Tver graves in the 1990s, Sanford has constructed an extremely detailed description of the executions of the Polish prisoners, providing the closest approximation to a witness testimony of the Katyn massacres.
[43] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 84.
[44] Ibid., 24.
[45] Addressing the idea that Stalin was motivated by antipathy towards Poles in his decision behind Katyn, Sanford acknowledges that the leader displayed resentment towards the Poles, yet in his regular political maneuverings, he did not act on such resentments. "As a self-disciplined and experienced political conspirator, subjective factors would be very subordinate to long-term political aims." Ibid., 78, 83.

illustrates the ambiguity around the origins of Katyn, present in previous literature and reinforced by an enduring lack of archival evidence relating to Stalin's personal decision or his motives on the massacre. Sanford thus differs from Zaslavsky as he left the origins of Katyn open for discussion, seeing the massacre as having been influenced by the immediate context of early 1940, yet holding that it may also have been a routine operation as other scholars suggested.[46] Sanford's own view is that the decision behind Katyn was exceptional, holding that "Stalin would have been less likely to choose the wholesale massacre option the nearer one gets to summer 1941," as many of the Polish prisoners would have volunteered to fight against Nazi Germany.[47] Sanford also holds that Stalin's decision behind Katyn stemmed from a position of Soviet strength felt by Stalin in early 1940, and was decided by a factor, or variety of factors, present during that time.[48] Which of these factors — "the Soviet-Finnish War in December 1939, personal resentments towards the Poles, internal dissent within the Soviet elite, or the German factor" — ultimately informed the decision behind Katyn, Sanford holds open for discussion.[49]

Sanford's views on the differing approaches to the origins of Katyn were continued by other scholars and summarized in *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* (2007), a multi-author edited collection providing a history of Katyn along with English translations of selected

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[46] Ibid., 86.
[47] Ibid., 85 – 86.
[48] In the spring of 1940, the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact still stood strong, and Stalin believed Hitler would be bogged down in a long war with the Western powers. "Stalin therefore felt himself in an exceptionally strong position, both domestically and internationally, in spring 1940. It is possible that he got unwontedly carried away by an almost euphoric and exalted feeling that he was at long last all powerful and beyond all accounting to humanity. Stalin was thus in a position to order the destruction of almost 22 000 Poles, who were held entirely within his power, if he so wished, either to settle personal scores or to further his political aims." Ibid., 83.
[49] Ibid., 86.

Soviet documents related to the massacre.[50] *A Crime Without Punishment* summarized the views of individual historians on the origins of Katyn, continuing to explore the themes of continuity versus contingency, and whether the massacre of the Polish prisoners was inevitable after their immediate capture. The opinion of Zaslavsky is supported by the Russian historian of Katyn, Inessa Yazhborova, who believed the execution of the Polish officers was inevitable.[51] In Yazhborova's view, the officers were class enemies, bound to be subject to liquidation in the USSR. By contrast, Nataliia Lebedeva, a Russian historian and editor of *A Crime Without Punishment,* argues that the Polish officers were exterminated because Soviet efforts to "re-educate" them had failed, for they were clearly determined to continue the fight to restore their country's independence.[52] Moreover, Lebedeva believes Stalin's hatred towards the Poles after the 1920 war was a factor in his decision to massacre the officers.[53] Wojciech Materski, a Polish historian, disagrees with this latter point, yet agrees with Lebedeva's general assessment of Stalin's motives.[54] In addition, Materski also believes that the prisoners were executed to clear the camps for a new wave of prisoners from the coming Soviet occupation of the Baltic States.[55] In contrast to these three historians, Anna Cienciala, an American historian of Katyn, points to Soviet foreign policy motivating Stalin's decision behind Katyn, believing the prisoners were kept alive as a counter bargaining chip in possible negotiations with the Polish Government-in-Exile on the postwar Soviet-Polish frontier.[56]

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[50] These documents were previously available in two Russian and four Polish volumes concerning the Katyn massacre. Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, "preface" to *A Crime Without Punishment*, ix.
[51] Ibid., 143.
[52] Ibid., 142.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 143.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 144.

Most recently, the author Jane Rogoyska has categorized the differing views on the origins of Katyn in her work, *Surviving Katyn: Stalin's Polish Massacre and the Search for Truth* (2021). Rogoyska divides these views into simple and complex theories: the former arguing that Katyn was an inevitable extension of previous Soviet practices of state terror; the latter examining the influence of the immediate wartime context.[57] In light of these competing theories, Rogoyska also holds that the origins of Katyn are unknowable to a degree.[58] Ultimately, the decision behind Katyn rested with Joseph Stalin, yet with the absence of any documentation detailing his thoughts and rationale for the massacre, historians must rely on reasoned conjecture.

Today, with a wider range of scholarly research on Stalinist terror, Katyn can be properly situated in Soviet history, in consideration of both its short- and long-term factors. Most relevant is recent scholarship on Stalinism that has pieced together a rationale behind the regime's use of terror, explaining terror as a policy designed to achieve concrete political aims. The German historian Karl Schlögel and American historian Stephen Kotkin have outlined these views in their respective works on Stalinism. In Schlögel's assessment, terror emerged as a reaction to the regime's fragile legitimacy at home, and from the threat of foreign powers abroad.[59] Stephen Kotkin, in his recent biography on Stalin, has taken a similar view, holding that terror was a rationally and politically calculated form of statecraft for Stalin, used to enhance his personal power and that of the state.[60] Rather contradictorily, then, Kotkin believes that the Katyn "massacres ultimately flowed from a bottomless well of

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[57] Jane Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn: Stalin's Polish Massacre and the Search for Truth* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2021), 315 – 317.
[58] Ibid., 321.
[59] Karl Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, trans, Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 502 – 504.
[60] Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler 1929 – 1941* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 309.

Soviet-Polish enmity."[61] This claim is an oversight on Kotkin's part, departing from his analysis of Stalinist terror as a form of statecraft. As other scholars of Katyn have shown, Stalin's antipathy towards the Poles is entirely insufficient to explain the origins of the massacre. Indeed, Chapters One and Two will explore the policies Stalin undertook towards Poland that were seemingly irrespective of any personal feelings he had towards the nation.

Tellingly, after 1941, Soviet propaganda spoke of the Poles as brethren and comrades united in the struggle against Germany. This shift in harsh repression of the Polish nation in 1940, to raising the nation as an ally against Germany after 1941, had immediate implications for the Soviet position on Katyn, and can be explored through Soviet propaganda around the massacre that emerged during the Second World War. While the Soviet propaganda campaign was aimed at blaming the Germans for Katyn, its content reflected the major changes towards Poland in Soviet foreign policy. Soviet-Polish relations were central in the Katyn Lie, with Soviet propaganda aimed at delegitimizing the Polish Government-in-Exile, while legitimizing the Polish communists as the genuine representatives of the Polish state. The Soviet wartime propaganda around Katyn sharply contrasts their strategic direction around the future of Poland in early 1940, which, I argue in Chapter One, ultimately led to the Katyn massacre.

The Historiography of Katyn Propaganda

Generally, propaganda around Katyn has been an unexplored area in the historiography of the massacre. This lack of research is attributable to several factors. For one, the period in which the German and Soviet governments produced propaganda around

[61] Ibid., 745.

Katyn was relatively short. For the Germans, this period was from April 1943 to the collapse of the regime in May 1945; for the Soviets, this period extended sometime into the middle of 1946. Afterwards, the Katyn Lie was officially maintained in the USSR and its satellites, yet Soviet policy in practice involved mentioning the massacre as little as possible. When international pressure compelled the Soviets to mention Katyn, they only repeated the findings of the wartime Burdenko Commission. [62] Secondly, because much of the historical research around Katyn has focused on demonstrating Soviet guilt for the massacre, the technical details of the Burdenko Commission have been analyzed in far more detail than the Soviet propaganda around Katyn.[63]

English-language historiography has given attention to the complicity of the Anglo-American governments in covering up Katyn. Mainly, scholars have focused on how the British and United States' governments supported the Katyn Lie by suppressing evidence and information indicative of Soviet guilt during the war. This behaviour was reflective of the attitudes of top British and American officials towards Katyn, who chose to ignore the evidence pointing to Soviet guilt at Katyn in favour of maintaining their wartime alliance.[64] Historians have thus researched the British and American policies towards Katyn at the top of each administration, while the effect of these policies on their media reporting on Katyn has

[62] While Katyn came up again in Soviet media, encyclopedias, history books, and notes to foreign governments, it was always presented through the report of the Burdenko Commission, released in January 1944. It was during the war that the Soviets created and crystallized their dominant narrative around Katyn. Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 229.
[63] See Sanford's coverage of the Burdenko Commission report. Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 138.
[64] American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, characterised Katyn as "entirely German propaganda and a German plot," despite receiving a great degree of evidence pointing Soviet guilt after April 1943. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill echoed this statement, seeing Katyn as "an obvious German move to sow discord between the Allies." Ibid., 162, 170.

been little explored. As such, there has been little scholarly analysis of the content of the Katyn Lie as it appeared in the Anglo-American press.

Returning to *Death in the Forest*, Zawodny's work first touched on Soviet propaganda around Katyn through the Soviet-based Polish Workers' Party (PPR) and their engagement with Katyn after 1943. As Zawodny noted, "the Polish communists decided to meet the Katyn affair head on"; that is, openly supporting the Soviet narrative that the Germans were behind the crime.[65] Zawodny summarizes the actions taken by the Polish communists to uphold the Katyn Lie, including having soldiers of the LWP visit the Katyn graves for a ceremonial reburial, calling to raise a tank unit named "Avengers of Katyn" (although it was never actually raised), and planning to hold a trial in postwar Poland to indict the Germans for the crime.[66] Later, Zawodny concluded from a survey of Polish and Soviet bibliographical sources that both countries remained relatively silent on Katyn after the war.[67]

Yet there were exceptions to the Soviet silence around Katyn after the Second World War. Fitzgibbon, for example, included a Soviet statement on Katyn from the newspaper *Soviet Weekly* in *The Katyn Cover-Up.* The Soviet article was written in 1971 after increasing public interest in Katyn in Britain compelled the Soviets to respond.[68] British public interest in Katyn included a campaign to erect a memorial in London, which brought diplomatic condemnation from the Soviets and a repetition of the Burdenko Commission's findings in their official statements and newspapers, such as in the *Soviet Weekly* article cited by Fitzgibbon. The other exception was a Soviet campaign to distract attention from Katyn by

[65] Zawodny, *Death in the Forest*, 170.
[66] Ibid., 170 – 171.
[67] Ibid., 176.
[68] Louis Fitzgibbon, *The Katyn Cover-Up* (London: Tom Stacey Ltd, 1972), 142 – 146.

publicizing and memorializing the Belarussian village of "Khatyn" in 1969, whose inhabitants had been slaughtered by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. [69] The historian David Marples writes that the present Belarussian government has taken the Soviet interpretation of the Second World War as its national narrative and basis for statehood; as such, the Khatyn memorial complex remains prominent in today's Belarus.[70] Otherwise, after 1950, Soviet authorities sought to control the truth around Katyn by erasing its name as much as possible in the public and in official documents.[71]

For Fitzgibbon, the Anglo-American political elites abetted the Soviet suppression of Katyn, and he characterizes their response to Katyn as a "great conspiracy of silence."[72] Yet silence was not entirely the case, as both the British and United States' governments would engage with Katyn publicly throughout the twentieth century. In 1952, the United States government found the Soviets guilty for Katyn in a congressional committee, known as the Madden Commission, though their findings did not result in an international trial despite the committee's recommendations for such.[73] In the United Kingdom, there was a large degree of

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[69] Sanford writes that Khatyn "was suddenly favoured with massive Soviet media attention from 1969 onwards. A large memorial complex was built in 1969. It became the focus of the usual compulsory factory and school visits, media publicity and a brochure, available in no less than six languages." Khatyn was further publicized when Richard Nixon visited the memorial in 1974. In this way, Sanford argues that the Soviets used the Khatyn memorial to discredit the Katyn memorial campaign in London in the mid 1970s, and to confuse Khatyn with Katyn in Western minds. Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre,* 194.

[70] In today's Belarus, the Khatyn memorial complex is a major historical site for local and foreign tourists. As Marples writes, the similarity between the names Katyn and Khatyn "may be another reason why Chatyń [Khatyn] has become a national symbol of suffering during the Great Patriotic War in modern-day Belarus." Marples, *'Our Glorious Past,'* 225 – 226, 229.

[71] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 195.

[72] Fitzgibbon, *The Katyn Coverup*, 2

[73] In the committee's final report, they found the Soviets guilty for Katyn, accurately dating the massacre to the spring of 1940. "The committee's verdict of Soviet guilt in the Katyn atrocity, which the report accurately placed as having occurred in the spring of 1940, surprised few who were familiar with the known details of the case. The evidence against Moscow, although circumstantial in nature, was overwhelming. Polish Americans and exiled Poles everywhere voiced their appreciation of the judgment. Yet, despite the high hopes engendered by all those who sought justice for the heinous Katyn atrocity, precious little came of the fruits of the Congressional inquiry. The likelihood that the Soviet Union could be brought to justice for the mass execution

public interest in Katyn in the 1970s, with the government eventually sanctioning the erection of a Katyn memorial in London in 1976. However, Britain and the United States entirely avoided a long-standing engagement with Katyn and issuing stronger condemnations of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, in part due to their complicity in covering up the crime during the war. During the Madden Commission, the question of US complicity in suppressing evidence incriminating Soviet guilt was raised, though no US official admitted to such.[74] Likewise, the British government's attitude towards Katyn — no matter the political persuasion — was ambiguous and evasive throughout the Cold War.[75] British documents relating to the massacre and their wartime policy towards handling the affair were only released in 1972 under public pressure.[76] Largely, it was the Polish diaspora and émigré community that kept the memory of Katyn alive. Moreover, during the Second World War, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Two, the Anglo-American governments actively supported and circulated the Katyn Lie in their domestic newspapers.

Later works, such as Sanford's study and *A Crime Without Punishment* — arguably the two most comprehensive works on Katyn in English — lack a complete investigation into Soviet propaganda around Katyn. However, the German journalist Thomas Urban's work, *The Katyn Massacre 1940: History of a Crime* (2015), is one of the first studies to deal with the propaganda campaigns that emerged around Katyn.[77] Urban made an in-depth analysis of the

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of thousands of Polish officers was never seriously considered." Robert Szymczak, "The Vindication of Memory: The Katyn Case in the West, Poland, and Russia, 1952-2008," *The Polish Review* 53, no. 4 (2008): 419 – 420. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25779772

[74] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 284.

[75] Ibid., 285.

[76] Ibid., 284.

[77] Thomas Urban, *The Katyn Massacre 1940: History of a Crime* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Military, 2021), 57, 95. Urban's book is also the first in English to look at German domestic propaganda around Katyn, showing the antisemitism and anti-Bolshevism present in this propaganda.

Soviet wartime propaganda campaign around Katyn, including their maneuverings to isolate the Polish Government-in-Exile. While Urban highlighted how the Soviets framed Katyn to isolate the exile government — mainly by charging the London Poles with supporting the Nazis through their calls to have the IRC examine the Katyn graves — he did not fully expand on the linkage between Katyn and the Polish communists. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, establishing the PPR as an alternative body of power to the London Poles was central in Soviet propaganda to deflect their guilt for the Katyn massacre. Finally, Urban touched on the Soviet efforts to publicize their narrative around Katyn to the international community through the willing support of Anglo-American media outlets. Mainly, Urban looked at how the Soviet government enlisted the support of Anglo-American journalists to circulate the findings of the Burdenko Commission in January 1944.[78] However, Urban does not cover the full Soviet propaganda content of the documents produced by the Burdenko Commission.

The American historian Timothy Gleason covers the role of British and American newspapers in falsifying Katyn in "Decade of Deceit: English-language Press Coverage of the Katyn Massacre in the 1940s" (2017). Here, Gleason uses the English-language press coverage of Katyn to explore what the Western governments knew about Katyn versus the narrative they told the public.[79] Gleason uses a variety of archival material on the Anglo-American government policies around Katyn to describe the former point, while using English-language newspaper reports on Katyn to describe the latter. As Gleason notes, the English-language coverage of Katyn was predicated on the wartime requirement for mainstream publications to support their nations and other allied countries.[80] Gleason writes

[78] Ibid., 123 – 125.
[79] Timothy Roy Gleason, "Decade of Deceit: English-Language Press Coverage of the Katyn Massacre in the 1940s," *Journalism History* 43, no. 3 (2017): 132. https://doi.org/10.1080/00947679.2017.12059173
[80] Ibid., 135.

that "[American] officials appeared to suspect that the Soviets committed the massacre … but chose to publicly accuse Nazi Germany" in the interest of maintaining their wartime alliance with Moscow.[81] Using a wide range of Anglo-American newspapers, Gleason demonstrates that most newspapers supported the Soviet narrative of events, although noting that a select few criticized the Soviet government.[82] While Gleason's research is closely related to the content of this thesis, my approach differs as I focus on the information the Soviet government chose to relay to the Anglo-American press around Katyn.

As Gleason concludes, "In the war's last year, the Nazis were still associated with Katyn in the minds of many accusers," showing the impact Anglo-American press reporting on Katyn had.[83] Summarizing the Anglo-American press reporting of Katyn, Gleason holds that "American President Roosevelt was willing to give up Poland to a historic enemy too willing to murder Poles during and after the war. The press — whether through patriotism or pressure — largely supported the message the Allies wanted their publics to read and hear."[84] His research uses these newspaper reports to demonstrate the complicity of the Anglo-American governments in covering-up the Katyn crime during the war. However, a full analysis of the Soviet propaganda present in the Anglo-American reporting around Katyn is absent from Gleason's study. Given that Soviet-Polish relations were central in the Katyn Lie, the analysis in this thesis will further expound on the role the Anglo-American governments played in falsifying Katyn and the lie. As well, Soviet focus on relaying the Katyn Lie to the Western powers throughout the war further highlights the importance the Soviets placed on

[81] Ibid.,136.
[82] Ibid., 138.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 140.

the international perception of Katyn. Both topics will be explored in detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Thesis Structure

In Chapter One, I examine the background of the Katyn massacre, and how the decision to execute the Polish prisoners was influenced by short- and long-term Soviet policy considerations. I denote long-term factors as the Soviet ideological attitudes that led the NKVD to seek out, capture, classify, and ultimately execute the Polish victims at Katyn. In this, my goal is to highlight the place of Katyn within a wider context of Stalinist terror and long-term Soviet policy objectives. As for short-term factors, my focus is on the immediate Soviet foreign policy goals in early 1940. Here, my goal is to demonstrate how Katyn was a result of the Soviet destruction of Polish sovereignty in the eastern provinces, in line with the immediate Soviet policy objectives in early 1940. I contrast this policy with that which emerged in the second half of 1940, when the Soviet leadership began to contemplate a revival of the Polish state encompassing western Poland.

