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Death and Politics: The Katyn Forest Massacre and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy

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Crister Garrett

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Introduction

On September 17, 1939 Russian tanks and troops flooded across the Polish border. As the Poles tried to defend themselves, the Russians succeeded in capturing 10,000 Polish military officers. Four years later, in the Katyn forest area near Smolensk, Russia, 4,143 of the captured Polish officers were found in several large graves. The cause of death, without exception, was shots to the head. The hands of the officers were tied behind the back with binder cord. A few of the bodies had four-edged bayonet wounds.

The Germans wasted no time in announcing to the world their discovery and in accusing the Russians of committing the atrocity. The Russians replied that the German accusations were a mere concoction and that, in fact, the Nazis had perpetrated this horrible crime. Throughout the remainder of the war both the Germans and the Russians continued to blame each other for the killing of the Polish officers.

The possibility of Russia's actually being responsible for Katyn worried Allied leaders from the moment the graves were found. If the Russians indeed killed the Poles, the American and British public, upon hearing the news of such an action, might begin to see their Soviet ally as actually little better than the Nazi foe. The sudden change in public opinion might possibly lead to an Allied breakdown. Russia, after losing its Allies might then negotiate a separate peace with Germany, leaving only America and England to fight the enemy. This realization significantly shaped the American and British

response to the Katyn story.

The manner in which America and Britain reacted to the Katyn massacre has been analyzed, at least in part, by studies such as Lynn Davis' The Cold War Begins, William Standley's Admiral Ambassador to Russia, and Joseph Zawodny's Death in the Forest. None of these books, however, provided a truly detailed analysis of the American reaction in its entirety during both the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations. This paper attempts to provide such an analysis, focusing on how the United States felt about the possible implications of the Katyn issue for both domestic and international politics during and after the Second World War.

The response of Allied leaders to the discovery of the Katyn graves is described in the following pages. One clear point emerges: with the passing of time the American government changed its attitude towards the issue. With the ending of the war, Roosevelt's successor, President Harry S. Truman, no longer faced the political restrictions his predecessor worked under. Moreover, Russian actions in Poland led Truman to believe, as Roosevelt had suspected just before he died, that Russia intended to play an aggressive role in Eastern European affairs during the postwar years. Not only was Russia no longer needed as an ally, then, it now seemed that America would have to take action to check Russia's expansionist ideas. The dramatic change in Soviet-American relations was clearly reflected in Roosevelt's and Truman's different attitudes towards the Katyn affair.

The Katyn story actually has many facets. On one level it was simply a great human tragedy and an undeniable atrocity. On another level it was representative of the moral and practical complexities that confront leaders in wartime, particularly in a war so total and fundamental as that fought in the years 1939-1945. Overall, the Katyn massacre was never assessed, either during the war or after, simply in its own terms by the broader political and military considerations. For the families of the dead officers, the political maneuvering meant little in the face of their personal loss. Perhaps it would be naive, however, to expect that an issue such as Katyn could ever have been divorced from the more fundamental ebbs and flows of international politics.

CHAPTER 1

"No Pole can help but be deeply shocked"

The Katyn graves' existence might have remained unknown if local peasants had not told the German Army, which occupied the Smolensk area in April, 1943, of mass graves lying deep in the Katyn Forest. The Germans, upon verifying the peasants' story, quickly let the world know of the discovery. Josef Goebbels, Propaganda Minister for the German Reich, released a statement announcing the German find and accusing the Russians of committing the atrocity. The Russians, over Radio Moscow, replied two days later by claiming the officers died when they "fell into the hands of the German-Fascist hangmen in the summer of 1941, after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the Smolensk area."[1] The Russian message went on to say that "beyond doubt Goebbels' [Germany's Propaganda Minister] slanderers are now trying by lies and calumnies to cover up the bloody crimes of the Hitlerite gangsters."[2]

The Polish Government, exiled in London, expressed the feelings of its compatriots in a statement released after the discovery of the graves. "No Pole can help but be deeply shocked by the news of the discovery of the bodies of Polish officers... and of the mass execution of which they were the victims."[3] The communique seemed to support the Russian accusations against the Germans by stating that "the Polish Government denies to the Germans any right to base, on a crime they ascribe to others, arguments in their own defense."[4]

While the Polish Government publicly sided with the Russians, they nevertheless instructed their representative in Switzerland to request the International Red Cross in Geneva to send a delegation to investigate the true state of affairs at Katyn. Upon hearing of the Polish request Josef Goebbels, Germany's Propaganda Minister, also extended an invitation to the International Red Cross to send a commission to witness the exhuming of the bodies. If all parties concerned wished such an undertaking, the Red Cross announced, then it would conduct an investigation. The Russians never sent a cable to the Red Cross on the subject, who thus never became involved in the Katyn Forest affair.

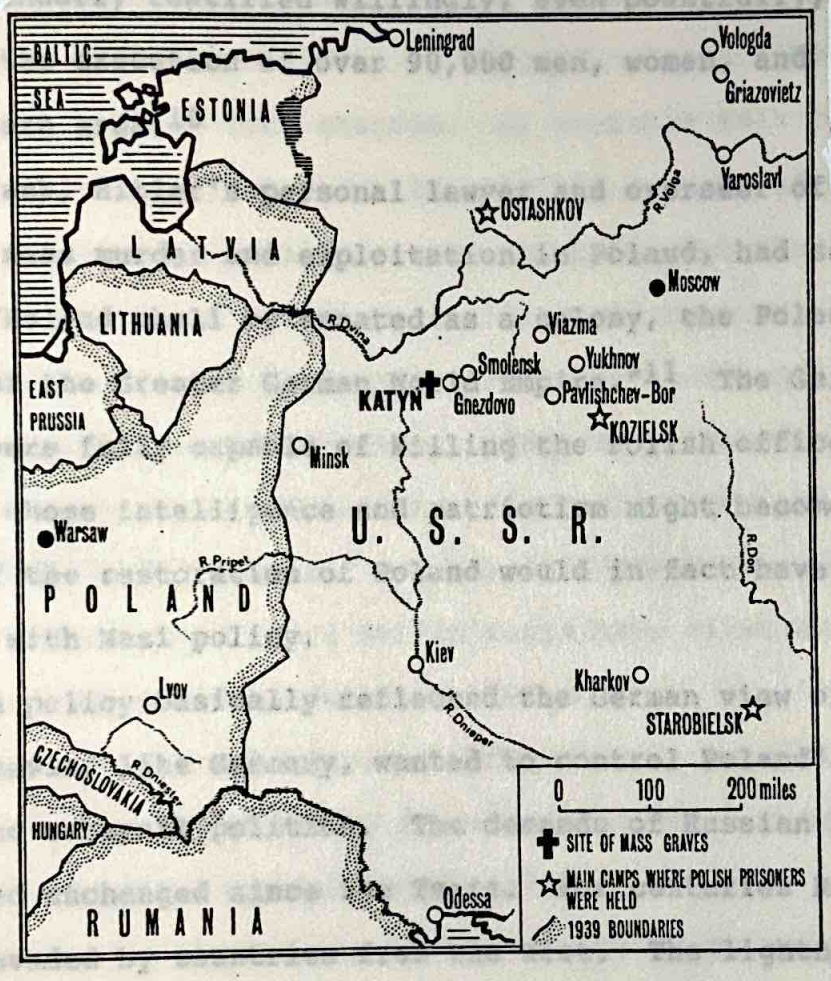
The Germans went ahead with their own fact-finding mission. At the end of April, the Germans put together a commission composed of experts in medical jurisprudence and criminology from European universities in Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The Commission dissected hundreds of bodies hoping to determine the date of death. Clues were sought in the letters, diaries, and newspapers found on the bodies. From the statements of witnesses, the items found on the bodies, and the condition of the bodies themselves, the men on the Commission concluded the Poles died between March and April of 1940. At that time the Russians controlled the area around the Katyn Forest. The Commission's findings, then, pointed to the Russians as responsible for killing the Poles.[5]

The Russians, to no one's surprise, attempted to refute the Commission's conclusion. The issue of who killed the Polish

officers was debated between the Russians and Germans on propaganda broadcasts until September 1943, when the Russian Army recaptured Smolensk. Four months later, on January 22, 1944, the Soviet Government announced that a Soviet investigation commission had been formed to settle once and for all the Katyn Forest dispute.[6] The Russian Commission concluded that in the Katyn Forest, in the autumn of 1941, "the German occupation authorities carried out mass shootings of Polish prisoners of war."[7]

Both Germany and Russia had opportunities to kill the Polish officers. On September 17, 1939, Russia invaded Poland. The Russians took 181,000 Polish prisoners of war, of which 10,000 were officers of the regular army and reserve. Three large camps of Polish prisoners of war were set up in Russia in November, 1939: in Kozielsk, east of Smolensk; in Starobielsk, near Kharkov; and Ostashkov, near Kalinin. In Kozielsk there were about 5,000 men, including some 4,500 officers. All but 400 were the men found in the graves at Katyn. The Russians controlled the camp until the summer of 1941 when German troops captured the Smolensk area.[8] Thus the time of death was a critical factor in determining the guilty party. If the men died before the summer of 1941, around February or March, then the Russians were guilty; if the time of death was in the summer of 1941 then the Germans were guilty.

Both countries not only had the opportunity but the capacity to commit mass murder as well. At the International Military Tribunal held in 1946 to try Nazi war criminals, German generals


BALTIC
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POLAND
Warsaw
Minsk
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Leningrad
Vologda
Griazovietz
Yaroslavl
OSTASHKOV
R. Volga
Moscow
Viazma
Smolensk
Yukhnov
KATYN
Gnezdovo
Pavlishchev-Bor
KOZIELSK
R. Dvina
R. Pripet
R. Don
Kiev
Kharkov
STAROBIELSK
R. Dnieper
Lvov
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
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HUNGARY
RUMANIA
Odessa
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SITE OF MASS GRAVES
MAIN CAMPS WHERE POLISH PRISONERS WERE HELD
1939 BOUNDARIES

testified to the number of Poles killed by the Nazis. Major-General Stroop recited the exact number killed during the Warsaw ghetto uprising as 56,065, and set out the day-to-day measures, including shooting, fire explosion and chemical extermination in the sewers.[8] "Only through the continuous and untiring work of all involved", Stroop boasted, "did we succeed in catching a total of 56,065 Jews."[9] Another Nazi, General Ohlendorf, testified willingly, even boastfully, that he supervised the execution of over 90,000 men, women, and children in the Eastern area.[10]

Hans Frank, Hitler's personal lawyer and overseer of the program of mass murder and exploitation in Poland, had said in 1940 that "Poland shall be treated as a colony, the Poles shall be slaves of the Greater German World Empire."[11] The Germans, in short, were fully capable of killing the Polish officers. To kill those whose intelligence and patriotism might become the backbone of the restoration of Poland would in fact have been consistent with Nazi policy.

Russian policy basically reflected the German view of Poland. Russia, like Germany, wanted to control Poland's internal and external politics. The demands of Russian security had remained unchanged since the Tsars. For centuries Russians had been invaded by countries from the West. The lightning successes scored by the German invader in 1941 served only to emphasize further the dangers of a border open to invasion because of its lack of natural defenses. To make up for these geographical deficiencies, Josef Stalin, Russia's leader during

the war, wanted to have Poland as a "buffer" state. Any nation's effort to invade Russia would face stiff resistance in Poland first, enabling the Soviet Union to mobilize militarily. Hence the necessity for a pro-Soviet government in Poland that would willingly fight those seeking to invade Russia.

Since most of the peoples of Poland were anti-Communist and anti-Russian, a government friendly to Communist Russia there and in other Eastern European countries could probably not be freely elected but would have to be imposed. It is likely that Stalin did not want to take chances. He probably felt that the best way to make sure that he could maintain control of Eastern Europe was to set up satellite states and hand pick their rulers.[12] To carry out his plans Stalin would have to eliminate any resistance. The officers found at Katyn could have amply supplied such resistance. They represented the life of Polish society. Most of the men were reserve officers who during peacetime were lawyers, doctors, and professors. By killing these Polish officers Stalin would have eliminated a major part of any would-be Polish resistance.

The Russians, like the Germans, had not only the motive but also the necessary brutality to fulfill their goals. An estimated three million people were killed during the collectivization of the Ukraine. When the Poles attempted to overthrow their German conquerers in the Warsaw uprising, the Russian army, located only a few miles away, had the opportunity to help their "allies". The Russians did not assist the Poles. Instead they stood idly by while thousands of Poles died at the

hands of the Germans. George Kennan, an expert in Russian affairs, feels the Russian inaction signaled that they intended "to have Poland lock, stock, and barrel."[13] Both Germany and Russia, in sum, had the opportunity, the motive, and the capability to kill the Polish officers from the Kozielsk camp.

One piece of damaging evidence existed against the German claim of innocence. German munitions were found in the graves of Katyn. Josef Goebbels understood the importance of the discovery, remarking in his diaries: "It is essential that this incident must be kept top secret. If it were to come to the knowledge of the enemy the whole Katyn affair would have to be dropped."[14] It must be noted, however, that while the pistol ammunition found at Katyn was of German manufacture, that caliber of ammunition had been sold frequently to the Russians. The ammunition controversy remained the only piece of concrete evidence against the Germans. Not a single document could be found by the Allies suggesting Nazi responsibility for Katyn despite the fact that the Germans kept extensive records of the crimes they committed in other areas.

The Russians, on the other hand, based their protestation of innocence on the document compiled in January, 1944 by the Soviet Commission. In that document, the Russians had to explain an important piece of evidence against them. When the International Medical Commission examined the bodies, they found Russian newspapers in the coats of the men. All the newspapers were dated not later than April 1940. The Russians claimed that the Germans, during the spring of 1943, brought from other

places the bodies of Polish prisoners, put them face down in the graves at Katyn, and falsified the documents on their bodies.[15] To do this, the Germans would have had to get thousands of newspapers from Russia, of that particular date, and place them on the bodies of the dead men. The Russian explanation about the newspapers seems unlikely. The idea of the Germans relocating 4,143 bodies in the spring of 1943 appears dubious as well. The International Medical Commission noticed the bodies stuck together because of a "human glue" secreted by the dead bodies. To reach this state of decomposition the bodies needed to be buried for over a year.[16] The time between when the Russians said the Germans buried the bodies and the German announcement of the discovery was only a month or two.

Further inconsistencies stem from the Russian Commission's claim that the Germans forced the officers found at Katyn to engage in railway construction between April 1940 until probably August 1941.[17] The officers found at Katyn, however, had clean new leather boots, uniforms in good condition, and heavy winter overcoats. The condition of the clothing hardly coincides with the Russian statement that the Polish officers had been engaged in heavy manual labor.

The overcoats the Polish officers wore provides another piece of evidence against the Russians. According to the Soviets, the men died in September, 1941. At that time of year, in the Smolensk area, the temperature ranges between 65 and 75 degrees. It seems unlikely that the Polish officers would have

worn winter coats in such conditions. Several American correspondents on their way back to Moscow, after examining the Katyn gravesite, asked the Soviet officers on the train why, if these men were indeed murdered in September 1941, most of them had been buried in overcoats. One American correspondent recalls, "The Soviets were stunned with that question. They did not know just exactly what to answer and it took them several days to figure out an answer."[18] Their answer was to move up the execution period from September to December, 1941.

The clothes, the state of the bodies, and the papers found with the dead men all seem to suggest that the Russians killed the Polish officers. The Russians handling of the Polish Government-in-exile's inquiries into the whereabouts of their officers provides additional damaging evidence against the Russian position.

After Germany invaded Russia, it became apparent that the former hostilities between Poland and Russia must be put aside, for the moment at least, in order to defeat the common enemy. The signing of the Polish-Soviet Treaty of July 30, 1941 and the Military Agreement of August 14, 1941 symbolized the new overt harmony in Polish-Soviet relations. Part of the agreement called for the formation of a Polish army in Russia. The Poles expected the officers from Kozielsk, Starobielsk, and Ostashkov to form the cadres of the army in formation.[19] As officers from other areas began to arrive in Buzeluk, Russia, not one officer appeared from Kozielsk, Starobielsk, and Ostashkov.

From October 1941 until the day the Germans discovered the

graves, both Ambassador Kot, Poland's envoy to Russia, and General Anders, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army in Russia, constantly raised, orally and in writing, the matter of the missing officers. The Russians told Polish officials the prisoners had been released. The Poles insisted they had not, for none had reported for duty. Stalin suggested to General Anders that the officers ran away to Manchuria. For two years the Russians failed to give the Poles credible information on where the officers were. Only after the discovery of the graves did the Russians provide detailed facts about the officers. Three days after the German announcement, Tass, the official Russian news agency, explained that the Polish officers were captured alive by the Germans during the Red Army retreat from Smolensk in the summer of 1941. Admiral William Standley, American ambassador to Russia at the time, commented that "the Poles went wild. If the Soviet government knew that they had been captured by the Germans in 1941, why had the Russians let the Poles hunt and hope for almost two years?"[20]

Based on the evidence, it seems the Polish officers were actually not alive to meet their German captors. The families of the officers felt as much when they received no more letters from the three camps after April, 1940. Three years later, the men from the Kozielsk camp were found at Katyn. During their investigation at the Katyn gravesite, the International Medical Commission found the diary of a Major Adam Solski, a prisoner from the Kozielsk camp. Major Solski wrote:

> April 8, 1940, 3:30 a.m., departure from Kozielsk station, moving west. 9:30 a.m. at Yelmia station.

April 9. In the morning some minutes before five, reveille; in the prison trucks and preparations to leave. We are to go somewhere by car, and what next?
April 9. It has been a strange day so far. Departure in prison coach in cells, terrible; taken somewhere into a wood.[21]

Despite their apparent killing of the officers, the Russians still tried to put the official blame on the Germans for the massacre. The Russian effort culminated at the Nuremburg trials. At Nuremberg, the Russians oversaw the prosecution of Nazis charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity which were committed in the eastern area of Europe. The Katyn affair thus fell under Russian jurisdiction. The charge raised by the Russians concerning Katyn read, "In September 1941, 11,000 Polish officers who were prisoners of war were killed in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk."[22] The Russians initially charged the Germans with killing only 925 Polish officers. Yet after the text listing all the charges being brought against the Nazis was given to the press, the Soviet prosecuter abruptly demanded that the passage in the indictment originally included by the Soviet Union be changed to read "11,000 Polish officers."