This context ultimately informed the Soviet propaganda around Katyn after the German discovery in April 1943. My second chapter will focus on the Katyn massacre in the Anglo-American press between 1943 and 1946. Expanding on Gleason's research, my aim is to focus on the Soviet role and rationale in facilitating Anglo-American press coverage of the Katyn Lie during the Second World War. In addition to Katyn, I have broadened my analysis of Anglo-American newspapers to include Soviet-Polish relations — primarily their relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Polish communists — which were equally connected to the Katyn Lie. The content of the Katyn Lie blamed the Germans for Katyn, delegitimized the Polish Government-in-Exile, and legitimized the PPR's claim to power in

postwar Poland. Katyn, and the Soviet lie that the crime was a German one, were central to the PPR's claim to legitimacy in Poland given their pro-Soviet orientation. Overall, I argue that during the Second World War, the Soviets actively promoted Anglo-American press coverage of the Katyn Lie, and that the favorable coverage given by the Anglo-American press to the lie was a key factor in giving the Soviets the confidence to push the issue into the public sphere.

Chapter One: Katyn and Stalinism

Introduction

> Events arising out of the Polish-German war have revealed the internal insolvency and obvious impotence of the Polish state. A mere fortnight has passed, and Poland has already lost all its industrial centres, the greater part of its large towns and cultural centres. The population of Poland has been abandoned by their ill-starred leaders to their fate. The Polish state and its government have virtually ceased to exist. In view of all of the above … the Soviet Government has instructed the high command of the Red Army to order the troops to cross the frontier and to take under their protection the lives and property of the population of western Ukraine and western White Russia.[85]

The above quotation is an extract from a speech delivered by Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, on 17 September 1939, justifying the Soviet invasion of Poland launched on the same day. In this speech, Molotov stressed that the Polish state had collapsed owing to the state's own impotence and the bankruptcy of its leadership, not because of the German invasion. This line of reasoning was a key justification for the Soviet invasion of the country as it provided diplomatic cover for the Soviet invasion, ignored the German role in Poland's collapse, and attacked the legitimacy of the Polish government and leadership. Within Soviet propaganda, Polish landowners, the nobility, and the officer corps featured prominently as antagonists, representative of the corrupt government of the Second Polish Republic. These figures were shown as oppressing the country's workers, peasants, and Belorussian and Ukrainian minorities. One poster was particularly representative of the themes of Soviet propaganda: it depicted a Red Army soldier impaling an eagle donned with a traditional Polish officer's cap, while two peasants escape from the eagle's talons.

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[85] "Extracts from Commissar Molotov's broadcast on the Soviet invasion of Poland, 17 September 1939," in General Sikorski Historical Institute, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations 1939 – 1945,* vol. 1 (London: Heinemann, 1961), 47 – 48.

Poster depicting a Red Army soldier attacking the Polish eagle, c. 1939.[86]

Soviet propaganda held that Polish officers — *polskie pany,* as Polish elites and officers were derogatorily called in Soviet jargon — were of aristocratic origin, responsible for class exploitation and the repression of Poland's Belorussian and Ukrainian minorities. During the invasion, numerous leaflets were dropped on Polish lines urging the rank-and-file soldiers to abandon their officers and come over to the Soviets. Likewise, Polish officers were singled out among the 240,000 Polish POWs and were handed over to the NKVD for imprisonment.[87] Viewed in light of the Soviet repressions in occupied eastern Poland

[86] "Poster depicting a Red Army soldier attacking the Polish eagle," 1939, Poster collection, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/24373/poster-depicting-a-red-army-soldier-attacking-the-polish-eag

[87] Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 25 – 27.

thereafter, the poster takes on a sinister meaning, foreshadowing the mass execution of Poland's officer corps in the spring of 1940.

Viewed within the wider history of Stalin's Soviet Union, the Katyn massacre was a continuation of the regime's widespread use of terror against its own citizens, now applied onto a foreign territory. By 1940, terror was deeply embedded within Soviet state practice, used by Stalin to consolidate his power in the upper echelons of the Soviet leadership and to maintain the regime's control over Soviet society. In relation to Katyn, some of Poland's officer corps were educated and held specialized professional positions in civilian and military life, thus representing a potential social group to threaten Soviet rule in occupied Poland. Likewise, the massacre was necessary precursor to imperial expansion: a decapitation of Poland's social elite to subjugate the occupied territories, as Nazi Germany did to the Polish intelligentsia after their invasion. This wider context of Stalinist terror is invaluable to understanding the massacre's origins and place in Soviet history.

However, the Katyn massacre was also an inconsistency in Soviet state practice. For one, there were no situations similar to Katyn during and after the Second World War.[88] The Katyn massacre, then, did not establish a pattern of occupation repeated in the Baltic states or the later Soviet occupations of 1944/45 in Eastern Europe. Neither was the decision to execute the mass of Polish prisoners a foregone conclusion, as the NKVD seriously explored the possibility of using the prisoners as forced labour. Nor were the mass executions of Katyn extended to the Polish officers who had escaped to the Baltic States in 1939. These officers,

[88] For instance, there was no similar genocide of the elites of Tatar or Check-Ingush communities, two nationalities ethnically cleansed by Soviet authorities during WWII. Although the elites suffered heavily under the Soviet deportations and ethnic cleansing of the populations, they were not systemically imprisoned and executed as the Polish officers were. Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 86.

instead of being executed, were offered a chance to join either Anders' Army or the LWP forming on Soviet soil after June 1941.

As Sanford has described, "While the 1940 massacre was in some respects untypical of Soviet practice it was by no means outside its more extreme parameters."[89] This description accurately reflects the place of Katyn as a consistency and aberration in Soviet state practice. My goal in this chapter is to chart both the consistencies and inconsistencies of the Katyn massacre within Soviet state practice, the latter of which I argue to be a product of the regime's immediate foreign policy directions in the spring of 1940. Ultimately, I hold that the Katyn massacre was an expression of the Soviet regime's goal of entirely extinguishing the sovereignty of the Polish state in early 1940. By examining Katyn in this light, I intend to show the contrast in Soviet policies towards Poland that emerged in the second half of 1940. In early 1940, the Soviet policy towards Poland indicated a complete destruction of Polish sovereignty within the eastern provinces, while no challenge was made to the German annexation and control of western Poland. By contrast, in late 1940 the Soviets planned to raise a new Polish state under Soviet auspices that encompassed the territory occupied by Nazi Germany. Furthermore, this new Polish state would be raised in a war against Nazi Germany. This shift in Soviet policy towards Poland would directly inform the propaganda the Soviets released around the massacre after April 1943, as the Polish communists had to justify their pro-Soviet stance in the face of the Katyn graves. As such, the legitimacy of the Polish communists came to rest on the notion that Katyn was a German crime.

[89] Ibid.

Class Cleansing: The Ideological Background of Katyn

On 5 March 1940, the Soviet Politburo secretly authorized the decision to execute the majority of the Polish prisoners captured in 1939. One month later, the executions were carried out by a special group of NKVD operatives, with the operation ending in May 1940. Much of the information on the timing and victim base of the massacre comes from the Politburo memorandum, composed sometime in February or March of 1940. The memorandum stipulated that some 25,000 Polish prisoners captured in 1939 were to be executed by the NKVD without trial (although the actual number would be some 21,867).[90] On 5 March, it was forwarded to the Politburo of the Central Committee, the highest decision-making body in the Soviet Union, and was signed by all five members, including Joseph Stalin.[91]

The Politburo memorandum gives a detailed record of the social profile of the prisoners held by the NKVD prior to their execution. In the text, the victim base was split into two groups: one, comprising 14,736 prisoners, and the other, some 18,632 prisoners of various social classes and nationalities.[92] The former group was 97 per cent Polish in

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[90] "Beria Memorandum to Joseph Stalin Proposing the Execution of the Polish Officers, Gendarmes, Police, Military Settlers, and Others in the Three Special POW Camps, Along with Those Held in the Prisons of the Western Regions of Ukraine and Belorussia, 5 March 1940," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 118 – 120.

[91] Despite the document originating from Beria and being forwarded to the Politburo, the decision behind Katyn ultimately rested with Joseph Stalin. By 1940, Stalin had exerted near total control over the Soviet government, and a major decision like Katyn would not have been made without his personal involvement. As Sanford summarizes, "The hub of power in the Stalinist system was an all-powerful tyrant called Stalin. He inspired and determined decisions in very direct personal and informal ways. It is rare to find written orders emanating directly from Stalin as against their rubber stamping by such bodies as the politburo and secretariat which, by 1940, merely acted as fronts for his will." Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 78.

[92] In Soviet parlance, nationality corresponded to ethnicity rather than citizenship. For example, an NKVD report on the national composition of the three special camps listed "Poles (who were the overwhelmingly majority), Jews, Belarussians, Germans, Ukrainians, Czechs, and Georgians" within the camp, despite all these groups being citizens of the Second Polish Republic. "NKVD UPV Report on the Nationality of Polish POW Officers Held in Starobilsk and Kozelsk Camps 28 February 1940," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 112.

nationality — that is, ethnically Polish — with some 8424 prisoners being military officers, while the remaining 6138 were composed of police officers, junior officers, gendarmes, prison guards, intelligence agents, officials, landowners, priests, and military settlers."[93] This first group formed the dominant victim base of the massacre: of the 14,700 listed, some 14,552 were shot in the spring of 1940.[94] In comparison, the second group was less socially and ethnically homogenous: of the 18,632 prisoners, some 10,685 were identified as Polish in Beria's report, the remainder likely being Ukrainian and Belorussian.[95] Socially, many of the victims were ambiguously classified as "members of counter-revolutionary organizations" and "refugees."[96] In this second group, Beria recommended the execution of 11,000, without specifying their social status, of whom some 7305 were executed across various prisons throughout western Ukraine and Belorussia.[97] In the memorandum, Beria was blunt in his justification for executing the Polish prisoners: "They are all sworn enemies of Soviet power, filled with hatred for the Soviet system of government, thus the USSR NKVD believes it is essential to … apply to them the supreme punishment, [execution by] shooting."[98]

Returning to Sanford's argument, about Katyn being within regular NKVD parameters, there are comparisons to be made with two other analogous NKVD "mass operations," denoting the mass repression of specific social groups of the Soviet population. The first emerged from NKVD Operational Order 00447, which marked the height of Stalin's Great Terror in 1937. This order stipulated quotas of arrests and executions in the various

[93] Military settlers, or *osadniki*, were Polish veterans of the 1920 Soviet-Polish war who were given or sold state land in the eastern provinces occupied in the 1920 war.
[94] Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 142.
[95] Ibid., 119.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., 136.
[98] Ibid., 119 – 120.

republics (SSRs) of the USSR for a wide group of social classes deemed hostile to the USSR.[99] After the operation came to an end in November 1938, over 767,000 persons were arrested and sentenced, of whom 386,000 were shot.[100] The other, Operational Order 00485, was the "Polish Operation," lasting from August 1937 to November 1938. The Polish Operation stipulated quotas for the arrest and execution of "members of the Polish military organization in the USSR," resulting in some 139,000 convictions, of which 111,091 were shot.[101] Notably, this operation did not exclusively target ethnic Poles; instead, the NKVD swept up anyone with any foreign ties, with only an estimated 54 per cent of victims being ethnically Polish.[102] Nevertheless, the operation, along with other national operations of the Great Terror, indicated that the Soviet regime would perceive foreign communities and nationalities with increasing mistrust. The Polish operation set a precedent for the Soviet incorporation of eastern Poland into the USSR after 1939, and its subsequent handling of the Polish population. Both the Great Terror and the Polish Operation likewise reflected the function of terror within Stalinism, as statecraft designed to accomplish concrete political goals. Karl Schlögel, in his monograph *Moscow 1937*, characterized the Great Terror as a "final solution to the social question" and "the destruction of any potentially independent

[99] The victim group of the mass operations of the Great Terror was a wide swathe of Soviet society that is difficult to succinctly summarize. Examples includes, "kulaks, criminals, members of anti-Soviet parties, Cossack and White Guard insurrectionists," etc. In practice, the wide and often unspecified range of social classes, in tandem with quotas set for repression, led to random and arbitrary repressions characteristic of the Great Terror. The same applied to the "National operations" of the Great Terror, which in theory targeted specific nationalities for repression, but in practice, often swept up nationalities outside their target quotas. Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, 494 – 495.
[100] Ibid., 499.
[101] Ibid., 500.
[102] James Morris, "The Polish terror: spy mania and ethnic cleansing in the great terror," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 5 (2004): 762. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4147481

elements [in Soviet society] who might constitute a threat to the regime if they were to unite."[103]

Similarly, Order 00485 showed how national minorities were seen as potentially dangerous and independent elements within Soviet society. Poles were from an "enemy nation," with Poland assessed as hostile by Soviet authorities throughout the 1930s.[104] Along with ethnic Poles, large numbers of other national minorities, including Germans, Latvians, and Chinese, were deported or arrested throughout the 1930s and targeted in the "national operations" of 1937, mostly throughout the Soviet border regions.[105] As Terry Martin has described in his study of the Soviet nationality policies, Soviet xenophobia towards these nationalities was spurred by an ideological hatred and suspicion of foreign capitalist governments, along with the belief that in the event of war, national minorities in the USSR would side with their respective homelands.[106] In the autumn of 1939, the Soviets had now absorbed a part of an "enemy nation," which they intended to merge with the Ukrainian and Belorussian SSR's. Terror would be used to merge eastern Poland into the two Soviet republics.

The Soviet occupation of eastern Poland thus saw the mass repression of those defined as "internal enemies" in the USSR, in line with previous Stalinist state practices. During the

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[103] Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*. 502 – 503.
[104] Soviet mistrust towards domestic Poles and those abroad undoubtedly had roots in the 1920 Polish-Soviet war, with fears of further Polish belligerency common in the Soviet leadership throughout the 1930s. Nevertheless, this mistrust belonged to a wider Soviet xenophobia that was mistrustful of foreign-capitalist governments. Poles were subject to ethnic cleansing in the USSR along with other nationalities — Germans, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Koreans, Chinese, Kurds, Iranians — with less history of belligerency towards the Soviets. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nation's and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923 – 1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 311, 313. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1rv61tj
[105] Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, 500
[106] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 313.

Soviet occupation of eastern Poland, hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens (including ethnic Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews) were arrested and deported *en masse* into the eastern USSR throughout 1940. [107] While these deportations involved the mass of the population, Katyn affected a relatively small group, who, as has been said, held specialized skills and leadership potentiality. In continuation of the Stalinist terror from the 1930s, the Katyn massacre appears as a social decapitation meant to remove any potential opposition to Soviet rule in occupied Poland: political leaders, politicians, judges and legal personnel, educators, and clergy were all swept up in arrests and deportations following the Soviet occupation. [108] Likewise, across the border, Nazi Germany conducted similar repressions of Polish citizens, targeting the Polish intelligentsia and political elites for arrest and execution. [109]

Through this framework, we can understand why the Soviet authorities singled out the Polish officers among the Polish population. As of 2 October 1939, a Politburo decision led to the segregation of Poland's officer corps from the mass of Polish POWs and the subsequent creation of the three special camps. [110] During the prisoners' time in the camps, the NKVD

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[107] Jan T. Gross, in his book on the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland, gives a comprehensive breakdown of these deportations. In February 1940, civil servants, local government officials, judges, members of the police force were deported from the towns; in the country, forest workers, settlers, and small farmers — irrespective of nationality — were deported. In April 1940, the families of persons previously arrested, the families of missing persons or those abroad, tradesmen (mostly Jews), farm labourers from confiscated estates, and more small farmers were deported. Jan T. Gross, *Revolution From Abroad: the Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 197. https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/2027/heb05003.0001.001.

[108] Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 23.

[109] "Most individuals on the wanted lists belonged to the Polish intelligentsia — teachers, priests, doctors, artists, writers, politicians — or had in the early 1920s been members of Polish insurgent organizations that had fought against German paramilitary units, some of whose members in 1939 filled the ranks of the *Einsatzgruppen* (special task forces of the SS, a major German paramilitary organization). These Poles would become the first targets of killings conducted by Heydrich's men." Jürgen Matthäus, Jochen Böhler, and Klaus-Michael Mallmann, *War, Pacification, and Mass Murder 1939: The Einsatzgruppen in Poland*, (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 42. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=1676709.

[110] "Excerpt from a Politburo Protocol: Decision on Prisoners of War, 2–3 October 1939," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 62.

conducted numerous interrogations, building a comprehensive record base in the form of individual files for every POW, including their origins, family connections, political and religious beliefs, behaviour, and social associations.[111] Part of the purpose of these interrogations was to find political collaborators amongst the Poles. Furthermore, the interrogations and the constant political propaganda in the camps were part of a broader, albeit highly unsuccessful, tactic of mass indoctrination of the Polish prisoners. By 8 February 1940, files on the Polish prisoners were sent to Moscow for examination by Beria and other senior NKVD functionaries.[112] These interrogations seemed to strongly inform Beria's conclusions presented to the Politburo in March 1940. For one, Beria classified nearly every Polish state, civil and political organization, to which most of the prisoners belonged to, as counterrevolutionary.[113] The idea that the majority of the prisoners belonged to a clandestine insurgency battling Soviet power was patently absurd. Yet within the paranoid enclosure of the Stalinist state, the Polish prisoners were a dangerous anomaly: coming from a foreign background with strong patriotic beliefs, they were anathema to the totalitarian Stalinist system. As well, Beria's assessment of the prisoners as "anti-Soviet" was accurate: NKVD reports from December noted the strongly held patriotism, military discipline, and religiosity of the Poles.[114] This portrait of the Polish prisoners in large part informed the security risk they represented to the Soviet state in the eyes of its leadership, hence a reason for their mass execution in the spring of 1940.