The German defendants could not believe the Russians were actually trying to prove Germany's supposed connection with the Katyn massacre. When the Chief Soviet Prosecuter, General R.A. Rudenko, denounced the Germans for the invasion of Poland and their policies of extermination Reich Marshal Hermann Goering simply laughed and said, "I did not think they woud be so shameless as to mention Poland."[23] Goering's sentiments stemmed from the fact that Germany and Russia had attacked Poland simultaneously as a direct result of the German-Soviet

military and political alliance in 1939. The Germans, in short, thought that Russia's behavior in Poland was no better than their own.

The Russian prosecuters, realizing their case had little substance, tried to "ram through" a verdict on the Katyn issue. The only evidence presented against the Germans was the report of the Soviet Commission. The German defense counsel requested the admission of some other materials but the Russians protested on the ground that the Soviet report was sufficient. In fact, the Soviet prosecuting staff suggested that the proceeding be shortened by not hearing witnesses at all. Instead, written affidavits would be presented in lieu of public testimony. The German counsel refused to agree and demanded that the witnesses testify. After some debate it was decided that three men would testify for the Russians and Germans. As the case proceeded the list of evidence pointing to Russian, not German, guilt continued to grow. As it did, Russian tactics became more desperate. In one instance the German counsellor offered the testimony of Captain Bohmert, a former adjutant of the German unit accused of committing the massacre. General Rudenko objected on the grounds that, "Captain Bohmert is himself a participant in the crimes of Katyn Forest...As he is an interested party, he cannot give any useful testimony."[24] Joseph Zawodny, who has written extensively on the Katyn issue, points out that "the logic of this argument is hard to follow. The witness was being disqualified because he was directly connected with the case."[25]

The final verdict, or rather the lack of one, reflected the absence of a Russian case against the Germans. As the chance for a conviction of the Germans became increasingly remote, the Russian prosecuter began to ignore the Katyn issue altogether and instead concentrated on other charges brought against the Germans. Finally, after it seemed as if the issue would receive no further attention, Dr. Hans Laternser, the counsel for the German General Staff and High Command of the German Armed Forces, asked, "May I have the question put to the prosecution, who is to be made responsible for the Katyn case?" The President of the Court, Lord Justice Geoffrey Lawrence, replied, "I do not propose to answer questions of that sort."[26] The Russians, knowing they would not get the answer they wanted, agreed with Lawrence's reply and made no effort to raise the Katyn question again. Justice Robert Jackson, America's Chief Prosecutor recalled that "Russia appears to have abandoned the charge."[27] When the final verdicts were rendered on September 30, 1946, the Katyn affair was not mentioned.

Russia's connection with Katyn held important implications for the Allies which went far beyond the immediate tragedy of the dead officers. Lord Justice Lawrence's answer to Dr. Laternser's question illustrates the American and British concern over how Katyn could affect their relations with Russia. To understand that concern we must now turn to the issue of Alliance politics when the war was being fought and the outcome of the struggle was still uncertain.

CHAPTER 2

"These people are dead"

Several factors figured in the immediate American response to the Katyn affair. Perhaps most important was the Roosevelt Administration's belief that the maintenance of the Grand Alliance between the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union was essential to the successful prosecution of the war, as well as hopes for a satisfactory world order following a victory against Germany and Japan. Varying attitudes toward the character of the Polish Government-in-exile in London also conditioned Washington's approach to the Katyn issue. There was the matter of general American public opinion to be considered, not only about America's wartime Russian ally but also about a country that millions of Polish-Americans claimed as their ancestral homeland. The fundamental point is that news of the Katyn massacre had the potential seriously to affect what the Roosevelt Administration saw as critical political and military objectives.

Four years prior to the Katyn affair, American-Soviet relations had in fact been at a low point. The Russo-Germany Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939--followed swiftly by the invasion of Poland by both Germany and Russia--caused a wave of shock among those Americans formerly sympathetic to the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Finland on November 30, 1939 made American disillusionment complete. Finland quickly became an object of sympathy, because not only had the Russians launched

an unprovoked attack on a nation with close ethnic ties to the United States, they had also invaded the only nation to maintain regular payments on its World War I debt to this country.

Relations between America and Russia became considerably more cordial after Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union on June 21, 1941. The Soviets would now be fighting the German military force ravaging Europe. To assist the Soviet cause, Roosevelt urged Congress to extend aid to Russia under the Lend-Lease program. Lend-Lease was designed to allow the President to authorize assistance to any country whose defense he deemed vital to that of the United States. Congressional hopes that continued Russian resistance might preclude an American need to fight prompted Congress to leave the President free to give Russia Lend-Lease help when he saw fit. For Roosevelt, that time came immediately after Hitler's declaration of war against America on December 11, 1941, and act which made the United States and the Soviet Union formal allies. Whatever past differences there had been, America would now cooperate with Russia to defeat Germany.

Roosevelt appraised the value of the coalition "in terms of dead Germans and smashed tanks." He also thought Russia could provide important military assistance for the American campaign against the Japanese once the allies defeated Germany. According to Roosevelt's military advisors, Russia's participation in the Asian Theatre could save untold thousands of American lives.[1]

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Military collaboration with Russia represented only one

facet of Roosevelt's overall "grand design". Cooperation with Russia would also be necessary to ensure postwar peace. Keenly aware of the realities of power, Roosevelt knew that the United States and the Soviet Union would emerge from the war as the world's two strongest nations. If they could stay together, no third power would prevail against them. If they could not, the world would be divided into two armed camps. Most Americans agreed with Roosevelt that universal cooperation after the war rested principally on Soviet-American cooperation. Without an accomodation between the two strongest victors in the war, world peace would soon collapse.[2]

Roosevelt also did not forget the importance of Poland as an ally. The Polish Army had potential value on two fronts. The Soviet Union could use Polish assistance in defending itself against Germany. In the Near East, where many Polish soldiers were stationed, the fight against the Germans also could benefit from the additional support of the Polish Army. Despite these Polish assets, however, Roosevelt would not assist the Polish Government-in-exile's plea for American help in solving several disputes existing between the Poles and Soviets.

In one instance, the Kremlin announced in January,1943, that all ethnic Poles in the Soviet Union would become Soviet citizens. These people represented the 1,500,000 Poles forcibly deported into the interior of Russia between February and June, 1941. After hearing Poland's request for American arbitration, Roosevelt told the Polish ambassador to the United States, Jan Ciechanowski, that the Soviet Union was winning battles while

the Western allies experienced difficulties in North Africa. Roosevelt explained to Ciechanowski that the United States was reluctant to take an action that might be interpreted as American meddling in Soviet domestic affairs.[3]

Washington continued to avoid becoming directly involved in Polish-Soviet affairs. Ambassador Standley cabled in March, 1943 that any American intervention would only worsen matters. When the Polish government continued to press Washington to do something to help it, Roosevelt grew testy. Sumner Welles, Roosevelt's Undersecretary of State, conveyed the President's admonition to the Polish government to "keep its shirt on". Washington, not Poland, Welles added, would be "the only judge" of what could be done to defuse Soviet-Polish tension.[4]

That tension, outside of the issue of Poles forced to accept Soviet citizenship, stemmed from the Polish-Soviet border dispute. Poland demanded that its border return to the frontier established by the Treaty of Riga. The Russians insisted upon recognition of the 1941 boundary. Drawn at the end of the Polish-Soviet war in 1921, the Treaty of Riga frontier was east of the Curzon Line frontier specified by the Paris Peace Conference at the end of the First World War. The Soviet frontier of 1941 was west of the Curzon Line and include territory incorporated by the Soviet Union following the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. Poland would lose thousands of square miles of territory under the 1941 boundary. In addition to the boundary dispute, the Poles became increasingly irritated with Soviet interference with the formation of the Polish Army in the


LATVIA
LITHUANIA
Baltic Sea
Wilno
EAST PRUSSIA
LINE OF DECEMBER 8, 1919
TREATY OF RIGA LINE
U.S.S.R.
GERMANY
Poznań
Warsaw
P O L A N D
EXTENDED AS CURZON LINE
Lwów
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
1919-1937
0 25 50 100 150
Miles

Soviet Union and in the conduct of relief activities among Poles exiled in Russia. At the same time, the Soviets accused the Poles of trying to build up a bloc of states hostile to the Soviet Union through Poland's encouragement of postwar confederations in Eastern Europe. As the diplomatic historian Lynn Etheridge Davis points out, "Suspicion and distrust ensued; charges and countercharges prevailed between these two supposedly allied government."[5]

Finally, by April, 1943, Polish-Soviet relations were at the breaking point. Reports revealed that the Soviet government was sponsoring the formation of a Union of Polish Patriots in Moscow, perhaps as an alternative Polish government to that in London. Roosevelt, privately questioning Russian intentions, approved a State Department recommendation that former United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union Joseph Davies discuss with Stalin what might be done on behalf of Polish deportees within the Soviet Union, in the interest of an improvement in Polish-Soviet relations.[6] Roosevelt nevertheless thought it best to keep America from becoming seriously involved in the dispute. Cordial American-Soviet relations were seen as essential. Poland represented an important ally and its requests appeared just, yet Roosevelt would not jeopardize American-Soviet relations to satisfy Polish appeals for help. Here lay an important factor that controlled Roosevelt's response to the Katyn affair.