Beria's order also specified that 800 captured Czechoslovaks were to be released "after obtaining from each of them a signed statement saying that they will not fight against the

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[111] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 64 – 65.
[112] Ibid., 73.
[113] Ibid., 69.
[114] Ibid., 66.

USSR."[115] The Czechoslovaks belonged to the Czech and Slovak Legion, a military unit that formed after the German annexation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, and was stationed in Poland to fight the Germans in September. The unit was later captured by the Soviets after their invasion on 17 September. Given that a Czechoslovak legion fought against the Bolsheviks in 1918, the contrast in their fates compared with the Polish officers suggests that Stalin was not motivated by a desire to inflict revenge on the Poles for the 1920 Polish-Soviet war. Later, during the Soviet-German conflict, a Czechoslovak formation, including prisoners from 1939, would fight alongside the Red Army. The experience of the Czechoslovak prisoners may highlight the fate of Polish military officers in that both were foreign officers ostensibly hostile to the USSR in 1939, yet only the Poles were executed in 1940. In *A Crime Without Punishment*, the authors write that the Czechoslovaks were spared as they "were traditionally pro-Russian, remembered Soviet diplomatic support for their country in the Munich Crisis, and had not lost any territory to the Soviet Union."[116] Unfortunately, there has been a lack of further documentation and research available in English explaining the Soviet attitudes towards the Czechoslovak prisoners.

Of the Poles taken prisoner in the fall of 1939 a small group of some 400 men were spared from execution. After the NKVD liquidated the three special camps, the survivors were transferred to a camp called Griazovets, where they received far more comfortable treatment than the three camps had offered.[117] An NKVD document from 25 May 1940 gave a breakdown of these survivors, tallying their number at 395 persons and listing the reasons for

[115] "Excerpt from a Politburo Protocol," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 63.
[116] Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 27.
[117] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 87.

the survival of some of them.[118] Some 68 prisoners were spared at the request of the German and Lithuanian embassies, while a further 24 "Germans" were spared.[119] The latter were Polish citizens of German descent (*Volksdeutsch*) and were saved due to the then ongoing Nazi-Soviet collaboration.[120] Finally, some 40 to 50 of these prisoners were openly pro-Soviet and expressed complete readiness to cooperate with the Soviet Union.[121] The survival of the German and pro-Soviet prisoners is readily understandable within the logic of the Soviet state, as they were spared for their political significance and potential as collaborators. However, the remaining prisoners in Griazovets remained loyal to the Polish Government-in-Exile and hostile to the Soviet Union.[122] Piecing together the NKVD's logic behind their survival is therefore difficult as most of their executed comrades shared their same political views and loyalty towards the exile government. Swianiewicz, who was in no way friendly to Soviet authorities, was seemingly spared for his studies on the Soviet and Nazi economies before the war, though, as he notes, he was condemned to imprisonment in the GULAG for these writings.[123] Another openly anti-Soviet survivor, General Jerzy Wołkowicki, believed he was spared for his role as a highly decorated Russian navy officer in the Russo-Japanese War of

[118] "Soprunenko's Report on the Number of Polish POWs Dispatched to Yukhnov Camp from the Special Camps and the Grounds on Which They Were Sent There After, 25 May 1940," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 264.
[119] Those spared by request of the German or Lithuanian embassies survived for a variety of reasons. Either their relatives appealed to them based on their German and Lithuanian descent, they were of professional prominence, or a person of note intervened on their behalf. For example, Second Lieutenant Prince Jan Lubomirski was spared and released due to highly placed diplomatic connections. Ibid; Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn,* 83.
[120] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn,* 84.
[121] Ibid., 91.
[122] Ibid., 90.
[123] Swianiewicz, *In the Shadow of Katyn,* 108.

1904–5.[124] Put simply, there was inconsistency in NKVD logic pertaining to the survival of many of these Polish prisoners.

Nevertheless, from the broad portrait of the prisoners, there emerges a consistent ideological rationale for their execution: they were a concentrated group of Polish nationals with attitudes hostile to the Soviet Union; thus, a potential obstacle to Soviet expansion and the incorporation of occupied Poland. Their elimination fit into previous patterns of Soviet terror, leading historians such as Lebedeva and Zaslavsky to conclude the massacres were inevitable. Nevertheless, the fates of the Polish prisoners at Katyn contrasted with the 15,000 Polish military members captured after the massacre, in June 1940, who were spared execution.[125] These Poles had escaped to the Baltic States after the invasion of Poland in 1939 and were arrested by the NKVD, yet not executed, after the Soviet annexation of the Baltics in the summer of 1940.[126] Secondly, as Sanford notes, all the evidence suggested that the NKVD functionaries worked on the assumption that the POWs in the three special camps would be sentenced to three to eight years forced labour in the GULAG.[127] All this suggests that mass execution by shooting was not a foregone conclusion predetermined by previous patterns of Soviet state terror. Rather, the evidence indicates that a combination of short-term factors influenced Soviet leadership at the very top, and ultimately precipitated the mass execution of the Polish prisoners. These factors, I argue, stemmed from Soviet foreign policy

[124] Wołkowicki had openly resisted surrender to the Japanese during the naval action at Tsushima during the war. Afterwards he was immortalized in fictional form in the Soviet historical novel *Tsushima.* Rogoyska notes that, "He was a living legend. Even the NKVD were in awe of him," and speculates he was spared for this reason. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest*, 145; Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn,* 89.
[125] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 22.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 77.

considerations throughout 1940. As Soviet foreign policy objectives shifted throughout 1940, so did their attitudes towards Poland and the surviving Polish prisoners.

By the autumn of 1940, the NKVD was exploring the possibility of creating a Polish army division under Soviet control, using the few remaining survivors from the Katyn massacres, along with Poles captured during the annexation of the Baltic states.[128] Prior to the massacre, this possibility was never seriously considered by the Soviet authorities in relation to the officers imprisoned in the three camps. In October of 1940, Beria held a meeting with Colonel Zygmunt Berling, a Polish officer willing to collaborate with Soviet authorities, concerned with the topic of raising a Soviet-Polish division for a future war against Germany.[129] Berling is a unique figure in the history of Katyn, as he collaborated with the Soviets not due to any communist political leanings, but through the belief that an alliance with the Soviet Union was the only viable route to Poland's survival as a nation.[130] Berling was politically adept at capitalizing on Moscow's project to revive Poland as a Soviet satellite, and later became the public face of the LWP, both domestically and abroad. Nevertheless, Berling proved too independently minded for Soviet authorities, and was sidelined by the end of the war by Poles more loyal to the Stalinist line.[131] Remarkably, Berling could not have been unaware of the fates of his former Polish compatriots. Having experienced Soviet captivity and the sudden silence surrounding the prisoners from the three special camps after May 1940, Berling nonetheless chose collaboration with the Soviets in the

[128] "Note from Beria to Stalin on the Possible Organization of Military Units with Polish and Czech Prisoners of War, 2 November 1940," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 276.
[129] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 102.
[130] Ibid., 37.
[131] Berling was stripped of his rank commanding the 1st Polish Army in September 1944, after disobeying Soviet orders and leading his army to succour the Warsaw Uprising. Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 119, 205; Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 281.

belief it would secure Poland's revival as a nation.[132] Later, during his conversation with Beria, Berling questioned whether the officers from Starobilsk and Kozelsk would be available for this division, to which Beria is said to have replied, "They are not available. We made a big mistake."[133]

Katyn and Soviet Foreign Policy

Beria's conversation with Berling has been retold in several different versions by various witnesses, with the words "we made a big mistake" attributed to Beria or another high-ranking NKVD officer.[134] In either case, whoever spoke the words held full knowledge of the fate of the Polish officers. Within the context of Beria's discussion with Berling, he appeared to reference Katyn as a mistake as the massacre robbed the planned Polish division of a valuable cadre of trained officers. Whether the words reflected Stalin's opinion is unknown; nevertheless, as Beria stated in his note, the plan to create a Soviet-Polish division in the autumn of 1940 came from Stalin's initiative.[135] In relation to Katyn, the planned Polish division indicated a profound shift towards Poland and its place in Soviet foreign policy goals. In essence, the Soviet leadership began to consider the revival of Poland as a nation-state, with land encompassing western Poland occupied by Nazi Germany. In contrast, Soviet policy in early 1940 was centered on eliminating Polish sovereignty in the eastern provinces and leaving the German western annexation uncontested.

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[132] In his memoirs, written many years after Katyn and only published in 1990, Berling acknowledged Soviet responsibility for the massacre, believing the victims were executed owing to their refusal to collaborate with Soviet authorities. Ibid., 255

[133] Ibid., 102.

[134] For greater detail on the discrepancies between these accounts, see Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 102 – 104.

[135] This was reported by Beria in his note to Stalin, stating that he was fulfilling Stalin's directives in regard to the Polish and Czech POWs. "Note from Beria to Stalin," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 276.

As mentioned previously, the official Soviet line on their invasion of Poland was that the Polish state had ceased to exist, with the Red Army moving in to protect the Ukrainian and Belorussian populations of eastern Poland.[136] Although this appears as diplomatic cover for the Soviet invasion, the idea that Poland had ceased to exist came up in Soviet rhetoric on the ground and in the discussions of the top Soviet leadership. In the three special camps, the NKVD constantly told the prisoners that Poland no longer existed: Polish culture was ridiculed by the guards, while some prisoners were sent into forced labour for "patriotic activity on behalf of former Poland."[137] While this was likely part of the NKVD's attempts to demoralize or indoctrinate the prisoners, the attitude was indicative of similar sentiments expressed by the upper echelons of Soviet leadership. While the Soviets considered raising a rump Polish state as a Soviet republic in early September, by 25 September 1939, Stalin told the German ambassador in Moscow that he was opposed to leaving any Polish state, as it might lead to friction between the USSR and Nazi Germany.[138]

The relationship between Russia and Poland — and, by extension, the Soviet-Polish relationship — has been described as an "age old antagonism" dating back to early modern times.[139] Indeed, Soviet animosity towards Poland was present in both the behaviour exhibited by the NKVD camp guards and in the official rhetoric of the Soviet government. While it can

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[136] "Soviet Government Note Handed to the Polish Ambassador in the USSR, Waclaw Grzybowski, 17 September 1939," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 44.
[137] Zawodny, *Death in the Forest*, 137 – 138.
[138] This rump Polish state would be an SSR, encompassing a predominantly Polish district in the occupied provinces. "This is suggested by an internal political directive of 16 September, issued by the War Council of the Belorussian Front, stating that a soviet, or assembly, elected in a preponderantly Polish district could vote for the district to join the USSR as a Soviet republic. Another indication is recorded by General Anders, who had been a cavalry staff officer in the Russian Army in 1914-1917. He was asked, while held a prisoner in Lwów, if he would join a Polish government under Soviet control and, later, if he would serve as a high officer in the Red Army. Anders rejected both proposals, thereby incurring brutal treatment." Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 24.
[139] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 5.

be said that this animosity affected the Soviet policy towards Poland, I agree with the arguments of historians who hold that the elimination of Polish sovereignty was a product of specific Soviet foreign policy projections in early 1940, rather than longer trends in Russo-Polish history. Sanford summarizes the Soviet international and strategic position in the first half of 1940, whereby Stalin believed that his non-aggression pact with Hitler would be long lasting and that it had secured the USSR's external position for well beyond the immediate future; moreover, Stalin expected that the Western powers would bog Germany down in a long war.[140]

In essence, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and Germany's war against France and Britain allowed the Soviet Union to stay on the sidelines of the European conflict. This gave time for the Soviet armed forces to continue their expansion and modernization. Whether this presaged a Soviet offensive into Europe is unknown; what can be said is that the Soviet policy of eliminating Polish sovereignty stemmed from their wider strategy of avoiding war with either Germany or the Western powers. Stalin believed an independent Polish state would cause friction between the USSR and Nazi Germany, while the Western powers had already guaranteed the integrity of the Polish state, hence the Soviets stressed that this state no longer existed.[141] Late in October 1939, Soviet "elections" were held in the occupied territories, resulting in their incorporation into the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs. As Jan T. Gross writes on his study of the Soviet invasion of Poland: "Just in case the Western powers hastily sued for peace and another Pax Germanica on Hitler's terms was established in Europe, it was important for the Soviet leaders to cast their territorial conquest in the respectable guise of a

[140] Ibid., 83.
[141] David R. Marples, *Motherland: Russia in the Twentieth Century*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 143. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4324/9781315837437

popular change of sovereignty. They did not want either to be drawn into war or to be taken for Hitler's allies."[142]

My own view is that the Katyn massacre stemmed from this policy of eliminating Poland as a sovereign state, with the Soviets viewing the Polish prisoners in the three special camps as integral to Polish sovereignty. In this, my views on Katyn's origins most closely align with Sanford, who likewise located the massacre's origins within the wider suppression of Polish influence in the occupied eastern provinces. In contrast to Sanford, however, I hold that the massacre stemmed from a position of perceived weakness on the international stage by the Stalinist regime. Looking back to the Great Terror, both Kotkin and Schlögel agree that heightening international tension — the Spanish Civil War, Japanese expansion into China, and the rise of Nazi Germany — fueled Stalin's rationale for the Great Terror, with terror used to eliminate any perceived fifth columnists.[143] Likewise, throughout the 1930s, the threat of war was a driving force behind the repression of ethnic minorities along the Soviet borderlands.[144] In the case of Katyn, the decision to execute the Polish officers, and the deportation of swathes of the Polish population to the Soviet Far East, took place towards the conclusion of the Soviet-Finnish war. The Soviet-Finnish war began in December 1939 after the Soviets invaded Finland in a bid to expand their influence and security in the Baltic region. Although the Soviets emerged victorious in March 1940, their initial military

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[142] Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 24; Gross, *Revolution From Abroad*, 71.
[143] As Schlögel notes, Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov offered the same justification for the Great Terror well into the rest of his life: "It is thanks to 1937 that we had no fifth column." In contrast, Kotkin describes the "fifth column storyline" as a convenient justification for Stalin's terror, picked up on by many in Stalin's inner circle and contemporary observers of the terror, but not its ultimate cause. In both analyses, international insecurity worked alongside Stalin's perceptions of domestic insecurity, providing impetus for the Great Terror. Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, 504; Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler*, 428 – 429.
[144] Hiroaki Kuromiya, "Accounting for the Great Terror," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 53, no. 1 (2005): 90. http://ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/41051345

performance was abysmal, exposing many deficiencies of the Red Army to the senior Soviet leadership.[145] With the Red Army modernizing and reorganizing after the war, the elimination of Polish sovereignty fit in with the immediate Soviet strategy of avoiding war with either Germany or the Western powers.

As well, the Soviets secured the Polish provinces they had sought since their defeat in the 1920 Polish-Soviet war. After the 1920 Treaty of Riga, which formally ended the Soviet-Polish war, "Moscow was bent on redrawing the Soviet-Polish border at the first suitable opportunity. Such an opportunity would be offered by a European war involving Germany."[146] Moscow also supported national irredentism among the Ukrainian and Belarussian populations in eastern Poland until the early 1930s, when, for internal reasons, the regime cracked down on nationalism in the Ukrainian and Belarussian SSRs. A subsequent result of this crackdown was the Soviet-Polish nonaggression pact of January 1932, which gave some stability to the Polish-Soviet border. In the view of the historian Jerzy Borzęcki, the Sovietization of Poland in 1920 was part of Lenin's policy of exporting the revolution into western Europe.[147] The elimination of Polish influence in the eastern provinces through deportations and the Katyn massacre can be read as a continuation of this policy. While the elimination of Polish sovereignty in these territories fit with Moscow's longer-term irredentist aims, in my view, the wholesale massacre of Poland's officer corps and social elite stemmed from Moscow's immediate foreign policy concerns in early 1940.

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[145] Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler*, 754 – 755; Alexander Hill, *The Red Army and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 169 – 171.
[146] Jerzy Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (Yale University Press, 2008), 278 – 279. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1npz47
[147] Ibid., 275.

To be sure, there is no doubt that the massacre continued a trend of Soviet state practice aimed at the suppression of "internal enemies" to buttress state security and the regime's hold on power. As such, the Polish officers and other social classes would have faced repression under the Soviet regime regardless of the international context. Nevertheless, the Polish prisoners, particularly the officer corps, were not simply class enemies in the view of the Soviet leadership. This label was enough to lead to the imprisonment or execution of any Soviet citizen, regardless of the real grounds for guilt. Hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens were deported under this label in early 1940, as being a class enemy was a sufficiently broad and ambiguous label to justify the repression of mass sections of the population. In contrast, the prisoners in Ostashkov, Kozelsk, and Starobilsk, were examined with a great degree of precision by the NKVD and were subject to attempts at indoctrination hitherto unusual for the NKVD.

A likely explanation for their different treatment was the large number of professionals and specialists that made up their ranks. Swianiewicz notes this when considering the contradictions of Katyn: the missing officers represented thousands of professionals and specialists whose skills could have enormously benefited the Soviet economy and the war effort.[148] Swianiewicz perhaps overstates his case in imagining that the Soviet Union would have made efficient use of these skills, suspect as the officers were in Soviet eyes; moreover, at the time of their execution, there was no war effort to support. What is clear is that the Soviet authorities treated the Polish prisoners with a degree of calculation in regard to their potential usefulness to the Soviet Union.

[148] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 318.

The Bolsheviks had previously adopted a similar stance towards Tsarist military officers at the onset of the Russian civil war in 1918. Tsarist military officers and specialists formed the backbone of the anti-Bolshevik movement, providing both military and political leadership around which other anti-Bolshevik groups united.[149] However, former Tsarist military officers also played a crucial role in the emerging Bolshevik armed forces.[150] Given the NKVD efforts to indoctrinate the Polish officers throughout their time in the camps, it is likely a similar attitude prevailed towards the Polish officers after their capture in 1939. Nevertheless, the view that ultimately prevailed of the Polish prisoners was their status as internal enemies of the Soviet Union: the rationale for their execution in March 1940. After June 1940, the Soviet view of the officers again changed considerably, which becomes most apparent when examining Beria's plan to raise a Soviet-Polish division in the fall of 1940.

Official authorization for a planned Soviet-Polish division came in a note from Beria to Stalin from 2 November 1940.[151] In his note, Beria reported that "All of them [the Polish POWs] have a very hostile attitude toward the Germans and believe a military clash between the USSR and Germany is inevitable in the future, and express the wish to participate … on the side of the Soviet Union."[152] According to Swianiewicz's memoirs, many prisoners in the three camps expressed willingness to fight the Germans alongside the Soviets prior to April 1940.[153] Nevertheless, this factor was not originally taken into consideration in deciding the

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[149] David R. Jones, "The Officers and the October Revolution," *Soviet Studies* 28, no. 2 (1976): 207. https://ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/150829

[150] In 1918 some 22,315 former officers enlisted in the Red Army, and the Commissar for War, Leon Trotsky, later admitted that 76% of the command and administrative staffs of the Red Army forces were composed of such specialists by December 1918. Ibid.

[151] "Note from Beria to Stalin," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 276.

[152] Ibid.

[153] This is also corroborated by the diary of Dobieslaw Jakubowicz, an officer imprisoned in Starobilsk. In his entry from 5 October 1939, he wrote, "The Bolsheviks are generally decent people, I told them that we shall yet join them against the Germans, they do not believe that, but rather yes, than not." Swianiewicz, *In the Shadow of Katyn,* 250; Marek Sobieralski, *The Katyn Diaries* (self-pub: Marek Sobieralski, 2021), 74.

fate of the prisoners executed in early 1940. Beria, however, took this into consideration in the fall of 1940, and noted that several Polish officers expressed a willingness "to fight the Germans in the interest of establishing Poland as a national state. They see the future of Poland as linked closely with the Soviet Union."[154] These officers were primarily those with sympathy towards socialism, and who would later form the nucleus of the future LWP, as Beria recommended in his report.[155] In the note, Beria presented both a military and strategic rationale for raising a Polish unit on Soviet soil, in that the unit would add to the strength of the Soviet armed forces, while serving as a basis for the revival of a Polish national state under Soviet auspices. In Rogoyska's assessment, the purpose of this division was to minimize Polish resistance should the Red Army cross into German occupied Poland, and "lend a friendly face to the arrival of their new occupiers,"[156] which was precisely how the LWP functioned in Soviet propaganda after 1943. Beria's note makes clear that the possibility of war with Germany supplied the need to raise the Polish division, the threat of which emerged after the defeat of France in June 1940. As Stephen Kotkin notes, "Stalin had staked Soviet security on France's fighting capabilities."[157] The upending of the strategic balance in Europe after the French defeat had profound consequences for the Soviet strategic direction in Europe, with the shift in reviving a Polish state for war against Germany being a clear consequence of such.

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[154] Nevertheless, many Poles in the camp remained loyal to the Polish Government-in-Exile and would only serve in a military unit under their authority. As Beria noted, "some [Polish POWs] state that they can participate in a war with Germany on the side of the USSR only if this will be sanctioned in one form or another by the Sikorski "government." "Note from Beria to Stalin," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 277.
[155] Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 278.
[156] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 95.
[157] Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler*, 768 – 769.

In light of the direction of Soviet foreign policy in early 1940, the repression in occupied Poland appears as a means to accomplish two mutually supporting goals: the subjugation and annexation of the occupied territories, and the elimination of Polish sovereignty on the international stage. This destruction of Polish sovereignty fit into the Soviet strategic orientation in early 1940, that being to avoid war with either Germany or the Western powers, a stance bolstered by the initially poor performance of the Red Army in the Soviet-Finnish war. While the broader repression of occupied Poland and the Katyn continued Soviet state practice and terror towards its own citizens, and the elimination of Polish influence in the newly annexed territories, the Katyn massacre was equally as influenced by Soviet foreign policy. Stalin stated the linkage between Soviet terror in Poland and foreign policy best when speaking to the German ambassador Friedrich von der Schulenberg in September 1939: "there is no place for an independent residual Poland as a buffer state; friction between Germany and the USSR has to be avoided in the final settlement of the Polish question."[158]

Conclusions

There is a confluence of long- and short-term policy objectives and influences that ultimately informed Stalin's decision on Katyn. In longer-term trends, the Katyn massacre was influenced by established practices of Stalinist terror targeting specific social classes and ethnicities for the potential challenge they posed to Soviet rule. The elimination of Poland's officer corps, along with the mass deportations of Poles from the occupied territories, also fulfilled Moscow's irredentist aims for eastern Poland after the 1920 Polish-Soviet war. As

[158] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 20.

for short-term considerations, the destruction of Polish sovereignty fit into Moscow's stance of avoiding war with either Germany or the Western powers since they viewed an independent Poland as a source of friction with the former and a *casus belli* for the latter. The Soviet stance of avoiding war in early 1940 was furthered by the Soviet war in Finland, which, although the USSR emerged victorious, exposed many weaknesses in the Red Army, spurring reform and modernization at all levels in the organization. While these longer-term factors led to the classification and imprisonment of Poland's officer corps and social elite, the short-term factors — including the Stalinist regime's reflexive tendency to resort to terror in times of perceived weakness — ultimately presaged the mass executions that became the Katyn massacre.

The influence of these shorter-term factors is why the massacre can be considered "a mistake." "Stalin," writes his biographer Stephen Kotkin, "was a strategist: a man of radical ideas able to perceive and seize opportunities that he did not always create but turned to his advantage."[159] This description certainly fits with Stalin's maneuverings after the German discovery of the Katyn graves in 1943, whereby Stalin utilized Katyn to discredit and isolate the London Poles with the active support of the Western powers. Yet given how Moscow sought to revive Poland as a satellite state during the Second World War, Kotkin's assessment that the massacre was a strategic blunder also holds true.[160] When Beria referenced Katyn as "a mistake" in the fall of 1940, he seemed to refer to the Polish division forming on Soviet soil, now robbed of a large cadre of trained officers. At the least, had the officers been spared from execution and sentenced to forced labour, then many could have contributed to the

[159] Kotkin, "preface" to *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler,* xii.
[160] Ibid., 745.

Soviet war effort or to the Allied armies during the Second World War by serving in Anders' Army or the LWP.

Katyn being a mistake were Beria's words: from what historians know, Stalin never spoke directly on the Katyn massacre throughout his lifetime. The closest personal reference Stalin made to Katyn comes from the memoirs of his daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva. During the Second World War, Alliluyeva describes how, as a teenager, she accompanied her father to the opera *Ivan Susanin*, about the struggle of Russians fighting advancing Poles in the 17th century.[161] In the third act, a Russian peasant leads a Polish troop into the woods around Smolensk, whereby they become trapped with no escape.[162] According to Alliluyeva, Stalin left the performance every time after this scene, although another act followed.[163] In her reflection, "the death of Poles in the forest … perhaps reminded him of the annihilation of 10,000 Polish officers captured in the forest of Katyn, secretly carried out by the Soviet leadership in 1940?"[164] Her reflections carry the implicit assumption that Stalin came to regret the Katyn massacre. This passage is unique in delving into an instance of Stalin regretting one of his mass murders, though there are no further sources to corroborate Alliluyeva's reflections. Whether or not Stalin regretted the massacre is open for question; nevertheless, Alliluyeva's anecdote further highlights how Katyn was a strategic blunder for the Soviets.

That the Katyn massacre was ultimately influenced by Stalin's short-term policy considerations in the spring of 1940 is further evidenced by Soviet propaganda around the massacre after 1943. Once Moscow embarked on its project to raise a Polish satellite state,

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[161] Urban, *Katyn 1940*, 43.
[162] Ibid., 44.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.

Polish patriotism and nationalism were openly used in their propaganda to support the Polish communists. To be sure, this propaganda was tempered by the pro-Soviet stance of the Polish communists. Yet when viewing the long-term trends behind Katyn and the targeted destruction of Polish nationalism, this propaganda, alongside raising a Polish state itself, was a remarkable about-face in Soviet policy towards Poland, and a marked shift away from the former goal of absorbing Poland into western Ukraine and Belarus. Concurrently, this propaganda fit in with Stalin's strategic pragmatism in accomplishing short-term objectives, with Moscow breaking away from socialist rhetoric and reviving pan-Russian nationalism during the Second World War.

Katyn was central to Soviet propaganda concerning Poland after 1943, delegitimizing the London Poles while providing a veneer for the Polish communists, who had to justify their pro-Soviet stance after the Soviets had dismembered their country in 1939. Ultimately, the Katyn massacre was distorted by Soviet propaganda and presented to lend legitimacy to their Polish project. The words of a Soviet-aligned Polish priest, present at a Soviet ceremony for the Poles murdered at Katyn in 1944, are most telling here: "Our murdered brothers hoped God would put some sense in the Polish government so it would find peace and tranquility through friendship with its great Eastern neighbour."[165] As is to be discussed, Katyn emerged from a bid to destroy Polish sovereignty in 1940, yet was subsequently presented in Soviet propaganda as an impetus for Polish-Soviet unity after 1943.

[165] Wireless to the *New York Times*, "MILITARY RITES HELD AT REBURAL OF POLES: Compatriots in Russia Pledge to Avenge Katyn Forest Victims," *New York Times*, 1 February 1944, 3. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1944/02/01/issue.html As with Gleason's research, capitalization has been used as it appeared in the original sources to reflect the style of the source.

Chapter 2: The Katyn Lie in the Anglo-American Press

Introduction

Before June 1941, relations between the Western powers and the USSR were characterized by mutual distrust. Both Britain and America had sent expeditionary forces to dismantle the Bolshevik regime after its inception in 1918, while, for their part, the Soviets proclaimed an ideological hostility towards the capitalist Western states. Soviet actions from 1939 to 1941 — their alliance with Nazi Germany and the invasion of eastern Poland and Finland — further worsened their relations with the Western powers. In spite of the strain in their pre-war relations, the wartime alliance that emerged between the Soviet Union and Britain after June 1941, and the United States after December 1941, held strong throughout the Second World War. In all three countries, the alliance was backed by wartime propaganda, including the news outlets of Britain and the United States. Their newspapers were fed information, albeit heavily censored and pro-Soviet, by a corps of Western war correspondents within the Soviet Union.

Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union all had a vested interest in ensuring favourable coverage of the Soviet war effort in their press. Both the British and the American governments recognized that the USSR was bearing the brunt of the fighting against Germany: without Soviet participation, the Western powers could not hope to defeat Germany on their own.[166] The policy of full support for the USSR from the top of each administration

[166] American President Franklin D. Roosevelt first recognized the Soviet role in the war against Nazi Germany in July of 1941, which translated into ever increasing support of the USSR materially, through the Lend-Lease program, and diplomatically, in supporting Soviet postwar territorial ambitions in Poland. Both Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill also feared that Stalin would make a separate peace with Hitler, allowing Germany to transfer the bulk of its troops to the West. Anna M. Cienciala, "The United States and Poland in World War II," *The Polish Review* 54, no. 2 (2009): 173 – 174. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25779810

translated into favourable coverage of the Soviet war effort in each country's newspapers. In late June and early July 1941, Western war correspondents arrived in Moscow in large numbers to cover the Soviet-German war.[167] The activities of these correspondents, the scope of news they could cover, and the information they sent to their home countries were all heavily censored by Soviet authorities.[168] As such, the early reports on the Soviet-German war from these correspondents masked the extent of Soviet losses and greatly exaggerated Soviet successes, often repeating figures from Soviet domestic propaganda. For instance, a report from *The Times* on 23 August 1941 listed German casualties in the USSR at two million men and 8,000 tanks, two-thirds the strength of the German army and more than double the actual number of tanks deployed by the Germans in the east.[169] Beyond Soviet censorship, reporting exaggerated enemy losses and minimized setbacks in all major nations by the Second World War.[170] Moreover, the Soviet Union was indeed bearing the brunt of the fighting against Germany at enormous cost to its army and civilian population. All these factors painted an increasingly favourable and popular view of the USSR in the British and American public. By

[167] The initial group was mainly composed of British and American war correspondents, though they were joined by three Australian war correspondents. Many correspondents left after disillusionment and frustration with the tight Soviet control of their activities, leaving a small handful of correspondents left at the war's end. Phillip Knightly, *The First Casualty: From Crimea to Vietnam, the War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker* (New York: Harvest Books, 1975), 247, 252.

[168] The Soviets were also suspicious that the Western war correspondents might be intelligence agents. Ibid., 247 – 248.

[169] In reality, by August 1941, German deaths on the Eastern Front amounted to some 134,000 men. Hardly an insignificant number, but a far cry from the two million claimed by Soviet propaganda. In contrast, the Red Army had lost two million men, killed, missing, or captured by the end of September 1941. Ibid., 246; Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler's War of Extermination in the East* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 495; Hill, *The Red Army*, 293.

[170] Phillip Knightly argues that this trend began with the First World War, where the demands of total war required the full support of the civilian population at home. As such, any unfavourable news from the front was suppressed, often with the support of war correspondents at the front. Knightly, *The First Casualty*, 80 – 81.

1943, after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, British and American public opinion of the Soviet war effort was at an all time high.[171]

The Soviets, for their part, had incentive to draw in Western media coverage of the Soviet-German war and create favourable relations with the Western powers. Through the Lend-Lease program, the Soviets received large amounts of military and economic aid from the United States and Great Britain after June 1941, which had a significant impact on the Soviet war effort.[172] Moreover, the favourable Western coverage of the war lent tacit approval to Stalin's territorial ambitions after the war, such as the restoration of Soviet frontiers from 1941 including the annexed Polish provinces. Circulating the magnitude of the Soviet war effort and the damage suffered by Soviet lands under Nazi occupation would also lend international support to Moscow's claims for material compensation and German labour after the war.[173] Given the tight controls placed on the Western war correspondents, Moscow

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[171] In Britain, a Home Intelligence Gallup poll from March 1943 placed the Soviet Union first for both war effort and achievement in the war. Similarly, in the United States, "The Russian [Soviet] military performance was, by far, the single most powerful factor in the development of the Russian image in the United States." Soviet popularity in the United States, supplemented by wartime press censorship, likewise increased markedly after the victories of 1943. P.M.H Bell, "Censorship, Propaganda, and Public Opinion: The Case of the Katyn Graves, 1943," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 39 (1989): 81. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3678978; Melvin Small, "How We Learned to Love the Russians: American Media and the Soviet Union During World War II," *The Historian* 36, no. 3 (1974): 467. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24443747

[172] Lend Lease aid was described as insignificant by Soviet historians after the war, yet today historians view this as an exaggeration of Soviet Cold War propaganda. However, the debate on the extent to which Lend Lease impacted the Soviet war effort continues to this day. Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev alleged that privately, Stalin admitted the USSR could not have won the war without Lend Lease. A similar view was allegedly shared by Soviet Marshal Georgy Zhukov in a bugged conversation from 1963. Regardless, the Soviet leadership constantly demanded more military hardware throughout the war, and the equipment undoubtedly played a role in the major Soviet victories from 1943 – 1945. Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 194 – 195.

[173] This at least, was one of the Soviet motivations in campaigning for an international trial of Nazi leaders after the Second World War. As Francine Hirsch writes, an international tribunal would provide a public forum to expose Nazi crimes in the USSR. It is not a leap to assume that the Soviets employed a similar logic in facilitating Western media coverage of the Soviet-German front during the war. Francine Hirsch, *Soviet Judgement at Nuremberg: A New History of the International Military Tribunal after World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 56.

actively utilized the news they released to their advantage, serving to shape a highly favourable international image of the USSR during the Second World War.

Thus, after the German announcement of the Katyn graves in April 1943, Moscow actively utilized the Western press to circulate the Katyn Lie abroad. Beyond addressing the immediate claims of German guilt, the Katyn Lie came to encompass the ongoing issues in Soviet-Polish relations. Using the Anglo-American press, the Soviets isolated the Polish Government-in-Exile by claiming the government was in collusion with Nazi Germany. At the same time, through the Western press, Moscow circulated a favourable view of the PPR and the LWP, the Polish political party and army that would establish Soviet control over Poland after the war. For the Polish communists, their legitimacy came to rest on the idea that Katyn was a German crime, an idea which the Anglo-American press actively circulated and corroborated during the war. In this way, the Anglo-American government policy of supporting the Soviet Katyn Lie served to obscure the truth of Katyn and facilitated the Soviet postwar takeover of Poland.

The Initial Reporting and Polish-Soviet Relations

On 13 April 1943, German radio stations broadcast a communiqué on the discovery of the mass graves of Polish officers in the Katyn Forest, "Where the GPU [NKVD] murdered 10,000 Polish officers."[174] After the German defeat at Stalingrad in January 1943, Joseph Goebbels was looking for propaganda campaigns to counter an increasingly defeatist mood on

[174] Within this initial broadcast, the antisemitic rhetoric found in later German propaganda around Katyn was absent. Largely, this rhetoric was limited to their domestic propaganda, while their international coverage of Katyn adopted a more neutral tone. "Radio Communiqué on the Discovery of Graves of Polish Officers in the Smolensk Area, 13 April 1943," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 305; Urban, *Katyn 1940*, 56.

the German home front.[175] The discovery of the Katyn graves provided material for such a campaign. Domestically, Katyn was used as an example of the "Judeo-Bolshevik" terror the Soviets would unleash should they reach German borders, while internationally, Goebbels exploited the Katyn issue to drive a wedge between the Allies.[176] The Katyn graves presented rich material for the latter goal, as Poland was ostensibly a Soviet ally in 1943, hence the German discovery drawing great attention from Poland and the Western powers upon immediate announcement. By contrast, another German discovery of a Soviet atrocity failed to draw similar international attention. In May 1943, the Germans uncovered mass graves of over 9,000 mainly Ukrainian citizens in the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia, executed by the NKVD between 1937-38.[177] Although the Germans arranged an international commission of forensic scientists to investigate the graves, the discovery in Vinnytsia garnered far less international publicity than Katyn.[178] The reasons for this are obvious: Katyn's victims were foreign military officers from a country allied to the Soviets and were represented by the Polish Government-in-Exile, while the Soviet massacre of its own citizenry proved far less newsworthy for the Western powers at the time.[179] Given that Vinnytsia received little to no attention from the international press, its case further highlights that Katyn received unique international publicity after the German discovery. The Soviets were equally cognisant of the

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[175] Urban, *Katyn 1940*, 55.
[176] For a greater discussion of German domestic propaganda around Katyn, including its use in Nazi antisemitic propaganda, see Urban's *Katyn 1940*.
[177] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 248.
[178] Ibid; Etkind, et al., *Remembering Katyn*, 62.
[179] As at Katyn, the Soviets blamed the Germans for the massacre in Vinnytsia. Amir Weiner describes that the cover-up of Vinnytsia fell in line with the self-erasure of the terror among the local elite in Soviet Ukraine. Thus, in August 1943 Dmytro Burchenko, the commissar of the Lenin partisan brigade, composed a report addressed to Khrushchev on the situation in the region. Referencing the Vinnytsia massacre and the German exhumations, Burchenko claimed "the population [of Vinnytsia] is convinced that all the photographs are of victims of the mass extermination of Jewish and other populations, organized by the Germans themselves." Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7t28v.

international ramifications of Katyn and drew in the Western press to support and circulate the Katyn Lie accordingly.