For the Poles and Soviets, the discovery of the graves at Katyn meant the final step in the deterioration of relations.

The Polish request for a Red Cross inquiry infuriated the Russians. Russia interpreted the request as meaning the Poles suspected the Russians of murdering the officers. Indeed the Poles did, but they did not say so publicly. Ambassador Victor Lebiedev, Russia's ambassador to England, discussed the subject with Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the man later to become Poland's Premier. Lebiedev told Mikolajcyzk that Russia wanted the Polish Government to dismiss Poland's Chief of Staff and Minister of Information. The reconstructed Polish Government, Libiedev added, must denounce the Polish officials that had brought the Katyn incident to the attention of the International Red Cross. Mikolajczyk recalls, "I laughed at him when he presented the last demand."

Mikolajczyk did not laugh for long. On April 21, 1943, Stalin sent Roosevelt a telegram indicating that the Soviet Government had broken off relations with the Polish government in exile in light of Poland's Red Cross request and Mikolajczyk's refusal to punish those responsible. Stalin's message claimed that "the campaign of calumny against the Soviet Union, initiated by the German fascists regarding the Polish officers...was immediately taken up by the Sikorski government...". The telegram concluded:

> At a time when the peoples of the Soviet Union are shedding their blood in the bitter struggle against Hitlerite Germany and straining every effort to rout the common foe of all liberty-loving democratic countries, the government of Mr. Sikorski, pandering to Hitler's tyranny, is dealing a treacherous blow to the Soviet Union.
>
> All these circumstances force the Soviet Goverment to infer that the present government of Poland, having fallen into the path of collusion

with the Hitler government, has actually discontinued relations of alliance with the U.S.S.R. and assumed a hostile attitude toward the Soviet Union.

In view of these circumstances the Soviet Government has come to the conclusion of the necessity for breaking relations with the present Polish government."[7]

The Polish government recognized the serious repercussions of its actions and almost immediately tried to improve relations by withdrawing its request to the Red Cross. Polish officials also tried to offset the negative publicity their government had received in the American press. Most of American newspapers blamed Hitler and Goebbels for concocting the Katyn story to instigate a break in Polish-Soviet diplomatic ties. At the time, Americans thought highly of their Russian comrades who were killing German soldiers. The American press, moreover, thought the Poles' request for a Red Cross investigation seemed like a move made only to further German objectives. The Nation sympathized with Russian anger at the Poles for petitioning the Red Cross. The New York Times agreed with the Nation's analysis. The New Republic went so far as to accuse the Polish government of being "as illiberal as the Nazi's themselves." To offset the negative press, the Polish government provided information on Poland under Nazi domination to sympathetic writers who published the accounts in American periodicals.

Roosevelt promptly replied to Stalin's telegram that had informed the President of the break in Russian-Polish relations. The President explained to Stalin, "In my opinion Sikorski had in no way acted with the Hitler gang but instead he has made a mistake in taking up this particular matter with the International Red Cross". Roosevelt went on to say,"I do hope

that in this present situation you can find means to label your reaction as a suspension of conversations with the Polish Government-in-exile rather than a complete severance of diplomatic relations.[8]

Roosevelt's concern partially stemmed from the immediate effects the Katyn affair could have on American foreign policy. In the short term, the issue provided Josef Goebbels with an excellent opportunity to disrupt Allied relations. Goebbels recognized the value of Katyn when he gave instructions to his aides "to make the widest possible use of this propaganda material."[9] Goebbels aides did this through radio announcements and pamphlets spreadinng the news of the Katyn discovery and Russian guilt. The German tactics appeared successful. "Seldom since the beginning of the war," Goebbels claimed, "has any affair stirred up so much public discussion as this."[10]

Winston Churchill fully agreed with Goebbels' analysis. Like Roosevelt, Churchill wrote to Stalin urging the Russian leader to reconsider his recent severing of Russian-Polish diplomatic ties. Churchill, echoing Roosevelt, explained to Stalin that "we are determined to spare no effort to break the present Polish-Soviet deadlock and so to deprive German propaganda of the most effective weapon with which it has been presented since the outbreak of the war.

Various theories circulated between the British and American governments as to why Stalin reacted so emotionally to the Red Cross issue. The most plausible reason was the Russian

intention to use the Polish request for the Red Cross investigation as an excuse for a diplomatic break, something which Stalin desired. Yet American and British speculations were not reflected in the telegrams sent to Stalin. Instead, Roosevelt and Churchill were preoccupied with the need to achieve the immediate resumption of relations in order to maintain the unity of the Allied military effort.

Stalin's reason for breaking off relations with Poland's government-in-exile did indeed go beyond the "slap in the face" dealt Russia by the Red Cross issue. Stalin's designs for the future fate of Poland figured in his actions. Thinking of Russian security, Stalin seemed to want Poland's previously mentioned eastern territory and a friendly Polish government once the war ended. When the Soviet armies entered Poland on July 27, 1943, a Polish Committee of Liberation, composed of Poles who endorsed the Soviet demands and headed by a Communist, was set up in the city of Lublin. To this body the Soviets turned over the civil administration of Polish territories freed from the Germans. The historian Adam Ulam comments that the Russians "obviously envisaged it as the nucleus of the future government of Poland."[12] The Katyn affair, then, provided the pretext for a break in relations that Stalin wanted in order to accomplish his overall policy objectives.

After their initial messages to Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt continued to try to heal the breach between Poland and Russia. Churchill persuaded the Poles to issue a communique that shifted "the argument from the dead to the living and from the

past to the future."[13] Soon afterwards Churchill sent Stalin another note informing the Russian leader that the Polish government had dropped their request for a Red Cross investigation. Churchill also asked Stalin not to create a Communist-controlled Polish government and instead to renew relations with Poland's Prime Minister, General Sikorski. Stalin, however, would concede nothing more than the possibility of improved relations under a reconstructed Polish government.[14]

Roosevelt cabled Churchill to express his gratification that the Prime Minister did not mention the underlying territorial dispute between the Poles and the Russians in his note to Stalin. The President was pleased that Churchill's approach to Stalin was based primarily on the need to create the most favorable conditions for bringing the full military effort of the Allied nations against the common foe. Roosevelt's message symbolized his Administration's reluctance to get involved in finding a solution to the Polish-Russian dispute. According to Cordell Hull, Roosevelt left the initiative to the British, considering that "the Polish Government was located in London, that Britain had a special alliance relationship with Poland, and that Britain had been the intermediary in bringing Russia and Poland together in 1941."[15]

Churchill would have nothing to do with Roosevelt's reasoning. The British felt that any approach to Stalin should represent both London and Washington. Roosevelt conceded the point and in August the American and British Ambassadors to the

Soviet Union presented to Stalin their governments' proposals for the solution of the Polish-Soviet dispute. The British agreed to control publication of anti-Soviet newspapers in Britain and presented proposals for the evacuation of certain categories of Poles from the Soviet Union. The Roosevelt administration outlined the broader considerations - citizenship problems of Poles living in the Soviet Union, relief and welfare activities of Polish organizations in Russia, and evacuation of families of Polish soldiers - which required a solution before a just and lasting resumption of relations could be achieved.

After a month's delay, Stalin rejected the British and American proposals. The Soviet leader contended that the governments had failed to address the fundamental issue which led to the break in relations: the hostile actions by the London government against the Soviet Union culminating in the Polish charges of Soviet responsibility for the Katyn massacre. Stalin concluded that the Allied proposals were identical to the Polish demands and therefore unacceptable.[16]

When Stalin rejected Churchill's and Roosevelt's plea for a resumption of diplomatic relations with the London Poles, the Roosevelt Administration displayed no sense of urgency over the Polish-Soviet crisis and held to the hope that the whole affair could be resolved without American involvement. American inaction, according to Herbert Feis, stemmed from the Roosevelt Administration's realization that the United States "while longing to foster a reconciliation" had had no "effective chance for bringing this about."[17] By the end of August, 1943, other

issues, particularly military planning for a second front in Europe, had further distracted Roosevelt from the issue.

Roosevelt's display of indifference did not mean the future of Poland meant little to the President. On the contrary, Roosevelt hoped to insure that after the war Poland would again become a free, self-governing nation. Yet the chief and overriding objective at the time was the war effort. Thus any friction that developed between the Soviet Union and Poland which hurt the war effort, such as the Katyn issue, should be avoided as far as possible. Even if Roosevelt decided to press the Katyn issue, the result might be disastrous. No one could exclude the possiblity that Stalin, if pressed too hard, might make a separate peace with Hitler. Furthermore, even if Stalin agreed to comply with British and American requests concerning Poland, there existed no guarantee that he would keep his word.