Information from the German Katyn broadcast was received shortly after by the American and British governments, the Soviet government, and the Polish Government-in-Exile. For the exile government and the Anglo-Americans, the basic evidence pointed to Soviet guilt: for the past three years, no communication came from the Polish officers captured in September 1939, while the Soviet government only gave evasive and ambiguous answers as to their whereabouts. In any event, the idea that the Soviets lost track of some 15,000 men was fantastical: in one oft-repeated remark in Katyn historiography, Stalin told Polish General Władysław Anders in December 1941 that the officers from Kozelsk and Starobilsk had "escaped to Manchuria."[180] Only after the German announcement did the Soviet government state that the officers' last-known whereabouts were near Smolensk in the summer of 1941.[181] Nevertheless, the Anglo-American governments quickly moved to support the Soviet version of events in the interests of maintaining their wartime alliance, a policy that was likewise translated to their censorship of domestic press agencies and their coverage of Katyn. [182] However, the Polish Government-in-Exile, under the leadership of Władysław Sikorski, could not venture such an openly pro-Soviet policy, at risk of losing a large base of popular support among Poles in Poland and abroad.[183] Instead, Sikorski's government responded with a statement requesting that the IRC examine the graves.[184]

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[180] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn, 155.*
[181] Urban, *Katyn 1940,* 56.
[182] Gleason, "Decade of Deceit," 135.
[183] Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 341.
[184] Ibid., 339.

The immediate Soviet response to the German allegations was to blame the crime on the Germans. On 15 April 1943, Moscow released its own radio communiqué in response to Berlin's broadcast two days earlier. The communiqué, entitled "Vile fabrications by German-Fascist Murderers," established the basic content of the Katyn Lie.[185] Firstly, the communiqué stated that Germany was responsible for the Katyn murders, aiming to spread "slanderous fabrications about some sort of Soviet atrocities" and deflect their own responsibility for the crime.[186] The communiqué likewise provided an alibi for the officers' whereabouts after the spring of 1940: they were engaged in construction work in the Smolensk region in the autumn of 1941, falling into German captivity after Soviet troops withdrew from the region during the German invasion.[187] Moreover, a link was established between Katyn and other German atrocities in the Soviet Union, along with German atrocities in occupied Poland.[188] As the Katyn Lie developed, this link became a central piece of Soviet rhetoric to blame the crime on the Germans and to foster a sense of Polish-Soviet unity.

Along with signalling the development of a Soviet narrative around Katyn, April 1943 was the first instance of the Soviets drawing international attention to the Katyn massacre, albeit in response to the German allegations. At this stage, the Katyn Lie was in its rudimentary beginnings. Specific details, such as naming a German military unit responsible for the crime, along with the exact timing of the murders, would only emerge after a Soviet

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[185] "Communiqué Issued by the Sovinformburo Attacking the German "Fabrications" about the Graves of Polish Officers in Katyn Forest, 15 April 1943," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 306.
[186] Ibid., 306 – 307.
[187] Ibid., 306.
[188] The connection to German atrocities in the Soviet Union was suggested when the communiqué stated that "many Soviet people, residents of the Smolensk region, fell into the hands of the German-Fascist hangmen in the summer of 1941." The connection to German atrocities in Poland was also explicitly stated in the communiqué: "[The Germans] exterminated many hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens in Poland." Ibid., 306 – 307.

commission was established to examine Katyn in late 1943. As such, the initial Anglo-American reporting on Katyn contained only the barest details of the crime. On 17 April 1943, *The Times* ran a story titled "MISSING POLISH OFFICERS" covering the German allegations and the Soviet response.[189] This article mainly focused on the break in Polish-Soviet relations along with the German plans to bring the IRC to investigate the Katyn graves. While the article made passing references to Katyn, neither the German nor Soviet communiques were cited directly. Instead, the article adopted a rather neutral tone on the Katyn murders and gave some sympathy to the Polish Government-in-Exile after the Soviets broke off relations with the government. Given their proximity to the exile government, the British press often wrote of a hoped-for resolution between the London Poles and the Soviets yet would nevertheless support and circulate the Katyn Lie as it developed.

By contrast, the initial American reporting on Katyn gave far less sympathy to the exile government. One of the first American news articles on Katyn came from the *New York Times* on 17 April 1943, titled "POLES ASK FOR INQUIRY IN SOVIETS 'MURDERS.'"[190] This article largely covered the same points as *The Times*, yet focused far less on the impact of the discovery on the exiled Polish government. Two more articles followed from the *New York Times,* on 23 and 24 April 1943, the first entitled "RED CROSS DECISION MADE ON 'MASSACRE.'"[191] This article referred to the massacres as the "Katyn affair," in reference to "the German charge that the Russians massacred 10,000 Polish officers near Smolensk."[192]

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[189] "MISSING POLISH OFFICERS," *The Times,* 17 April 1943, 3. https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/apps/doc/CS51461265/TTDA?u=uvictoria&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=93ea3658.
[190] Wireless to the *New York Times,* "POLES ASK FOR INQUIRY IN SOVIET 'MURDERS,'" *New York Times,* 17 April 1943, 4. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1943/04/17/85098157.html?pageNumber=4
[191] Telephone to the *New York Times,* "RED CROSS DECISION MADE ON 'MASSACRE,'" *New York Times,* 23 April 1943, 3. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1943/04/23/85100135.html?pageNumber=3
[192] Ibid.

The second article, titled "MASSACRE INQUIRY DEPENDS ON SOVIETS," like the preceding article, dealt only in passing with the Katyn allegations.[193] Instead, the article largely focused on the issue of the pending IRC investigation the Germans were pushing for. Another Katyn article by the American journalist and war correspondent William Shirer in the Californian newspaper the *San Bernardino Sun* likewise focused on the break in Soviet-Polish relations, attacking the exiled Polish government for calling for the IRC to investigate the graves.[194]

At this stage in 1943, the break in Soviet-Polish relations occupied much of the discussion around Katyn in the Anglo-American press, something the Soviets themselves highlighted in their press releases on Katyn to the world. An article on 28 April 1943, from the Canadian newspaper the *Vancouver Daily Province*, using reporting from the Associated Press, showed how Moscow was drawing international attention to the rupture in Soviet-Polish relations. The article noted that *Pravda,* the Soviet Union's primary newspaper, ran an editorial attacking the Polish Government-in-Exile for collusion with Nazi Germany, which the Soviet news agency TASS broadcast in an English-language translation.[195] That the Soviets translated their broadcast into English shows the attention the Soviets paid to the Anglo-American reception of Katyn, along with showing the convergence in their domestic and international rhetoric around the massacre.

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[193] Daniel T. Brigham, "MASSACRE INQUIRY DEPENDS ON SOVETS: Russia Also Must Request the Identification of Bodies in Katyn, Red Cross Says," *New York* Times, 24 April 1943, 4. https://www.proquest.com/docview/106598621?parentSessionId=4Jyo1SH%2BqoYIuQ7pcs9RxZ0fIB4WJU0rvzUHjE5pHrI%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=14846

[194] William L. Shirer, "WORLD PROPAGANDA FRONT: GERMANS USE DEADLY WEAPON," *San Bernardino Sun*, 3 May 1943, 10. https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SBS19430503.1.10&srpos=4&e=------194-en--20--1--txt-txIN-katyn----1943---1

[195] "Union of Polish Patriots Repudiates Sikorsky Regime," *Vancouver Daily Province*, 28 April 1943, 3. http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/historical-newspapers/april-28-1943-page-3-30/docview/2368968147/se-2

In 1943, in relation to Katyn, the Soviets largely focused on attacking the exile government and justifying breaking off relations with the London Poles. The break in Soviet-Polish relations was instigated by the Soviets shortly after the German announcement. The Soviet pretext for the break in relations came on 17 April 1943, after the Polish Government-in-Exile released a statement, in which they requested the IRC in Geneva to investigate the Katyn graves.[196] Shortly afterwards, the Soviet government broke off relations with the London Poles for this reason, framing the request as active collusion with Nazi Germany. In a note to the Polish ambassador on 25 April, Molotov confidently stated that "The fact that the hostile campaign against the Soviet Union commenced simultaneously in the German and Polish press, and was conducted along the same lines, leaves no doubt as to the existence of contact and accord in carrying out this hostile campaign between the enemy of the Allies — Hitler — and the Polish Government."[197] This rhetoric was a cover for the Soviet strategy of isolating the Polish Government-in-Exile as Stalin had been planning to break off relations with the London Poles for some time before April 1943.[198] As was discussed in Chapter One, Stalin's aim to revive a Polish state under Soviet auspices was apparent from November 1940, with the preliminary plans to raise a Polish division on Soviet soil. The unexpected and rapid German invasion in June 1941 shelved these plans for the time being and resulted in the Soviet Union resuming diplomatic relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile. The relationship between the Soviet Union and the London Poles was nevertheless tenuous, with its foundation largely predicated on Moscow's military and strategic weakness in the summer

[196] "Statement of the Polish Government Concerning the Discovery of the Graves of Polish Officers near Smolensk, 17 April 1943," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 308.
[197] "Note from Molotov to Polish Ambassador Tadeusz Romer on the Soviet Government's Decision to Break Off Relations with the Polish Government, 25 April 1943," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 309.
[198] Ibid.

of 1941.[199] Stalin's agreement with the Sikorski government came at the nadir of Soviet military fortunes in 1941: as the Soviet military position improved, Stalin increasingly built-up the Polish communists as an alternative body of power to the London Poles between 1941 and 1943.

The German announcement about the Katyn graves in April 1943 subsequently detonated the underlying tensions in Soviet relations with the exile government, signifying Moscow's complete break with the London Poles and their shift to full support of the Polish communists. Prior to the war, the Polish Communist Party (KPP) was dissolved by Moscow in 1938.[200] In 1938, the dissolution of the KPP was likely more reflective of the wider purges of other international communist parties. In 1939, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact undoubtably crippled the party owing to Moscow's aforementioned policy of eliminating Polish sovereignty. The few cadres left of the KPP, like the officers spared from Katyn, became useful to Moscow when the Soviets contemplated reviving the Polish state after 1940. Subsequently, the Polish communist party was re-founded as the PPR in January 1942.

Moscow's full support of the Polish communists came alongside rhetoric supportive of an independent Polish nation-state led by the PPR. Soviet rhetoric distanced the revived Polish communists from the previous KPP in order to win a broad front of popular support in Poland. The name of the revived Polish communist organization, the Polish Worker's Party or

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[199] Sanford succinctly describes this relationship: "There was a direct and inverse correlation between initial Soviet weakness and Moscow's readiness to re-establish collaboration with the Poles, if only to mollify their new Western Allies." George Sanford, "The Katyn Massacre and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1941 – 1943," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 1 (2006): 98. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022009406058676

[200] In the words of M. K. Dziewanowski, this dissolution made KPP "one of the last major victims of the great purges, and one of the first victims of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. M. K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland: An Outline of History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 154. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=3046340.

PPR, was a break with the anti-nationalist stance of the former KPP.[201] Likewise, the Party's first declaration in early 1942 was addressed to "Workers, peasants, intelligentsia. To all Polish Patriots," and contained no mention of socialism, class struggle, or revolution.[202] Instead, the PPR advocated for a broad national front to fight the German occupiers in Poland, and claimed they supported close collaboration with other Polish political organizations fighting the Germans.[203] Finally, the PPR heavily emphasized friendship with the USSR in its program, "not as the fatherland of the world proletariat, but as the big Slav brother, the liberator and protector of small nations now struggling against the German yoke."[204] This rhetoric would later be used in the Katyn Lie, which framed both the PPR and the Soviet Union as avenging the Katyn crime together.

Given the Soviet repression of alternative bodies of power in Poland during and after the war, the pro-national stance of the PPR was a clear smokescreen to win popular support for the party before it could establish control over Poland. Soviet propaganda around the PPR notably contrasted with that used by the Soviets in their invasion of Poland in 1939. The military order to the Soviet armies that began the invasion in September 1939 attacked "Polish landowners and capitalists" for suppressing the revolutionary movement and enslaving Belorussian, Ukrainian, and Polish workers and peasants.[205] In Soviet rhetoric, fraternity with the Poles in 1939 was established on class lines with the Polish proletariat, and ethnically with Poland's Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities. By 1943, Soviet propaganda spoke of a shared

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[201] Antony Polonsky, Bolesław Drukier, *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland* (London: Routledge, 1980), 6.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland,* 163.
[205] "Order no. 005 of the Military Council of the Belorussian Front, 16 September 1939," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 42.

Slavic fraternity with the entire Polish nation that was strengthened by sharing the common German enemy. No doubt, a major component of this propaganda was aimed at Poles in Poland: the PPR decried the alleged passivity of the Polish Government-in-Exile and made consistent efforts to persuade the Poles that the new party was the main center of anti-German resistance.[206] This pro-national propaganda remained the same in Soviet press releases on Katyn and Soviet-Polish relations to foreign audiences, and was largely reflected in Anglo-American press reporting on the two issues.[207]

The Kościuszko Division

Western correspondents, either through English translations of *Pravda* or Moscow Radio, relayed Soviet propaganda about the PPR to the Anglo-American press, much of which centered on the LWP and its first component formation, the 1st Polish Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division. The division was formed in May 1943, shortly after the German announcement about the mass graves, and was placed under the command of Zygmunt Berling.[208] This division was the first unit of the LWP — Polish forces fighting under Soviet command — which would include some 300,000 Polish soldiers in two armies by 1945. The division was named after a famous Polish revolutionary Tadeusz Kościuszko, responsible for organizing armed resistance against Russia and fighting for Polish independence in the late

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[206] Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland,* 163.

[207] The shift to a pro-national propaganda based on Polish history largely reflected a similar shift in Soviet propaganda during the Second World War. In late 1941, Stalin framed the conflict with Germany in continuation with the imperial Russian past. The name, the "Great Patriotic War," the reopening of Russian Orthodox churches, and the revival of past Russian military leaders were some examples of the shift towards Russian chauvinism in Soviet propaganda. As David R. Marples writes, the shift in propaganda "Indicated that the USSR by itself lacked appeal for the masses during a period of great instability." This equally applied for the Polish communists, hence their use of pro-national rhetoric to win popular support during the war. Marples, *Motherland,* 159.

[208] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre,* 205.

eighteenth century.[209] The name, harkening back to Polish history, further indicated the pro-national stance the Soviets were cultivating in their propaganda for Poland. Shortly after, the Kościuszko division was featured in a Soviet ceremony held near Moscow to inaugurate its formation, with Allied military officers and foreign correspondents invited as observers. A *New York Times* article by Alexander Werth from 18 July 1943 described the ceremony at length and the division's character as it trained in Moscow.[210]

Werth, who was born in Russia and raised in Britain, was one of the most prominent Western war correspondents in the USSR. Although a correspondent for the BBC, his articles proliferated widely throughout the wartime Anglo-American press, covering many of the major battles on the Eastern Front. His fluency in Russian gave him access to official Soviet sources throughout the war, such as *Pravda* and Moscow Radio. Otherwise, Werth and other Western war correspondents came under the supervision of Solomon Lozovsky, the official spokesperson for the Soviet Information Bureau.[211] Lozovsky served to regulate and control what the war correspondents saw and heard and the information they could report throughout the war, most often regulated through heavy censorship. Nevertheless, Werth later writes that he often interviewed Soviet soldiers (though it is unlikely these were impromptu interviews given the tight Soviet control of the Western war correspondents), and during the Kościuszko Division ceremony, Werth interviewed some Polish soldiers from the division.[212] Finally,

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[209] Urban, *Katyn 1940*, 115.
[210] Alexander Werth, "POLISH SOVIET UNIT SHOWS ITS MIGHT: Division Training Near Moscow Reviewed by Allied Officers in Patriotic Ceremony," *New York Times*, 18 July 1943, 18. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1943/07/18/88556983.html?pageNumber=18
[211] Knightly, *The First Casualty*, 247; Alexander Werth, *Russia at War: 1941 – 1945* (New York: Carroll & Graff Publishers, 1964), 179.
[212] Werth, *Russia at War*, 658.

Werth was pro-Soviet and hostile to the Polish Government-in-Exile,[213] making him an excellent correspondent to relay pro-Soviet propaganda about Poland abroad.

In describing the Kościuszko division, Werth noted that the division was to fight alongside the Red Army under the slogan "There is no return to Poland except across the battlefield."[214] This was a thinly veiled condemnation of the Polish Army being formed under General Władysław Anders, which was then departing from the Soviet Union to fight in the western theater of the war. Moreover, Werth noted that the Kościuszko division emerged as an alternative to Anders' Army, with Werth boasting of the division's military strength, along with its solidly Polish character. Werth wrote that "Emphasis on the unity of Russia and Poland was emphasized in everything – in slogans, in the wording of the Polish soldier's oath, and in the division's cultural activities."[215] Likewise, an article written by a *Times* correspondent in Moscow, published on 13 May, echoed the Soviet rhetoric around the division. "Not Part of the Red Army" was the article's claim: "All the officers will be Polish, and the Polish language, national anthem, and banner will be used. Its uniform will be that of the Polish Army in 1939 and an oath of allegiance to the Polish people will be taken."[216] As Werth's article strongly emphasized, the Kościuszko Division was represented as a manifestation of a strong, Slavic Russo-Polish unity.

Werth's article is notable for the length and detail of his coverage of the Kościuszko division, providing excellent insight into the image the Soviets developed for the LWP, both

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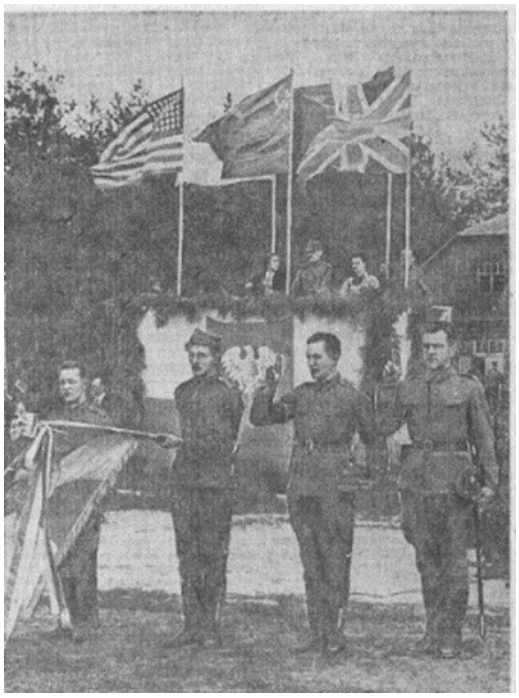
[213] Urban, *Katyn 1940*, 124.
[214] Werth, "POLISH SOVIET UNIT," 18.
[215] Ibid.
[216] From our Special Correspondent, "POLISH DIVISION IN RUSSIA: 'NOT PART OF THE RED ARMY,'" *The Times*, 13 May 1943, 3. https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/apps/doc/CS52247726/TTDA?u=uvictoria&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=55ae3a8f.

for domestic Poles and their propaganda abroad. For the former group, the LWP gave a Polish face to the Red Army's coming occupation of Poland, while for the latter group, it was a tangible manifestation of Polish-Soviet unity and cooperation. Significantly for this thesis, the division's formation shortly after the German announcement can further be read as a reaction to the Katyn discovery. While Werth's article did not mention Katyn, he alluded to the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, albeit in a veiled manner, writing that, "The division includes some soldiers and officers who served in the Polish Army before 1939 and had been in the Soviet Union since, through the recovery of Western Ukraine or for other reasons."[217] This claim seems to have indirectly addressed the German allegations that the Polish officers taken prisoner in 1939 were murdered by the Soviets, suggesting that these officers would have been offered the opportunity to serve in the LWP were they not murdered by the Germans.

Behind the pro-national propaganda about the Kościuszko division, the LWP was a Soviet trojan horse, acting as an effective cover for Soviet control over Poland.[218] Later in the war, some three quarters of the officer corps of the LWP was comprised of Soviet officers, emblematic of the Soviet control over these armed forces, not to mention the shortage of Polish officers caused by the Katyn massacre.[219] The Polish armed forces under Soviet control would thus play an important role in Moscow's efforts to win over the Polish population postwar by associating the Polish left with the agents of victory against the German invaders.[220] For Soviet propaganda abroad, the Kościuszko division furthered the idea that the

[217] Werth, "POLISH SOVIET UNIT," 18.
[218] As Alexander Hill notes, Soviet manpower shortages in the later periods of the war were another rationale for the formation of Soviet-sponsored national formations, with Polish, Czechoslovak, and Romanian formations all seeing heavy action later in the war. Hill, *The Red Army*, 334.
[219] Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 378.
[220] Patryk Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin's New Empire, 1943-1957* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 18. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469620909_babiracki.

Poles and Soviets were fraternally aligned, strengthening the political legitimacy of the PPR. Finally, in both domestic propaganda and that abroad, the LWP would feature in Soviet propaganda about Katyn, with its implications of Soviet-Polish unity used to further push the Soviet narrative around Katyn as a Nazi atrocity, allowing Poles and Russians to find common ground in the face of their adversarial history.



Polish soldiers at the ceremony for the Kościuszko division.[221]

In early May 1943, Moscow went on to reassure the British and American governments that their intentions in Poland would not quash the country's independence.[222]

[221] "Prinjatie prisjagi v divizii imeni Tadeuša Kostjuško," *Pravda,* 17 July 1943, 2. https://dlib-eastview-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/browse/doc/64544345.

[222] On 4 May 1943, Stalin also sent a personal letter to Churchill explaining why the USSR broke off relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile, while denying the Soviets would establish a new Polish government. "Letter from Marshal Stalin to Mr. Churchill on the need for British control over the Polish authorities in London and of joint allied intervention to effect a change in the composition of the Polish government, 4 May 1943," in General Sikorski Historical Institute, eds., *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations,* vol. 2 (London: Heinemann, 1967), 2.

While Moscow was establishing the PPR as a rival left wing government in Poland, a *New York Times* article from 1 May 1943 noted that "Moscow has no intention of attempting to establish a rival left wing Polish government in Russia."[223] The article noted that this information was cabled by Moscow to London, seemingly as a reassurance that Moscow's break in relations with the exile Polish government would not presage a conflict with the British government.[224] More broadly, in May 1943, Moscow established its line that they sought the restoration of an independent Poland after the war. Later, throughout 1943 and 1944, Soviet propaganda around the PPR would depict the organization as the authentic representatives of Polish independence. On 4 May 1943, Stalin released a statement to *The Times* and the *New York Times* concerning the future of Polish-Soviet relations. The *New York Times* reported on 5 May 1943 that Stalin gave a personal letter to their correspondent Ralph Parker, assuring that the USSR desired a strong, independent Poland after the war.[225] The PPR's broad front strategy and vaguely defined political goals supported Moscow's international rhetoric around its postwar plans for Poland, presenting itself as an independent, alternative body of power to the London Poles, yet one friendly to the USSR. In this goal, Moscow utilized the Anglo-American press to circulate its professed aim for an independent Poland abroad, serving to provide international backing for the PPR.

Moreover, the Soviet press continued to attack the London Poles on the grounds that they were collaborating with Nazi Germany in connection to the Katyn massacre. This propaganda was relayed to the international press by the Soviets and could also be found in

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[223] Raymond Daniell, "NO POLISH REGIME IN RUSSIA PLANNED," *New York Times,* 1 May 1943, 9. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1943/05/01/85102536.html?pageNumber=8
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ralph Parker, "Soviet Premier Offers Tie With Poland After War," *New York Times,* 5 May 1943, 1. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1943/05/06/96562216.html?pageNumber=1

Soviet domestic propaganda directed towards the Poles. After the Soviets revived the PPR, they created the newspaper *Wolna Polska* — Free Poland — to spread the party's message. In this, there was considerable overlap between the message the Soviets put out to the international press and that relayed to the Polish and Soviet populations at home. Likewise, the Anglo-American press often reported Soviet propaganda from *Wolna Polska* or *Pravda* largely verbatim. Another *New York Times* article on 17 May 1943 further relayed Moscow's attacks on the London Poles through an interview with Colonel Berling, in which he accused Anders' Army of being undemocratic and anti-Soviet.[226] Relaying the charge that the London Poles were cooperating with the Germans, Berling stated that "The Anders' Army … did not consider the Germans the enemy and officers did not train men to hate them."[227]

That an interview from the Soviet press was relayed verbatim by the *New York Times* had much to do with the wartime conditions for the Anglo-American press and the attention the Soviets paid to Polish-Soviet relations in their international propaganda. Owing to wartime censorship in both Britain and America, the mainstream press supported their nations and infrequently criticized other Allied nations.[228] Concerning the Katyn case, both governments took special attention to ensure their press maintained the Soviet line, as their alliance with the Soviets was valued highly for the overall war effort. In the United States, a document from the Office of War Information's New York Office of Control was released on 17 April 1943, presenting guidelines for the American press on their reporting on Katyn: "We are to show up this story for the propaganda trick it is and we are to use stories rebutting it." One approach was to report on how well the Czechs fought along with the Russians, which

[226] Wireless to the *New York Times,* "EX-OFFICER ACCUSES ANDERS POLISH ARMY," *New York Times,* 18 May 1943, 4. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1943/05/18/85104023.html?pageNumber=4
[227] Ibid.
[228] Gleason, "Decade of Deceit," 135.

was deemed significant because their "position in many ways is analogous to the Poles."[229] As the Katyn issue progressed, "The American press, fed with tendentious material by official sources, increasingly depicted the exiled Poles as troublemaking nuisances while the USSR was painted in uncritically rosy colours."[230] Despite the sympathy for the exiled Poles in London, the British government largely adopted the same stance in their press organs towards Katyn, albeit with fewer attacks on the exiled Polish government. Alongside the Anglo-American stance towards Katyn, the Soviet government paid special attention to Soviet-Polish relations in their international propaganda. While the *New York Times* article on Berling's interview appeared to stem from their correspondent's initiative, in other cases, the Soviets deliberately invited the international press to cover developments in Soviet-Polish relations. Stalin's statement from 4 May 1943 was an example of such, as was the international press coverage of the Kościuszko division in July 1943.[231]

Taken together, the Soviet rhetoric that emerged around Katyn and Soviet-Polish relations in mid-1943 presaged much of the material later released in 1944 after the Soviets recaptured the Katyn Forest and created their own commission to investigate the graves. The LWP would play an important role in their international propaganda to blame the crime on the Germans and discredit the Polish Government-in-Exile. Both the LWP and PPR formed the positive element of the Soviet propaganda, which depicted Katyn as an impetus for Soviet-Polish unity, based on a shared Slavic heritage and shared victimhood in atrocities inflicted by the Germans.

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[229] Ibid.
[230] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 160.
[231] As Werth's article stated, the Soviets invited allied correspondents and officers to the ceremony. Werth, "POLISH SOVIET UNIT," 18

The 1944 Burdenko Commission Report

Throughout 1943, the Red Army pushed the Wehrmacht back across Soviet soil, recapturing the Katyn Forest and its surrounding regions in late September 1943. From there, the NKVD quickly moved into the site of the mass graves to establish the beginnings of a Soviet-led commission to further falsify the truth behind the massacre.[232] The Soviet commission's official aim was "to establish and investigate the circumstances surrounding the shooting of Polish prisoner-of-war officers by the German-Fascist aggressors in the Katyn Forest," and was commonly called the Burdenko Commission, named after the chief investigative surgeon of the commission, Nikolay Burdenko.[233]

The commission's official name, "The Special State Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating the Circumstances of the Shooting of the Polish Prisoners of War by the German Fascist Invaders in the Katyn Forest," blatantly made clear that German guilt was a foregone conclusion. To prove German guilt, the commission worked with false forensic evidence produced by the NKVD, although it is not clear how many members in the commission, outside of NKVD officers, knew the truth about the massacre.[234] For Soviet propaganda, the Burdenko Commission signalled the full development of the Katyn Lie: after the commission completed its work, their cover story was enshrined in Soviet media and historiography as the truth behind Katyn, remaining unchanged until 1990.[235] Moreover, in 1944, the commission's

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[232] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 137; Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 227.
[233] "The Burdenko Commission Report (Excerpts), 24 January 1944," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 319.
[234] Burdenko knew the truth about the Katyn graves. "Shortly before his death in 1946, he reportedly admitted to a family friend that as a doctor, he knew the graves were four years old, which would have dated them to 1940." Echoing Beria's earlier words, Burdenko also said he believed the NKVD comrades had committed a "great blunder." Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 228.
[235] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre,* 137.

work was internationally publicized by the Soviets: correspondents from influential Anglo-American media outlets were invited by Soviet authorities to cover the commission's findings.[236] These journalists were specially selected by the Soviets, largely for their pro-Communist sympathies and prior work covering German atrocities in the Soviet Union.[237] The journalists were joined by Kathleen Harriman, the 25-year-old daughter of the American ambassador to Moscow, with John Melby, Third Secretary of the US Embassy, as her guardian.[238]

As a result of the journalists' dispositions and wartime censorship, the Anglo-American press materials that emerged from the journalists' coverage of the Burdenko Commission largely circulated the Katyn Lie verbatim. Likewise, the number of journalists invited, along with Harriman's presence, gave the Soviet commission an appearance of legitimacy and authenticity. However, even though many of the journalists expressed sympathy for the Soviet Union, many were not convinced by the Soviet presentation, pointing to the numerous holes in the Soviet case and their scant evidence for German guilt. Some journalists immediately noticed the heavy winter clothing worn by the Polish officers, meaning, if they were executed in 1941, they had worn the same clothing for well over a year since 1939.[239] The officers' boots were another giveaway of the Soviet lie, as they showed little signs of wear despite the Soviet claim that the officers were working in road

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[236] Urban, *Katyn 1940,* 121.
[237] Thomas Urban gives a list of many of the journalists invited to the Katyn graves in his book *The Katyn Massacre 1940.* Included were Jerome Davis (*Toronto Star),* John Gibbons (*Daily Worker),* Richard Lauterbach (*Time Magazine*), Ralph Parker (*The Times*), Homer Smith (*Associated Negro Press),* Edmund Stevens (*Christian Science Monitor),* and Alexander Werth (BBC, *Sunday Times*). All these journalists had strong sympathies with the Soviet system and the Stalinist government, except for Smith, whose pro-Soviet sympathies waned throughout the war. Smith later confessed that he participated in the trip to Katyn in hopes of finding evidence of African American victims of the NKVD. Ibid., 123 – 125.
[238] Ibid., 126.
[239] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn,* 247.

construction before their execution. The journalists were also not allowed to interview the Soviet forensic specialists nor the "witnesses" the NKVD had brought in.[240] Nevertheless, the journalists' sympathies with the Soviet Union and wartime censorship ensured that pro-Soviet reports on the Burdenko Commission's work appeared in the Anglo-American press. One journalist in the group, W.L. White, remarked in 1945 that the Anglo-American reports were censored to the extent that all qualifying words such as "in my opinion" or "probably" were cut out, so that "the stories received in America were as firmly damning as *Pravda's* editorials."[241]

Much of the Burdenko report contained technical medical information the commission produced as evidence of German guilt.[242] Yet the report also contained a great degree of propaganda around Katyn, aimed at both blaming the crime on the Germans and addressing the issue of Soviet-Polish relations. The commission's conclusion for the German motivation behind the crime first addressed Soviet-Polish relations, stating that the Germans publicized the Katyn murders as a calculated provocation in 1943 to "sow strife between Russians and Poles."[243] Moreover, in several places throughout the report, the commission drew attention to German atrocities on Soviet soil, in one instance stating that the "method of execution of the

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[240] These "witnesses" were locals near Katyn, cajoled into the role of supporting the Burdenko commission on threat of death. At the same time, anyone who had cooperated with the Germans in their Katyn investigation was swiftly arrested. Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn,* 245, 247.
[241] Ibid., 249.
[242] For example, here are two paragraphs dealing with the state of the corpses: "External and internal examinations of the 925 corpses provide grounds for asserting the presence of bullet wounds to the head and neck, in four cases combined with injury to the skull with a blunt, hard, heavy object. Moreover, in an insignificant number of cases, injury to the belly was discovered that was simultaneous [with injury] to the head wound. Entry wounds for firearm injuries, as a rule, are singular, more rarely double, and located in the nape area of the head close to the occiput, [that is,] the large occipital opening, or at its edge. In a small number of cases, the bullet entry wounds are found on the rear surface of the neck, corresponding to cervical vertebrae 1, 2, and 3." "The Burdenko Commission Report (Excerpts)," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 320.
[243] Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 325.

Polish POWs … was widely practiced by the German-Fascist authorities on the temporarily occupied territory of the USSR."[244] To support the connection between Katyn and German atrocities in the Soviet Union, the report invented the claim that 500 Soviet POWs were employed to dig up the graves in the Katyn Forest, and were executed by the Germans thereafter.[245] The political propaganda was most bluntly stated in the report's conclusion: "In executing the Polish POWs in the Katyn Forest, the German-Fascist aggressors were consistently implementing their own policy of physically destroying the Slavic peoples."[246]

Given the unreliability and gaps in the hard Soviet evidence pointing to German guilt, this association of Katyn to other German atrocities was a piece of circumstantial evidence, not least due to the real and numerous German atrocities against the Poles. Zawodny noted this much in his history of Katyn, stating that "No one who had lived under German occupation was apt to believe the German description of the discovery [of Katyn]."[247] While many Poles began to believe in Soviet guilt as further evidence was released — many were also familiar with the methods of Soviet occupation — the linkage to German atrocities remained a compelling argument for German guilt in the Anglo-American opinion of the crime. John Gibbons, a writer for the British communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker,* echoed this in his reporting on Katyn, citing the words of a Russian woman from Smolensk

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[244] Ibid., 322.
[245] Today, the Katyn memorial complex in the Katyn Forest retains a monument to the 500 Soviet POWs allegedly executed there. While it is true the Germans employed Soviet POWs and local residents to exhume the graves, the claim that they were executed at the Katyn Forest was an invention of the Burdenko Commission. When Katyn first received attention by the Soviet government in 1988, it was to commemorate the 500 Soviet POWs allegedly murdered there. Even after the Soviet government admitted responsibility for the Katyn massacre, Russian officials continued to foreground the 500 Soviet POWs when commemorating Katyn. As of today, the memorial to the 500 POWs remains in the Katyn memorial complex, though guides in the complex now pass by it without comment. Ibid., 325; Etkind, et al., *Remembering Katyn,* 127 – 131.
[246] "The Burdenko Commission Report (Excerpts)," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 322.
[247] Zawodny, *Death in the Forest,* 16.

interviewed during the Burdenko Commission: "Do you think that the murderers of 120,000 Russians would show pity for Polish officers?"[248] Similarly, the *New York Times*' article on the Burdenko Commission restated Burdenko's claim that the method of execution at Katyn was virtually identical to German methods used at atrocities near Orel and Voronezh.[249] *The Times'* article on the Burdenko report ran similar comments, restating the report's claims of the murdered 500 Soviet POWs, the identicality of the methods to other German atrocities in the USSR, and the German aim to sow discord between the Poles and Soviets.[250]

Given the Soviet efforts to draw an international light to the Burdenko Commission and its findings, the Burdenko report was widely spread throughout many Anglo-American newspapers. In the California newspaper the *San Pedro News Pilot*, the paper repeated the Soviet narrative that Katyn was a German provocation and cited much of the Burdenko Commission's evidence as supporting proof.[251] Another American newspaper, *Mandera Tribune,* reported that, "A special Soviet atrocity commission formally charged the German army tonight with the mass murder of approximately 11,000 Polish war prisoners in the Katyn square [forest] near Smolensk" on 26 January 1944.[252] The Canadian newspaper *The Daily Colonist* likewise reported the Burdenko Commission's findings, along with Soviet attacks on the Polish Government-in-Exile.[253] For the Soviets, this favourable and widespread reporting

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[248] Urban, *Katyn Massacre*, 131.
[249] W. H. Lawrence, "SOVIETS BLAME FOE IN KILLING OF GERMANS," *New York Times,* 27 January 1944, 3. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1944/01/27/87432708.html?pageNumber=3
[250] "The Shootings at Katyn," *Times*, January 27, 1944, 3. https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/apps/doc/CS51985979/TTDA?u=uvictoria&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=0b59f669.
[251] Henry C. Cassidy, "Russ Show Allied Newsmen Graves of Slaughtered Poles," *San Pedro News Pilot,* 26 January 1944, 2. California Digital Newspaper Archive. https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SPNP19440126.2.50
[252] "Mass Murders are Charged," *Madera Tribune,* 26 January 1944, 1. https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MT19440126.2.13
[253] "Find Evidence Germans Killed Polish Prisoners," *The Daily Colonist,* 27 January 1944, 1 – 2. https://archive.org/details/dailycolonist0144uvic_19/mode/1up?view=theater&q=katyn

was a propaganda coup, largely ensuring their narrative of events was put forwards verbatim to the international community and greatly obscuring the truth of the massacre during and after the war.