Roosevelt's views on the issue were reflected in the Allied conferences held throughout 1943. When Churchill and Roosevelt met at the Washington Conference in May 1943, the issue of Katyn received no attention. Three months later, when Churchill and Roosevelt met again at the Quebec Conference, the Katyn issue continued to be ignored. During the Teheran conference in November and December, 1943, Roosevelt's objectives became clear to his allies. Reflecting on the discussions on Poland that occurred during the conference, Anthony Eden, England's Foreign Minister, recalled that "the President did not want to get involved in a discussion on Poland, and this, therefore, was entirely an Anglo-Russian affair."[18]

Polish officials who tried to push the issue with Roosevelt came away with little doubt as to Roosevelt's views. Stanislaw Mikolajczyk tried to discuss the Katyn issue with Roosevelt's Administration for several months. Initially he did not even receive the opportunity to speak directly with Roosevelt. Instead, as Mikolajczyk explains, the Roosevelt Administration came across as telling the Polish government, "You have to settle the problems of the Polish-Soviet relations. These people are dead. You will not help them, but you will spoil the collaboration of the Allies. Therefore, keep silent."[19]

When Mikolajczyk finally received an opportunity to meet with Roosevelt, their discussion provided insight into another factor limiting Roosevelt's action in the Katyn affair. Discussing the Polish-Soviet crisis Roosevelt told Mikolajczyk that he would eventually "act as a moderator in this problem and affect a settlement." Then explaining why he did not initiate a compromise immediately, Roosevelt told Mikolajczyk that "I haven't acted on the Polish question because this is an election year."[20] 1944 was indeed a Presidential election year. Domestically, the most important ethnic group in America with respect to attitudes toward Russia were the Polish-Americans, six to eight million strong, who could swing elections in the large industrialized states of the Northeast and Midwest. Roosevelt feared that millions of Polish-Americans might vote against him in the 1944 election if a controversy over Poland erupted and he was forced to support the Russian position in public.[21] Yet if the issue were pressed Roosevelt would feel

obliged to express his support to insure Soviet-American relations remained cordial while the war proceeded.

Roosevelt thus did what he could to silence discussion on the Katyn affair among the Allied leaders by ignoring the issue at conferences and by sending no more telegrams to Stalin on the subject. The President knew, as early as June, 1942, that the Polish officers had been in Russian prison camps.[22] He opted, at the time, not to force the issue with Stalin. Roosevelt made the same decision after the discovery of the graves. As Cordell Hull, Roosevelt's Secretary of State, explains, "Russia, Britain, and the United States were in the same boat, which would float or sink depending on their abilities in jointly fighting the common enemy."[23] Roosevelt had no intention of "rocking the boat." That meant defusing the issue not only among the allies but also among those in America who believed that Russia had committed the atrocity at Katyn. Whether these people expressed their opinions publicly or in private governmental circles, they soon found out that the Roosevelt Administration did not approve of their viewpoint.

CHAPTER 3

"I specifically forbid you to publish any information"

President Roosevelt's concern about the effect the Katyn affair could have on his overall wartime policies led him to adopt a strategy designed to eliminate Katyn's a topic of discussion. After the first week following the discovery of the mass graves the President simply ignored the issue in his communications with other Allied leaders. American diplomatic personnel were specifically restrained from raising the Katyn issue in the course of their activities in various foreign capitals. Within the United States itself, the Administration undertook an aggressive campaign to contain the public debate over Katyn, an effort which had an impact not only on Congressmen but even on commentators for the numerous foreign language radio stations in this country.

Roosevelt's beliefs about who killed the officers remain difficult to ascertain. Working with the Roosevelt Administration in April, 1943 was Dr. Ernst Hanfstaengl, Hitler's former foreign press chief. Hanfstaengl fled from Germany in 1938, fearing an attempt on his life. During the war Hanfstaengl constantly kept tuned to Berlin radio. He submitted oral and written reports to an informal intelligence unit set up by Roosevelt to act on assignment from the White House. When the news came out about the discovery at Katyn, Hanfstaengl concluded that, knowing Goebbels quite well, the Propaganda Minister was telling the truth this time. Hanfstaengl's report

went to Roosevelt immediately. Sumner Welles, Roosevelt's Undersecretary of State, reported back to John Carter, director of the intelligence unit, that the President agreed with Hanfstaengl's analysis. Shortly after the discovery of the graves became known, Roosevelt thus appeared to think the Russians killed the officers.

One year later the President's opinion seemed altogether different. George Earle, one of the President's aides, came to Roosevelt with evidence suggesting Russian guilt. Roosevelt looked at the evidence and said, according to Earle,"this is entirely German propaganda and a German plot. I am absolutely convinced the Russians did not do this."[1] When Earle pointed out the German invitation to the Red Cross, the President replied, "The Germans could have rigged things up. Those Nazis very smart, and they could rig it up for the Red Cross."[2]

Roosevelt's conclusion ran contrary to the beliefs of aides and allies. Owen O'Malley, working in England's Foreign Office, was convinced that "a large number of officers were indeed murdered by the Russian authorities."[3] The Office of Strategic Service (O.S.S.), the official American intelligence service during the war, sent a report to Roosevelt on Polish sentiment about who killed the men. "Peasant and labor groups", the O.S.S. report concluded, "are convinced that the missing Polish officers had been executed by the Russians long before the discovery at Katyn."[4]

Since Roosevelt knew that a number of people were highly suspicious about Russian duplicity in the Katyn affair, it would

be necessary to limit discussion of Katyn as much as possible. Over the next two years the War Department, the State Department, and the Office of War Information, would all comply with Roosevelt's policy. One specific case involved government reaction to the findings of Lieutenant Colonel John Van Vliet of the United States Army.

In May, 1945, Colonel Van Vliet reported to General Clayton Bisell, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2 (Intelligence) War Department, concerning the Katyn massacre. Colonel Van Vliet and another American had been captured by the Germans. While under German captivity Van Vliet was forced to go to the Katyn gravesite. The Germans felt the if an American military officer witnessed the exhuming of the bodies then the German story would have further credibility. Once at Katyn, Colonel Van Vliet talked to the International Medical Commission, observed the exhumation of the bodies, and finally reached a conclusion as to who killed the Polish officers.

The Russians, Van Vliet felt, had murdered the Poles. After leaving the German prison camp Van Vliet went to General Bissel in Washington, D.C. and to reported on what he had viewed at Katyn. The finished report, Bissel felt, contained highly sensitive information, so much that Bissel instructed Van Vliet, "Due to the nature of your report and the possible political implications, it is directed that you neither mention or discuss the matter with anyone in or out of the service without specific approval in writing from the War Department."[5] Bissel then placed a "Top Secret" classification on the Van Vliet report.

The report was so secret, in fact, that once in General Bissel's safe it was never found. Three months after receiving it, according to his testimony before a Congressional Committee, General Bissel apparantly sent a copy over to the State Department. Yet the State Department had no record of having viewed the Van Vliet report, and the Department of Army could not find either a receipt for the actual transmittal or a covering letter. In fact, an Inspector General's report concluded that "there is no proof that this document even left the office wherein it originated."[6] The Van Vliet report, to date, remains missing.

No proof exists that General Bissel actually destroyed the Van Vliet report. Events surrounding the report's disappearance nevertheless remain uncertain. How could a top official in the War Department's Intelligence Unit lose a document marked "Top Secret" that he personally placed in his safe? Van Vliet stated in his report that the Russians killed the Polish officers. There were many at the time who would not have objected if such a "politically sensitive" report had indeed been destroyed.

The Army also disapproved of Colonel Henry Syzmanski's dealings with the Katyn affair. General George C. Marshall, Chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff, instructed Szymanski, an expert in Eastern European affairs, to compile a report on the facts surrounding Katyn. Colonel Szymanski proceeded to assemble a mass of information, much of it provided by General Wladyslaw Anders, the leader of the Polish Army. In May , 1943, Szymanski handed in his report to the military

Intelligence Sevice of the War Department. Included was an analysis of Polish prisoners of war in Russia, a report on prison camps in Russia, and a summary of the facts concerning the graves themselves.

Colonel Szyamanski felt he had not expresssed any personal conclusions when he handed in his report. Major General Strong, an Assistant Chief of Staff who received Szymanski's report, disagreed. Based on the information enclosed in the report, General Strong felt Szymanski expressed a favorable bias towards the Polish viewpoint. In December, 1943, General Strong wrote to Colonel Szymanski's immediate superiors, instructing them to have the Colonel "avoid political involvement and recommend you require him to concentrate on liaision with Poles."[7] Colonel Szymanski's expertise, in short, was no longer needed, due to his supposed opinions which did not reflect overall American policy. Thereafter the Department of the Army, the State Department and the International Military Tribunal never consulted Szymanski about his findings on the Katyn affair.[8]

The Roosevelt Administration clampdown on Szymanski's reports extended to those wanting to see the reports. At the time, nine members of Congress were Americans of Polish descent. In 1944 they discovered the existence of Szymanski's analysis and tried to get the War Department to give them a copy. The War Department denied the Congressmen's request on grounds of secrecy. The Congressmen, in July, 1944, tried to see Roosevelt to discuss the report and the Katyn affair in general. Unable to get an appointment, they saw Secretary of

State Cordell Hull instead.