Berling's Ceremony

Alongside the Burdenko Commission, Berling, now a General, and the LWP were again showcased by the Soviets as symbols of Polish-Soviet unity in the face of Katyn. Shortly after Burdenko's report was released, Berling led a delegation of 600 of his soldiers to the Katyn Forest to attend to the ceremonial reburial of the exhumed officers. Unlike the Burdenko Commission's work, this ceremony was not given the same broad international coverage and retinue of foreign journalists; nevertheless, Anglo-American press correspondents reported on the ceremony through Moscow Radio and *Pravda*. For English language speakers, a *New York Times* article from 1 February 1944 produced excerpts of the rhetoric from the ceremony largely verbatim, the remarkable content of which is quoted in full below:

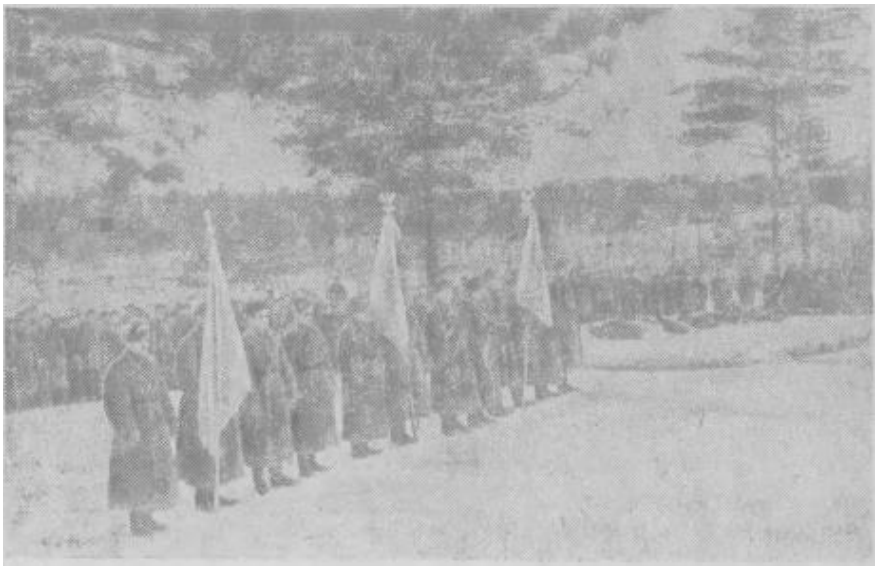
> MOSCOW, January 31st – Pravda described today the Katyn Forest funeral yesterday, the reburial of 11,000 Polish officers and soldiers at which officers of Polish units denounced as lies the German charges that the Soviet Union had murdered the men. A [Polish] priest said at the services: "Our murdered brothers hoped God would put some sense in the Polish government so it would find peace and tranquility with its great Eastern neighbour."
>
> Maj[or] Gen[eral] Zigmund [Zygmunt] Berling, commander of the First Polish Corps with the Soviet Armies, and his staff sat bareheaded before an altar fashioned of birch and fir trees, above which a Polish inscription, made with fir branches read, "Glory to those fallen in 1941."
>
> General Berling and the other officers placed red, white, and black-ribboned wreaths on the graves. The inscriptions on the wreaths read: "Comrades in arms, glory to the memory of the victims of the Hitlerite terror in Katyn Forest." A band played Chopin's funeral march, and as a priest sprinkled holy water on the graves, sixty meters long, live artillery salvos shook the winter sky. Two Polish officers, one of whom had spent

> some time in a Soviet detention camp near the scene of the massacre, spoke briefly, denying Russians had killed the Poles.
>
> General Berling pledged revenge for his fallen comrades. His aide, Major Zavatsky, asserted nobody believed the German story "except some Poles in London who supported the bloody lies of the Hitlerites for their own intriguing purposes and who have nothing in common with the Polish people.[254]

This article perhaps best shows how the Soviets framed Katyn in their propaganda, and how the Katyn Lie had matured by 1944. Attacks on the Polish Government-in-Exile were clearly present, while the PPR was stressed as the political body best representing the interests of the Polish people. The LWP was again upheld as an example of Soviet-Polish unity, with the army now committed to "avenging the Katyn crime." During this ceremony, Berling was said to have announced the formation of a Polish tank unit named the "Avengers of Katyn," although this never came to fruition.[255] This ceremony further foreshadowed how Katyn became a litmus test for Polish loyalty to the Soviets in the years after the war, in that the future leaders of the PRL all publicly regarded Katyn as a German crime. In the view of Polish historian Witold Wasilewski, Katyn was "the foundational lie of the Polish People's

[254] Wireless to the *New York Times*, "MILITARY RITES HELD AT REBURAL OF POLES," *New York Times,* 3.
[255] Urban, *Katyn 1940,* 134; Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre,* 206.

Republic."[256] Here we can see that the PPR's engagement with Katyn during the Second World War cemented the Katyn Lie as foundational to the PRL's political legitimacy.



Polish soldiers of the LWP at Berling's Ceremony.[257]

Moreover, Berling's ceremony shows the convergence between Soviet domestic and international propaganda around Katyn. Given that the ceremony was reported through *Pravda*, with few foreign observers present, it was likely intended for domestic consumption, aimed especially at the Polish population. Centering the LWP in this narrative further cemented the army as giving a Polish face to the Soviet takeover of Poland. The pro-national propaganda around the LWP largely supported this goal, presenting Polish-Soviet unity as a shared and mutually beneficial goal to both parties, based off a historical, Slavic unity and both countries' ongoing resistance to Nazi Germany. These goals in Soviet propaganda largely coincided with that put forward to the Anglo-American press.

[256] Etkind, et al., *Remembering Katyn*, 16.
[257] "Byłem jeńcem w tesie Katyńskim," *Wolna Polska*, 24 February 1944, 2. https://mbc.cyfrowemazowsze.pl/dlibra/publication/47009/edition/41736/content

Soviet pan-Slavic rhetoric was further expressed in an "all-Slav" meeting held in late February 1944, which was broadcast through Moscow Radio and reported on by *The Times*: "MOSCOW CALL TO SLAVS." This article again featured General Berling, with a speech supporting Soviet-Polish unity justified by the rhetoric of pan-Slavism:

> The future of our country [Poland] we can visualize only in the constant support of the Soviet Union, in a single fraternal union of Slav peoples … directed against the eternal enemy of the Slavs, the Germans. We categorically disassociate ourselves from the Polish émigré government in London. We have nothing in common with it and do not recognize it as representative of the Polish people. They are playing into the hands of German fascism and in opposition to the interests of Poland and all the allied nations.[258]

This polemic about the Polish Government-in-Exile, appearing alongside Berling's ceremony and the Burdenko Commission report, further solidified the narrative around Katyn and Polish-Soviet relations that Moscow was relaying to the Poles and international audiences. The London Poles were condemned on the grounds that they allegedly collaborated with Nazi Germany, while the PPR was held as representing the true interests of the Polish people. Around the same time, on 11 February 1944, Wanda Wasilewska, the leader of the Union of Polish Patriots (ZPP) — a Polish communist political body in the USSR — released a stirring call to arms to Berling's army.[259] "The blood of Katyn calls us to unforgiving and merciless

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[258] Indicating that the meeting had international reception in mind, the *Times* article stated that "The meeting decided to send greetings to Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt." "MOSCOW CALL TO SLAVS," *Times*, 24 February 1944, 3. https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/apps/doc/CS51854936/TTDA?u=uvictoria&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=765b8137.

[259] There is a likely possibility that both Wasilewska and Berling's comments around Katyn came from their own initiative, albeit with sanction from Moscow. This would explain, for example, why the PPR was so vocal on Katyn during the war, or why the "Avengers of Katyn" tank unit was never created, as the idea would have come from Berling, not Moscow. Recalling Zawodny's assessment that the PPR met Katyn head on at first, Poles supporting the Soviet Katyn Lie were likely demonstrating their loyalty to the Soviet cause. Berling and Wasilewska may have been attempting to outdo each other in their pro-Soviet Katyn propaganda. Berling, for example, detested Wasilewska. "His antipathy toward Wasilewska can be explained by envy of her high political position and the trust Stalin gave her. Berling's misogyny went hand in hand with his anti-Semitism: his memoirs are marked by a deep aversion toward Polish communists of Jewish origin, whom he accused of acting against Polish interests." Agnieszka Mrozik, "Crossing Boundaries: The Case of Wanda Wasilewska and Polish Communism," *Aspasia* 11, no. 1 (2017): 51. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.3167/asp.2017.110103

revenge. When you go west, through gritted teeth whisper these words to yourself: for Warsaw, for Westerplatte, for Kutno – and do not forget to add, for Katyn!"[260] The article appearing in *Wolna Polska* shows its intended audience were Poles living in Poland, again being strikingly similar to the Katyn Lie disseminated abroad.

Postwar: The Schellenberg Case and Katyn at the IMT

Despite the obvious bias and scant physical evidence present in the Burdenko Commission report, along with the doubts of some of the correspondents present, the international publicization of the commission's findings was undoubtedly a success for Moscow. The Katyn Lie had been relayed largely verbatim by the international press. The main components to this narrative were as follows: the Katyn crime was a German one, committed against Polish officers engaged in construction work in the late summer of 1941; the officers were murdered because of German anti-Slavism, which affected the Soviets as equally as it did the Poles; 500 Soviet POWs were murdered along with the Polish officers, while the atrocity closely resembled others committed by the Germans in the Soviet Union; and the Germans publicized the Katyn graves as a provocation to cause disunity between the Soviets and Poles. Because the London Poles called for an international commission to investigate the graves, they were in collusion with the Nazi government. In contrast, the Polish communists represented the true interests of the Polish people, and, most importantly, they recognized Katyn as a German crime. In that regard, the Katyn Lie was largely aimed at the Polish population to reduce resistance to Soviet rule. The international reception of this

[260] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 256.

narrative reinforced the Katyn Lie, while blaming the crime on the Germans and smoothing over the issue of Soviet-Polish relations on the international stage.

Yet the favourable Anglo-American reception of the Soviet narrative was not to last: the end of the Second World War and the loosening of wartime censorship, along with the start of the Cold War, soon led to the Katyn Lie being discredited abroad. Immediately after the end of the war, this was not necessarily apparent, with major Anglo-American press organs maintaining German guilt for the crime; nevertheless, the key components of the Katyn Lie were slowly dropped. This is best illustrated by a *New York Times* article from 29 June 1945 reporting on the interrogation of Walter Schellenberg, a high-ranking SS leader who had escaped to Sweden. In his interrogation, Schellenberg declared that Katyn was a German crime, yet his story differed from that laid down by the Soviets. Schellenberg claimed that the bodies found in the Katyn graves were those of concentration camp inmates dressed in Polish uniforms, while Jewish prisoners were forced to forge the documents found on the bodies.[261] This story was nearly identical to the Gleiwitz false-flag attack undertaken by Nazi Germany on 31 August 1939 to justify the invasion of Poland. In the Anglo-American press, the spread of the report was limited, with a similar version only reported in the Australian newspaper *The Daily News*.[262] Given the discrepancy with Moscow's version of Katyn, the report likely came from Schellenberg's own initiative while he was in captivity, and while not widely reported, it showed that Moscow was losing control of the information space around Katyn it had held during the war.

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[261] Wireless to the *New York Times,* "KATYN GRAVES STORY DECLARED GRIM FRAUD," *New York Times,* 29 June 1945, 2. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1945/06/29/306091732.html?pageNumber=2

[262] "Polish Massacre Was 'Faked,'" *The Daily News,* 28 June 1945, 1. http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article78782646

The Soviet leadership further lost control of the information space around Katyn after their decision to charge Germany with the massacre at the Nuremberg Trials. The decision to bring Katyn to the Nuremberg Trials, the postwar tribunal to charge Nazi leaders with crimes against humanity, was made on Stalin's own initiative. As Francine Hirsch writes in her history of the Soviet Union at the Nuremberg Trials, Stalin was considering holding a Katyn trial in occupied Poland, yet instead seized on the International Military Tribunal (IMT) to tar Nazi Germany with the crime.[263] As Sanford writes, the planned trial in the PRL was largely untenable given that power was shared with other political parties in Poland, with the Polish communists lacking a monopoly on power to force the trial.[264] Likewise, the conditions for a successful indictment of Katyn against the Nazis appeared favourable: members of the international medical commission organized by Goebbels had been arrested by the NKVD after the war, leaving no credible witnesses to contest the Soviet version of events.[265] As Hirsch also notes, the favourable Anglo-American press coverage on the Burdenko Commission in January 1944 gave the Soviets the confidence to charge the Nazis with the Katyn crime at the IMT.[266] Pinning the Katyn crime on the Nazis was equally central to Moscow's bid to control Poland postwar, with recognition of Katyn as a German crime being a central tenet of the PPR's political legitimacy. As with the Soviet approach to Katyn throughout 1943 and 1944, securing international support for the Katyn Lie would further buttress Soviet control in Poland. Moreover, the idea that the Polish Government-in-Exile collaborated with the Nazis continued after the war in Moscow's bid to control Poland: in

[263] As Hirsch explains, Stalin foresaw the trial as a Soviet show trial, with the guilt of the defendants already determined. He did not anticipate that the trial would turn against the Soviets and be used by the defendants to attack the Soviet Union, which the Western prosecutors would largely tolerate given the rising tensions of the Cold War. Hirsch, *Soviet Judgement,* 86.
[264] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre,* 206.
[265] Urban, *Katyn 1940,* 133.
[266] Hirsch, *Soviet Judgement,* 321.

June 1945, 16 Polish leaders of the Polish underground state had been indicted in a show trial in the Soviet Union on the grounds that they had collaborated with Nazi Germany.[267]

The Soviet prosecution failed at indicting the Germans for the Katyn crime at Nuremberg. Unlike Soviet trials, where the verdict was prearranged, the defense contested the Soviet prosecution's charges at the IMT, something the Soviet judges were not trained to deal with. As such, when German officers from the 537th Signal Regiment — the unit the Burdenko Commission identified as responsible for the crime — were called to witness, they compellingly contested the Soviet allegations.[268] As Hirsch writes, "the Soviets had done reasonably well in this contest with the defense, especially given the fact that they were engaging in an elaborate charade." The careful fabrication of evidence and scripting of witness testimony had paid off for the Soviets, while the Soviet prosecution again linked Katyn as a crime identical to other Nazi atrocities.[269] Nevertheless, the German witnesses had thrown reasonable doubt on the Soviet Katyn charges, enough so that the Western judges had set aside the Soviet charge. Afterwards, there was no official finding of German guilt for the crime.[270]

Given how the Anglo-American press had circulated the Katyn Lie during the war largely verbatim, Nuremberg was unquestionably a loss for the Soviet Katyn case and the lie at large. The Soviet success in handling Katyn during the war relied on the cooperation of the Anglo-American governments shutting out any opposing evidence from the Germans on

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[267] Ibid., 76.
[268] The Commission had charged the German "537th Engineering Battalion" with the Katyn crime, which was a mistranslation as no such unit existed. The Signals Battalion was charged with the Katyn crime as they were stationed near the Katyn Forest after 1941. Ibid., 326.
[269] Ibid., 333 – 334.
[270] Ibid., 372.

Katyn, the facts of which overwhelmingly pointed to Soviet guilt. During the trial, the Anglo-American press coverage varied, with many papers still maintaining the Soviet narrative of events. Papers such as the Los Angeles *Daily News* reported that the Soviet evidence had dimmed the defendants' hopes of pinning Katyn on the NKVD, while *The Times* wrote that there was "little attempt by the defense to unsaddle themselves of responsibility for the crime."[271] Yet a *New York Times* article was perhaps most representative of the shifting Anglo-American attitudes around Katyn, reporting the details of the German defense as credible testimony.[272] This was a stark shift from the verbatim reporting of the Katyn Lie earlier in the war, signalling the end of Anglo-American support of the narrative and hinting at the beginnings of the Cold War to come.

Conclusions

"From the moment we first heard of the Katyn massacre, I think most Poles knew in their broken hearts that this time Dr. Goebbels wasn't lying."[273] These words come from the memoirs of Andrew Borowiec, a Polish resistance fighter of the AK in Warsaw, reflecting on his reaction to the German announcement about the Katyn graves in April 1943. For Poles in occupied Poland, Borowiec's reflection was accurate: public opinion in Poland first viewed the announcement as a Nazi propaganda stunt, yet opinion changed as more evidence pointing to Soviet guilt became available.[274] After the war, Borowiec, recognizing the danger his former AK connections held under the new Polish leadership, fled the PRL and settled in

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[271] "Massacre at Katyn Argued," *Daily News*, 3 July 1946, 6. https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=DNLA19460703.1.6; From our Special Correspondent, "Murder of Polish officers," *The Times*, 3 July 1946, 3. https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/apps/doc/CS52118243/TTDA?u=uvictoria&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=4fc2ea70.
[272] "Katyn Forest Issue Revived by the Germans," *New York Times*, 2 July 1946, 15. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1946/07/02/93130461.html?pageNumber=15
[273] Andrew Borowiec, *Warsaw Boy: A Memoir of a Wartime Childhood*, ed. Colin Smith (Saint Ives: Penguin Books, 2015), 134.
[274] Rogoyska, *Surviving Katyn*, 213.

England. During his brief stay in Warsaw in the summer of 1945, Borowiec remembered the changing political climate in Poland at the time, noting the view from several Warsaw residents that the Warsaw Uprising — an unsuccessful uprising staged by the AK in August 1944 without Soviet support — had only helped raze the city to the ground.[275] Such were the beginnings of the Soviet distortions of the history of the Second World War in Poland, of which the Katyn Massacre was perhaps the most egregious of all, for as seen during the war, the Soviets claimed fraternity with the Poles on the grounds that Katyn was a German crime.

Anglo-American complicity in supporting the Soviet Katyn Lie went beyond negating Soviet responsibility for the crime, with their press organs actively aiding in creating the foundations of Soviet control over Poland after the war. Indeed, the Katyn Lie was the foundational tenet of the PPR's claim to legitimacy in Poland, just as the truth behind the massacre showed how tenuous the PRL's political legitimacy was. While the favourable Allied press coverage the Soviets received around Katyn during the war served to bolster their image on the international stage, it also served to strengthen their domestic narrative by putting the authority of the Anglo-American governments behind the lie. This support quickly ended after the war, yet during the war, Anglo-American support had proved critical in the development of the Katyn Lie, and to securing Katyn as the founding lie of the PRL.

[275] Borowiec, *Warsaw Boy*, 349 – 351.

Conclusion: Remembering Katyn

Homer Smith, one of the American journalists present at the public unveiling of the Burdenko Commission, dealt with the subject of Katyn in his postwar memoirs *Black Man in Red Russia* (1964). While Smith did not directly confront who he thought the perpetrators of Katyn were, he posed a series of questions pointing out the inconsistencies of the Burdenko Commission:

> Why had no foreign newsman been invited to be present when the opening of the graves began? Why had we not been permitted to be present when the first autopsies were being performed? Why had Stalin not invited any Allied or neutral experts to join the Soviet investigation team? Why had the spruce saplings that had been removed from on top of the graves grown to a height indicating that they had been planted three or four years ago?

Then, Smith concludes, "But I did not ask these questions."[276]

In many ways, Smith's reflections provide a short anecdote representative of the broader Anglo-American handling of the Katyn case. Those unasked questions were reflective of the United States' and British governments recognizing the likelihood of Soviet culpability for Katyn. Instead of pressing the Soviets, however, both governments turned the other way and openly supported the Soviet Katyn Lie to preserve their wartime alliance. The implications for the Anglo-American handling of the Katyn case are best described in Swianewicz's memoirs: "**It means the two great Anglo-Saxon powers knew very well to whom they were giving half of Europe** [emphasis in original]."[277] Katyn reflected a broader

[276] Urban, *Katyn 1940,* 140.
[277] Swianewicz, *In the Shadow of Katyn,* 228.

frustration, particularly in émigré communities from the Soviet Eastern bloc, that the Western powers had conceded much of Eastern Europe to Soviet domination after 1945.[278]

Anglo-American circulation of the Katyn Lie had clear impact on the public perception of the massacre postwar. In Cienciala's assessment, the American public was unfamiliar with the Katyn crime in the immediate postwar years owing to the Roosevelt administration's suppression of the issue.[279] Given how widely the American press reported on Katyn, unfamiliarity with Katyn in America certainly wasn't the case. Here, Gleason's assessment of the immediate memory of Katyn in the United States is more accurate: many Americans were uninterested in Katyn until the spread of strong anti-Soviet feelings after the beginning of the Korean War in 1950.[280] Among the British public, the immediate memory of Katyn was certainly similar to that of the American public.[281] In broad strokes, then, the British and American public perception of Katyn likely reflected their corresponding attitudes towards the Soviet Union. However, Fitzgibbon, who spent many years studying Katyn, perhaps offers the best assessment: in 1971, "many had [in Britain] never heard of Katyn at all; of those who had, some appeared to be confused in their own minds as to who was

[278] For the Polish example, Anna M. Cienciala's assesses that, "U.S. policy towards Poland in World War II, which ended with Soviet domination, is often interpreted as the betrayal of an ally, as the price for the USSR's decisive military input — with enormous loss of life and property — into the defeat of Nazi Germany, or as the inevitable result of the Red Army's presence in Central and Eastern Europe by spring of that year." Cienciala further notes that most Polish historical works on WWII charge Britain and the United States with betraying Poland. Cienciala, "The United States and Poland," 173.
[279] Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 235.
[280] Gleason, "Decade of Deceit," 140.
[281] For example, P. M. H. Bell writes that British intelligence reports on public opinion on the Katyn graves in April 1943 indicated that the German stories about the Katyn graves were usually not believed. The breach in relations between the Soviets and the London Poles was perceived as a success of German propaganda. Later reports indicated that interest in Katyn died down during the last week in May 1943. While this source does not immediately concern the postwar perception of Katyn, it gives some indication of the British public opinion on Katyn, which likely did not change greatly over the course of the war. Bell, "Censorship, Propaganda, and Public Opinion," 81.

responsible for the crime."[282] Primarily, it was the Polish émigré community who maintained Soviet guilt, keeping the memory of the massacre alive along with calls for justice.

Smith's reflection highlights another key point on the Anglo-American coverage of Katyn: had he wanted to, he *could not* have asked those questions, much less relayed any answer critical of the Soviets past their censorship. The Soviets were not just subjects in the Anglo-American press coverage of Katyn, but they also actively utilized and capitalized this coverage to circulate and corroborate the Katyn Lie. The full import of this coverage, as this thesis has shown, was to delegitimize the Polish Government-in-Exile, legitimize the PPR, and mask Soviet culpability for the crime. Soviet leaders were clearly cognisant of the importance of international opinion on Katyn, only confronting the massacre publicly when facing pressure from the West: in 1952, with the American Madden Committee, and in the 1970s, with the British memorialization campaign. The importance of the international coverage of Katyn was further expressed in 1959 by Alexander Shelepin, then head of the KGB — the renamed Soviet secret police — in a note to Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor.[283] Shelepin claimed that "The [Burdenko] commission's conclusions became firmly established in international public opinion," and went on to recommend the destruction of all Soviet documents from 1940 relating to Katyn.[284] This focus on the international

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[282] Fitzgibbon, *A Crime Without Parallel,* 6.

[283] Khrushchev's rule led to a limited confrontation with the USSR's Stalinist past and its atrocities, notably in a 1956 speech to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Primarily, Khrushchev included Stalin's purges of the Red Army in 1937 and the purges of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Absent were far more of the state's atrocities, including the Holodomor or the millions deported to the GULAG camp system. As Donald Filzter summarizes, "any attack on Stalin and the way he had ruled would inevitably threaten many people who had won power and privileges under this system, not least Khrushchev himself." Donald Filzter, *The Khrushchev Era: De-Stalinization and the Limits of Reform in the USSR 1953-64* (London: Red Globe Press, 1993), 18. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/978-1-349-13076-4

[284] "Note by Shelepin to Khrushchev Proposing to Destroy the Documents of the Operation Sanctioned by the Politburo on 5 March 1940, 3 March 1959," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 333.

opinion of Katyn likely reflected that the massacre was first publicly revealed internationally by the Germans, with the recognition that further interest in Katyn abroad could engender public discussion of the massacre within the PRL. This reflected the original circumstances of the Katyn discovery in 1943, with the German announcement threatening the Soviet project to establish a Polish satellite state.

No written documentation has emerged confirming whether Khrushchev went through with Shelepin's recommendation to destroy much of the documentary evidence on Katyn.[285] Remarkably, this recommendation came three years after undocumented rumours that Khrushchev suggested publicly admitting Soviet guilt on Katyn to the Polish communist leader Władysław Gomułka in October 1956.[286] According to the rumour, Khrushchev believed revealing the truth of Katyn would strengthen Polish-Soviet friendship, while Gomułka dissuaded him, believing that such a revelation could cause a chain reaction in Polish public opinion.[287] Behind Gomułka's worry was the unspoken assumption that such a chain reaction could lead to the collapse of communist rule in Poland. These rumours, if true, would have occurred at the same time as the mass protests in Poland against Soviet rule in October 1956. Polish October, as the protests have been called, reflected the ongoing tension Katyn posed between the PRL and the Polish public, as the protestors in 1956 demanded a

[285] Historians presume these files were primarily the protocols of the Special Troikas of the NKVD which sentenced the Polish prisoners. To date, these files have not been found. Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 196.
[286] These rumours were said to originate from Soviet Central Committee official Pyotr Kostikov, who told a Polish journalist and personal friend of hearing from "a highly reliable source"— after the most important facts about the Katyn massacre became known — that the Soviet leader made such a proposal to Gomulka during his official visit to Moscow. Swianewicz, *In the Shadow of Katyn*, 243; Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 240.
[287] Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 240.

public explanation of the Katyn massacre from the communist government.[288] Gomułka's suggestion echoed Shelepin's conclusions around Soviet documents relating to Katyn, "All these files are of no operational or historical value to Soviet organs. It is also highly doubtful whether they could be of any real value to our Polish friends."[289] Shelepin's assessment, along with Gomułka's alleged words, underscored how volatile Katyn was for the Polish communists, who built their legitimacy on the lie that Katyn was a German crime. Throughout the remainder of Soviet rule, then, the Katyn massacre was largely silenced and suppressed in the USSR and the PRL.

Katyn thus had no place in the official Soviet history of Polish-Soviet relations. As Patryk Babiracki summarized in his book *Soviet Soft Power in Poland*¸ Soviet-Polish relations were fraught with open wounds and grievances: Russia's partition of Poland in the 18th century, the 1920 Polish-Soviet war, and the Soviet dismemberment of Poland with Nazi Germany in September 1939.[290] After the war, the propagandists of the PRL had to explain to the population "why they should now turn this difficult page in history and move on."[291] Primarily, this was accomplished by condemning the prewar Polish regime, while the PRL was heralded as a democratic regime representative of the Polish population. The Soviet history of the Second World War in Poland was recorded as such, providing a founding myth for the PRL to base its legitimacy. Here, for example, is a Soviet historian's assessment of the German invasion of Poland in 1939:

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[288] Paweł Machcewicz, "Social Protest and Political Crisis in 1956," in *Stalinism in Poland: 1944 – 56*, ed. A. Kemp-Welch (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 1999), 114. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/978-1-349-27680-6
[289] "Note by Shelepin to Khrushchev," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment*, 332.
[290] Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power in Poland*, 9.
[291] Ibid.

> The abyss that lay between the prewar reactionary Polish regime and the people was evident more than ever during the war. While the army and the people fought heroically, the government, stricken by panic, pleaded for British and French aid. The bourgeois-landlord regime proved unable of uniting the country in the hour of trial, while the people, hating the Nazi invaders, were ready to fight, their patriotism fettered by the corrupt political system.[292]

This history book, *Secrets of the Second World War* (1971), also devotes a section to the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939: "When the Polish state collapsed, Soviet troops were sent to liberate western Ukraine and western Byelorussia. This was an internationalist duty. It was the only possible help they could then render to the neighbouring peoples. Furthermore, the campaign had to be undertaken to prevent Germany from thrusting to the Soviet border."[293] Of course, there was no mention that the Soviet invasion was in collaboration with Nazi Germany, nor was there mention of the Polish officers taken prisoner in 1939. Katyn was perhaps the most blatant example of the Soviets' aggressive anti-Polish stance in 1939 and their bid to destroy Polish sovereignty, hence its omission, even of the Katyn Lie in later histories.

Primarily, the Soviet policy around Katyn after the war was dictated by a strict caution, mentioning the massacre only when necessary. In 1952 Moscow and the PRL leadership broke their silence around Katyn to criticize the United States' congressional investigation of Katyn.[294] Likewise, Moscow confronted Britain in the mid-1970s in response to the Katyn memorialization campaign, including a document covering protocols "On Countermeasures against Western Propaganda on the So-Called Katyn Question."[295]

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[292] Gregory Deborin, *Secrets of the Second World War,* trans., Vic Schmeierson (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 39. https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/great-patriotic-war/pdf/deborin-secrets-of-the-second-world-war-progress-1971.pdf
[293] Ibid., 43.
[294] For the Soviet campaign against the Madden Committee, see Urban, *Katyn 1940,* 196 – 200.
[295] "Politburo Protocol no. 3 on Measures to Counteract Western Propaganda on the Katyn Question (Excerpt), 5 April 1976," in Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *A Crime Without Punishment,* 336.

Otherwise, as Sanford notes, "the Soviet drive to control the truth about Katyn involved erasing its name as much as possible."[296] This Soviet policy of handling Katyn only when necessary reflected their behavior around Katyn during the Second World War, with the whole Katyn Lie emerging as a reaction to the German allegations and the issue of Polish-Soviet relations. Despite the Katyn Lie, the massacre was too contentious for the Soviets to maintain within the public space — especially given that the Katyn Lie was no longer supported abroad — hence its erasure and lack of memorialization in the USSR and the PRL. Not only did the massacre indict the fragile legitimacy of the PRL's leadership, but it was also a reminder of the prevailing distortions of Soviet history that likewise indicted the legitimacy of the Bolshevik regime.

The truth of Katyn would be officially revealed to the world in 1990, some ten years after Walenty Badylak's self-immolation. Set amidst the backdrop of the collapsing Soviet Union, the Katyn revelations were a powerful indicator that the empire was crumbling under the weight of its own past. In 1988, Gorbachev had visited Poland where he acknowledged that there were "blank spots" in the history of the two countries, of which Katyn was the most prominent.[297] By the summer of 1991, the Soviet Union was digging up these blank spots in a forest near the city of Kalinin, "searching the earth for the artifacts of the totalitarian regime – bullet shattered skulls, worm-eaten boots, scraps of Polish military uniforms."[298] Tver, where the Soviet army soldiers and Polish volunteers were digging, was the site of execution for the 6,000 Polish prisoners at Ostashkov. As David Remnick writes in his account of the fall of the Soviet Union, "the relationship between Moscow and Warsaw was one based on violence, an

[296] Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre*, 195.
[297] David R. Marples, *The Collapse of the Soviet Union: 1985 – 1991* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2004), 43. https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4324/9781315836140
[298] David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 1.

occupier's regime over its satellite."[299] When the truth of Katyn was revealed, the Polish-Soviet alliance — the "friendship of peoples" — abruptly crumbled, ending the Soviet satellite regime in Poland after some 50 years.

In Britain and the United States today, the memory of Katyn has overcome the widespread circulation of the Katyn Lie by their newspapers during the Second World War. Both countries now feature memorials commemorating the massacre, and the complicity of both governments in silencing the crime has become an accepted scholarly fact. In Poland, the massacre has been metonymically enshrined in national memory, as a part of the country's history meant to stand for the whole.[300] The whole, in this case, encapsulates Poland's modern history of conquest and division by outside powers, a narrative of national victimhood and resilience, standing as a unifying mythos for the modern Polish state.

Katyn is further connected to another tragedy in contemporary Poland: on 10 April 2010, the Polish presidential plane went down in the forests of Smolensk, killing all 96 members on board.[301] The victims were many of Poland's senior political and military officials, including then-President Lech Kaczynski. The flight was carrying the delegation to a ceremony commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Katyn massacre and crashed owing to adverse weather conditions and human error.[302] The parallels between the 1940 massacre and the 2010 crash were haunting, with Poland's civil and military elite again found dead outside the forests of Smolensk. The 2010 plane crash brought an outpouring of grief

[299] Ibid., 4.
[300] Etkind, et al., *Remembering Katyn,* 8.
[301] Ibid., 132.
[302] Ibid.

from the Polish public, further solidifying the Katyn massacre's central place in Polish collective memory.

Russia, too, has confronted the Katyn massacre as the legal successor of the USSR, hence bearing the legacy of perpetrating the massacre. Nevertheless, Russia today has not fully accepted responsibility for Katyn, often recognizing itself as a victim of Stalinism: "All of Russia is one big Katyn," remarked a Russian political scientist in 2010, "dotted by unmarked graves of millions of victims of the Soviet regime."[303] Russian President Vladimir Putin also announced his "personal opinion" on the massacre in 2010, proclaiming that Stalin sought revenge for the 32,000 Soviet POWs who died in Polish camps during the 1920 Polish-Soviet war.[304] Much as with its broader memory of Stalinism, the Russian government's policy towards Katyn today stands uneasily between recognition and exculpation.[305]

Memory has been a fundamental challenge posed by the Katyn massacre and the Soviet cover-up. The massacre itself left a stark void in memory owing to its nearly entirely unwitnessed nature, with no survivors emerging from the killing sites at Tver, Kharkiv, and Katyn. The Soviet wartime Katyn Lie equally obscured the memory of the massacre and the meaning of the victims' deaths. The Polish priest's speech at Berling's ceremony represent the obscuration of Katyn's memory best: "Our murdered brothers hoped God would put some sense in the Polish government so it would find peace and tranquility through friendship with its great Eastern neighbour." Afterwards, Poles were challenged by an inability to remember the massacre, both through Soviet silence and the PRL's suppression of Katyn

[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid., 113.
[305] For a greater discussion of the memory of Katyn in Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States, see Etkind, et al., *Remembering Katyn*.

commemoration. Yet today, the memory of Katyn flourishes in Poland's commemorative culture and history, having overcome the past challenges to the massacre's commemoration. Polish collective memory has found meaning in Katyn as a nationally connective trauma, as a metonym for Poland's modern history, and as a triumph of truth after decades of deceit.

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