Anxious to see a change in the American stance on the Katyn issue, the Congressmen told Hull about the existence of the Szymanski report which indicated that the issue should receive further attention. Hull told the Congressmen he would convey their message to the President. American policy did not undergo any changes. "Our personal intervention", Congressmen Alvin O'Konski conceeded , "did not get anywhere at that time."[9]

American personnel abroad also received little, if any, guidance on the matter of the Polish officers. Admiral William Standley became America's Ambassador to Russia in April, 1942. At the time the State Department had on file a report concerning Polish prisoners of war in the Soviet Union which dealt with the 10,000 missing officers. Before leaving for Moscow Admiral Standley never received a briefing on the situation by the State Department. Admiral Standley thus knew nothing about the missing officers despite the availability of information pertaining to the subject.

Even though the United States realized there were missing officers before Admiral Standley's departure, the graves at Katyn had not yet been discovered. But the existence of the graves was known when Arthur Bliss Lane, America's Ambassador to the Polish government, officially began his diplomatic duties in July, 1945. Consequently, Lane sought out American documents pertaining to the subject. He was permitted to look at one report filed by Averell Harriman's daughter, who had seen the graves. She had concluded the Germans killed the Poles. All

other documents in both the State Department and the War Department were not released to Lane.[10]

Members of the media who discussed the Katyn affair in an anti-Russian tone soon received a note from any of several federal authorities. During the war there were three organizations responsible for listening to news about the war coming from foreign language radio stations in America. Besides the Federal Communications Commission and the Foreign Language Wartime Control Committee, there was the Office of War Information (OWI). The OWI, responsible for the dispensing and censoring of war news, took the direct lead in dealing with radio commentators expressing anti-Soviet views on the Katyn issue. These stations, upon voicing their views about the Katyn affair, soon found out the foreign-language wartime control agencies disapproved of what the stations' commentators had to say.

In one case, a commentator for the Polish radio station WJBK in Detroit made several remarks indicating Russian guilt for the massacre. The OWI reacted quickly to the commentator's public airing of his views. Alan Cranston, working for the OWI, spoke to the Chairman of the foreign language committee of the National Association of Broadcasters. Cranston urged the chairman to convince station WJBK to stop making comments which would indicate Russian guilt.[11] The station ceased to make anti-Russian comments. Another station, WBNY in Buffalo, expressed opinions similar to those at WJBK which were also not appreciated by the Federal Government. Soon after his initial

broadcast suggesting the Russians had something to hide, the commentator received a letter from Washington explaining he must stop talking against America's allies, or lose his job.[12] WBNY, like WJBK, stopped expressing its views on the Katyn affair.

In fact those who censored the information put out on the public airwaves believed that all foreign language stations should avoid expressing any anti-Soviet opinions over the air. The Federal Communications Act strictly forbade this form of censorship. Nevertheless, those responsible for the foreign language radio wartime control "urgently recommended that news and war commentators be requested to cease, immediately, the broadcasting of editorial or personal opinion."[13]

Between the breaking of the Katyn story and the end of May, 1944, Roosevelt had not personally involved himself in trying to curb the release of information to the public. The Van Vliet report, the Szymanski report, the withholding of information from Admiral Standley and Arthur Lane, and the clampdown on the radio station had all occurred under the jurisdiction of the War Department, the State Department, and the foreign language radio wartime control agencies. In the case of George Earle, the President acted directly.

A long-time government servant, Earle formerly served as Minister to Austria and Minister to Bulgaria. In 1943 he was Special Emissary of President Roosevelt for Balkan affairs, assigned to Turkey. Earle traveled through the Balkans gathering intelligence, and through his contacts in Bulgaria and

Romania he received data about the Katyn affair. Knowing that Katyn was the official reason for the break in Soviet-Polish relations, Earle collected his materials and submitted them to Roosevelt personally in May, 1944.[14]

Earle's report, like Szymanski's and Van Vliet's, pointed to Russian guilt. In a personal conversation with Roosevelt, Earle suggested that perhaps a neutral Red Cross Investigation might indeed be advisable. The President disagreed. In fact, despite Earle's months of accumulating information on Katyn, Roosevelt spent the rest of the conversation explaining to Earle that he wanted him to "find out something about the veterans of this war, whether they should have a new organization."[15] Roosevelt ended the conversation by also asking Earle to "go out over the country and spend three weeks finding our whether I can be re-elected or not."[16]

After completing his tasks in America, Earle went back to Turkey. Over the next year Earle continued to gather information about Katyn from his contacts in Eastern Europe. Finally in March 1945, Earle wrote to Roosevelt explaining his intention to write a book on Katyn. Replying promptly, Roosevelt told Earle:

> I specifically forbid you to publish any information or opinion about an ally that you may have acquired while in office or in the service of the United States Navy.
> In view of your wish for continued active service, I shall withdraw any previous understanding that you are serving as an emissary of mine and I shall direct the Navy Department to continue your employment wherever they can make use of your services.[17]

The Navy decided the best place for an expert in Eastern

European affairs would be Samoa. In hopes of having his orders changed, Earle tried to explain to Roosevelt the pointlessness of sending someone in his field to Samoa. "I think you had better go", Roosevelt replied, "and see what you think of the Pacific War as one of our problems."[18] Upon Earle's return from Samoa the Chief of Personnel of the Navy and Commodore Vardaman, Rooosevelt's Navy aide, both apologized to Earle, saying that the Navy Department had nothing to do with his being assigned to the South Pacific.[19] Roosevelt, it appears, personally made sure Earle received orders to a place securely distant from any contact with Eastern European affairs.

At the time President Roosevelt sent Earle to Samoa there was at least one factor that had previously conditioned the President's attitude toward Katyn that had now been eliminated: Roosevelt had successfully won re-election. From this narrow perspective, then, his treatment of Earle might appear unusually harsh. Nevertheless the United States was still engaged in a bitter struggle with the Germans and Japanese, and there was increasing attention being devoted to the question of how to achieve a lasting postwar peace. For both these reasons, Roosevelt still wanted, even after his re-election, to discourage the introduction of any information pertaining to Katyn that might imply Soviet guilt, and thus threaten the Grand Alliance. It was evident by November, 1944, however, that the war would probably be won within the foreseeable future, and under these circumstances it seemed appropriate for Roosevelt finally to negotiate the "compromise" over the future of Poland

that he had promised to Mikolajczyk. The agreement which would be reached among the Allied leaders would later provoke intense controversy. Over all the negotiations hung the memory, and perhaps the significance, of the Katyn massacre in terms of what it said about Soviet willingness to accept a genuine "compromise" on Poland's fate.

CHAPTER IV

"The Russians are planning world conquest"

In a fashionable resort by the Crimean Sea, the Big Three - Stalin, Churchilll, and Roosevelt - met in February, 1945 to discuss Poland and other postwar issues. Their meeting, known as the Yalta Conference, resulted in an agreement on Poland's political structure. Over the next two years, the allied leaders sharply disagreed over the meaning of the Yalta agreement. The tensions between the allies which came from the dispute over Yalta contributed significantly to the Cold War. As the Cold War grew in intensity the American public also became increasingly vocal in its demands to know the true facts behind the Katyn massacre. Labor groups, Polish-Americans and former government officials all urged the President to conduct an investigation into the facts surrounding the killing of the Polish officers. Truman thus faced considerable political pressure to act. Moreover, Truman no longer faced the political obstacles that had limited Roosevelt's course of action. The combination of constituency demands and the changed political situation led Truman to undertake a fundamental departure from Roosevelt's handling of the Katyn issue.

The question of Poland symbolized the differences separating the allies. For Russia, having former Polish territory east of the 1941 border and a friendly government meant security. Thus Russians, after recapturing Warsaw from the Germans, had put into power the Lublin committee as the official voice of the

Polish people. For England and America, Poland represented a more emotional issue. The war started because of Hitler's invasion of Poland. The Atlantic Charter, an Allied declaration about securing freedom and democracy for nations under Hitler's tyrannical rule, especially applied to Poland, a ravaged victim of Nazi brutality. By establishing the Lublin committee, however, the Russians had given notice that they would demand a pro-Soviet government in Poland.

In light of Stalin's determination to control Poland's political future, Roosevelt realized his ability to help the Poles would remain limited. "He had little expectation of winning genuine independence for the Poles,", Robert Dallek explains, "but he hoped that Stalin would at least create the impression and make Poland less of an issue at home and abroad."[1] Roosevelt hoped the impression of Polish self-determination would satisfy the American public, and more specifically the six to seven million Polish-American in the United States. American public opinion, however, opposed recognition of the Lublin government as unrepresentative of the majority of Poles. Americans wanted a government of national unity representing all the political factions within Poland to govern the country.[2]

The Yalta agreement appeared to give Roosevelt and the American public everything they wanted. "Free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot" would make Poland's future government seem democratic and chosen by the people for the people. Concerning

Polish boundaries, the Allied leaders decided these would be fixed at the upcoming peace conference. The British and Americans left Yalta with the belief that the difficult Polish problem, "had reached an honorable and equitable solution."[3]

By March, however, Roosevelt had grown anxious about Stalin's intentions to follow through on the Yalta agreements. The Russians were preparing the way for a totalitarian regime in Poland with liquidations and deportations and an interpretation of the Yalta agreement which prohibited basically all anti-Lublin Poles from participating in the construction of a new government. Reluctant to force a showdown with Stalin, Roosevelt nevertheless believed it essential to "stand firm in the right interpretation of the Crimean decision." Roosevelt wrote to Churchill that "neither the Government nor the people of this country will support participation in a fraud or a mere whitewash of the Lublin government, and the solution must be as envisaged at Yalta."[4]

Roosevelt's successor, President Harry S. Truman, attempted during his first few weeks to follow the basic policies which Roosevelt had established. Truman lacked both the desire and the information to strike out in new directions, and he was surrounded by Roosevelt's closest advisors, which made changes difficult. Thus the chief concern of Truman about the Polish question, as with Roosevelt, was to see that the Poles got a democratic government representing a majority of the people.

Even as Truman adhered to the policies of Roosevelt, however, the American public's goodwill toward Russia had begun

to decline sharply since March, 1945. The change in sentiment occurred basically because Americans were unprepared for the realities of the rapidly approaching postwar world, i.e., the Soviet's dominant role in Eastern European affairs. "The decline in goodwill after March, 1945", according to the historian Ralph Levering, "occurred specifically because Americans decided that Russia was not living up to the Yalta accords."[5]

Truman soon began to share the public's changing sentiments. An important moment came at a meeting of the Allied leaders held at Potsdam, Germany, in July, 1945. James Byrnes, Truman's Secretary of State who accompanied the President to Potsdam, felt the fundamental difficulty was "the determination of the Soviets to maintain in power the Lublin government...". Under pressure from Truman and Churchill, the Soviets did agree to representatives from the Polish National government in London being added to the Lublin regime. Yet, as Byrnes noted, the Russians strongly implied that "any such representation would be a mere addition to the Lublin government and in effect superflous."[6] Truman, as a result, became altogether disillusioned "to find that the Russians were not earnest about peace." Truman's conclusion was followed by an even more ominous one: "Force is the only thing the Russians understand. The Russians are planning world conquest."[7] As noted, American opinion supported Truman's attitude toward Soviet policy. By the second half of 1946, opinion polls showed that almost two-thirds of the American

people saw the Soviet Union as wanting to dominate as much of the world as possible.[8]

The election in Poland called for under the Yalta agreement was finally held on January 5, 1947. Rigged by the Lublin Poles, the election gave the Russian-backed Lublin government a decisive victory. Molotov had promised Roosevelt the election would take place within a month of the signing of the Yalta agreement. The election actually occurred twenty-three months later. Once concluded, it gave the Lublin government what is considered to be legitimate stamp of approval to stay in power. America could do little or nothing for Poland at this stage. Russia's domination of Poland seemed complete.

To summarize: "President Roosevelt's assumptions about the possibilites of happy cooperation with Russia in the establishment of a peaceful and democratic world", according to Gaddis Smith, "were subjected to greater strain by Soviet policy toward Poland than by any wartime issue."[9] Despite the Yalta agreement, Roosevelt could not get Stalin to install a democratic government in Poland. Truman also failed during the initial months of his Presidency when he took a relatively accomodating stance towards Russian actions. Thereafter he decided Russia could no longer be treated as a trustworthy friend. Consequently, as Ralph Levering argues, "the American bitterness and disillusionment in the wake of Yalta - a bitterness reciprocated by Kremlin leaders - stimulated the tangible beginnings of the Cold War."[10]

The general deterioration in Soviet-American relations, of

course, had a number of profound consequences for the general structure of international politics. That deterioration also had important consequences for the American approach to the Katyn massacre controversy. The Truman Administration abandoned the policy of its predecessor in discouraging any analysis of who was responsible for Katyn. In fact, Katyn came to the forefront as a symbol of all that was now seen as deplorable in Soviet behavior.

Before Truman became finally convinced that Russia presented a menace to world peace, however, his Administration had tried to quiet discussion about the Katyn affair. The Truman Administration's initial approach towards the Katyn issue was illustrated at the Nuremburg trial. Once the trial began, Justice Robert Jackson tried to convince the Soviets to keep the Katyn affair out of the Indictment. The less talked about Katyn the better, thought Jackson. Sir Harteley Shawcross, the British Chief Prosecuter, recalls that the Americans and British "raised violent objection to the inclusion of the Katyn massacre in the Indictment."

Despite these objections the Russians went ahead and included Katyn in the Indictment. The American delegation kept a keen eye on how the Russian case proceeded. In January, 1946, United States General Lucius D. Clay, soon to be Commander-in-Chief of the American zone in Germany, transmitted to Jackson "strictly confidential information from the Embassy at Warsaw."[11] In the opinion of Polish circles, Clay explained, the Germans were not responsible for the Katyn

deaths.[12] Jackson kept Clay's intelligence report to himself. In fact, Jackson told the Soviet delegation that he "would keep hands off and leave the entire contest to the Soviet and German lawyers."[13]

To make sure the American approach to the Katyn affair remained neutral, the Truman Administration did not send Jackson all of the reports America had concerning the issue. Military intelligence, in February, 1946, did deliver to a member of Jackson's staff several documents classified "Secret". The sensitive data included the German report accusing the Soviets, Soviet documents accusing the Nazi's and a paper labeled, "Excerpts of conversation between Sikorski, Anders, Stalin, and Molotov." Yet as Jackson recalled after the trial, he knew nothing "at any time during the trial of Colonel Van Vliet or Colonel Szymanski."[14] Moreover, neither the State Department or G-2, the Army intelligence unit, attempted to send Jackson voluminous amounts of data, besides the Van Vliet and Szymanski reports, which dealt directly with the Katyn affair.

Truman's approach to the Katyn issue at the Nuremberg trials might seem paradoxical if we recall how he generally felt about the Russians by this time. The best explanation for the President's conduct seems to be that even as he was becoming increasingly pessimistic about Soviet intentions, he still clung to a thin hope that perhaps a reasonable relationship between Moscow and the West could yet be established. It was this "grasping at straws" that presumably accounted for the President's willingness to downplay the Katyn issue at the time

of Nuremberg. It is of interest that Truman's diplomatic advisers seemed also not to have totally surrendered to pessimism. Diplomatic historian Hugh De Santis explains that while American diplomats felt a "mounting apprehension that Moscow had opted for a policy of unilateralism", there still remained a "lingering hope of postwar cooperation in accord with American ideals."

In contrast with their attitude towards the Katyn massacre, the British and Americans at Nuremberg had no reservations about seeking out those who had committed war crimes against soldiers from their own nations. For several years after the war, the Allies searched throughout Germany for the murderers of fifty allied soldier who were at the Sagan camp. More than 200,000 people altogether were questioned before the search finally ended and thirteen of the guilty were hung in 1948.[15] In another instance, a similar manhunt took place for the men who, with two machine guns, annihilated company "A", 2nd Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment in May, 1940, at Paradis in northern France. After surrendering and stacking their weapons, the men of the company, ninety in all, were summarily shot by their German captors. The British and Americans searched for the man responsible for the massacre, and eventually found him. He was tried and hung in October, 1948.[16]

Nuremberg represented Truman's last direct dealing with the Katyn issue for the next three years. During that time American-Soviet relations, as noted earlier, began to decline quickly. The American public also became increasingly

suspicious of Soviet intentions around the world. Compounding the public's anti-Soviet sentiments was the continuing remembrance by many of the mystery surrounding the Katyn massacre, i.e., who actually killed the officers.

The American public, in fact, encouraged a deeper probing in to the Katyn issue. In November, 1949, Ambassador Lane and his colleague Mr. Julius Epstein both held a press conference to announce their formation of the American Committee for the Investigation of the Katyn Massacre, Inc. Lane explained at the press conference that the massacre never had been properly investigated and that it was the Committee's intention to accumulate as much information as possible. To help their cause, Lane and Epstein recruited men such as General William Donovan, wartime chief of the O.S.S., and Allen Dulles, former European director of the O.S.S.[17] During the investigation Lane made numerous public speeches and wrote several articles in order to publicize the questions surrounding the Katyn massacre. Lane and his colleagues concluded, not surprisingly, that Russia should accept the blame for the death of the Polish officers.

Another instance where the Katyn affair received public attention was the Polish-American Congress's organization in February, 1950 of a memorial service for the Polish officers. Colonel Jospeh Czapski, a former Polish Army officer and one of the few survivors from the Kozielsk camp, spoke of his experiences under Russian captivity. Over a thousand people listened to Colonel Czapski's speech. Other guest speakers

included judges, mayors, and former American military personnel. Ironically, the New York Times story covering the memorial began, "The tenth anniversary of the massacre of Katyn Forest was commemorated yesterday..."[18] By calling the memorial, "the tenth anniversary", the New York Times implicitly accepted the argument that the massacre took place in February, 1940 and thus under Russian supervision. Newspaper coverage of the massacre, then, was undergoing an evolution of opinion as well.

Others took more direct action by writing to the President. Francis Wazeter, Chief of the New York Division of the Polish-American Congress, urged Truman to investigate "the massacre of Polish servicemen perpetrated at Katyn."[19] Ralph Tillotson, as official in the labor group known as the Congress of Industrial Organizations, also requested that Truman probe the facts surrounding Katyn. Talking of the Pennsylvania town he lived in, Tillotson concluded his letter by explaining that "almost half the residents of Erie are either Polish or of Polish descent and the question of Katyn is often under discussion."[20]

The Truman Administration, unlike the Roosevelt Administration, made no effort to suppress the increasing discussion of the issue, even if it was conducted in an anti-Soviet tone. Summing up the overall change in the political climate surrounding the Katyn affair was a letter Truman received from Mr. Wiancek, a Polish-American living in Hartford, Connecticut. Recalling the former cover-up on Katyn,

Mr. Wiancek, explained to Truman, "If you and your co-officials are not communist sympathizers you'd do well to remove that doubt by seeing to it that news on the Katyn massacre be released." Switching over to a discussion of the significance an investigation would have on American global political strategy, Mr. Wiancek concluded that "it seems to me to be a good cold-war tactic in discouraging communists an would-be communists."21

The swelling public demand for Truman to act received a significant boost from an editorial written by Julius Epstein which appeared in the New York Times. "It is not only the American community of Polish origin which is tremendously interested in such an investigation," wrote Epstein, "every American citizen has an interest in it." Wide public support existed, according to Epstein, to honor President Roosevelt's pledge issued on the close of the Moscow Conference in October, 1943:

> Let those who have hitherto not imbued their hands with innocent blood beware lest they join the ranks of the guilty for most assuredly the three Allied Powers will pursue them to the outermost ends of the earth and will deliver them to their accusers in order that justice may be done. (22)

Whether the public demand for an investigation was specifically influenced by Roosevelt's statement is debatable. A number of Congressmen, however, were not concerned with intellectual technicalities. The large public outcry, supported by Epstein's widely read editorial, led the 82nd Congress on September 18, 1951 to pass House Resolution 390 which allowed for the formation of a committee authorized and directed "to

conduct a full and complete investigation and study before and after the massacre of thousands of Polish officers buried in a mass grave in the Katyn Forest..."[23] The words "before" and "after" were important. They meant the committee would investigate the facts surrounding the massacre and the American reaction to the Katyn affair.

To insure the committee compiled all the data available the House resolution was made to read that all those participating in the investigation be allowed:

> to hold hearings, and to require, by subpoena or otherwise, the attendance and testimony of such witnesses and the production of such books, records, correspondance, memoranda, papers, and documents as it deems necessary. (24)

Congressman Ray J. Madden, Chairman of the Select Committee to Investigate the Katyn Forest Massacre, sent to Truman a letter requesting the President to direct the various government agencies to release "all information, records and data in their files" pertaining to the issue. Truman assured Madden he would tell his Administration to give the Committee any information it needed.[25]

Madden also sent a letter to A.Y. Vishinsky, the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, notifying him of the Congressional investigation and asking whether the Russians desired to present any evidence. Vishinsky told Madden, not surprisingly, that the Congressman's letter was a violation of "generally accepted rules of international relation and an insult to the Soviet Union."[26] After the Russians refused to appear, the Committee went ahead on its own in assembling the evidence.

The Committee's investigation did indeed accumulate an

impressive amount of information. Truman made sure his Administration complied with all committee requests, especially after Arthur Lane went on the Republican payroll and began charging that the Executive Branch was withholding information with respect to Katyn.[27] Documents from the former Polish Government-in-exile, the International Medical Commission, the Soviet Commission, the State Department, and the War Department, were all compiled. Prominent witnesses such as Averell Harriman, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, Sumner Welles, Admiral Standley, Colonel Van Vliet, Colonel Szymanski, and George Earle gave testimony. Hearings were held in Washington D.C., Chicago, London, Frankfurt, Berlin, and Naples. From inception to conclusion, the Committee's work lasted a little over nine months.

Partisan politics appeared throughout the investigation. In a verbal exchange with Admiral Standley, Congressman Timothy Sheehan let it be known that he and fellow Republicans had, "been screaming for the last twenty years about Government by crony." Sheehan also thought America had suffered during the same time period from an "international diplomacy by crony, from the look of things, where individuals worked for the President..."[28] Alvin O'Konski, another Republican, also let another Roosevelt aide, Averell Harriman, know exactly what he thought of Roosevelt's foreign policy:

> As I view the whole set up, Ambassador, there is no question in my mind that you boys were ready to give Stalin anything he asked for. The thing that I am most glad about is that Stalin did not know that. If he had known how ready you boys were to give up and give in he could have forced us to sign an agreement that they would have free elections in the

United States of America the way he wanted it. That is how anxious we were to go along with him. (29)

The denunciatory remarks against the Roosevelt administration also found their way into the Committee's concluding statement. Before 1942, according to the Committee, the Kremlin rulers gave much evidence of the menace of Soviet imperialism. The Roosevelt Administration by failing "to recognize the danger signs which then existed and following a policy of satisfying the Kremlin leaders", unwittingly strenghthened the Russian position and "contributed to a situation which has grown to be a menace to the United States and the entire free world."30

The Katyn Committee also concluded that the Russians beyond a doubt were guilty of killing the Polish officers. "The evidence, testimony, records and exhibits recorded by this committee through its investigation and hearings during the last nine months", the Congressmen stated, "overwhelmingly will show the people of the world that Russia is directly responsible for the Katyn massacre." In fact, the committee found not a "scintilla of proof or even any remote circumstantial evidence presented that could indict any other nation in this international crime."31

The Russians and the Polish government were quick to denounce the Committee's findings. The Polish Embassy in Washington D.C. issued an acidly critical press release. Witnesses were brought before Polish and Russian radio stations to declare that the whole story was a "Wall Street lie". The Russians also retaliated by charging the United States with

dropping germ-infected pork in an effort to murder the people of Manchuria.[32]

Five representatives from the House as well as Julius Epstein felt that America's involvement with the Katyn affair should go beyond simply accusing the Russians of murdering the polish officers. These men urged Truman to take steps towards bringing the Soviet Union to trial before the International Court of Justice at the Hague for the massacre. In addition, the Congressmen and Epstein requested the President to ask the United Nations to establish an international commission "to investigate other mass murders and crimes against humanity."[33] In Epstein's words, "Such presentation would certainly serve as a tremendously powerful psychological weapon in our cold war with the Soviet Union."[34]

Truman, however, was not willing to take action on the recommended proposals or any other which would carry the issue any further. At the request of the State Department, the House Foreign Affairs Committee thus decided to shelve a resolution asking the United Nations to start action "against the Soviet Union for the 1941 mass murders in the Katyn Forest." The State Department's views were given to the Foreign Affairs Committee in a letter from Thurston B. Morton, Assistant Secretary of State. Morton said that "no useful purpose would be served by further action by the Congress on this subject."[35]

Domestically, however, the Truman Administration still faced the danger of having the Katyn story distorted by its political enemies. With an upcoming Presidential election, Republicans

were trying to win the Polish-American vote by implicating the Administration in responsibility for the cover-up of the Katyn massacre. Speaking over a Polish-American radio program in Massachusetts, Arthur Lane climaxed a discussion of the Katyn affair by declaring: "No wonder that President Truman has publicly stated that our foreign policy should not by brought into the coming Presidential election."[36]

Despite such comments, Truman thought he had satisfied the public demand for knowledge in the Katyn affair when he approved the releasing of all government materials relating to the issue. Moreover, Truman felt the United States could do little else with the issue on the international scene. Whether brought before the Hague or the United Nations, the Katyn story would surely become overshadowed by the inevitable exchange of Cold War rhetoric by both the United States and Russia. While obviously not stating so publicly, Truman's decision also appeared to be influenced by Lane's accusations. Truman was fully aware not only of his Administration's handling of the Katyn affair at Nuremberg but of Roosevelt's approach to the issue as well. If the Katyn issue were brought before the U.N. or the Hague, the Russians would most likely make it clear to the world that America's leaders had previously treated the Katyn issue in a cold, realpolitik manner. Truman and the Democratic party did not need such publicity during an election year.

Ambassador Vishinsky wrote in a letter to Congressman Madden:

For eight years the Government of the United States

> of America did not raise any objection to such conclusion of the commission (Russian) until very recently. In view of this, the Embassy considers it necessary to state that raising of the question of the Katyn crime eight years after the decision of the official commission can be solely for the purpose of slandering the Soviet Union... (37)

The committee's creation and work was indeed motivated by politics, both at home and abroad. Truman thought the investigation would enhance his chances for re-election by satisfying the Polish-American community. Moreover, Truman partially diffused charges of being sympathetic to communists by cooperating with the Committee's requests. Truman, after the initial months of his Presidency, thus adopted an opposite stance on the Katyn issue then Roosevelt. Roosevelt felt he needed to discourage public debate to promote his re-election chances; Truman saw to it that all documents pointing to Russian guilt reached the Katyn committee. Roosevelt tried to disregard Katyn to keep the Alliance intact; Truman publicized the issue to prove his animosity towards communism. The Katyn massacre was from the beginning a "political football" in the hands of America's decision makers.

Conclusion

Millions of Poles were killed by the Nazis during World War II, and every night candles burn in memorial in the windows of Warsaw. But one of the most horrid of the atrocities - the Katyn massacre - is the one that Poles are forbidden to commemorate. The Soviets have taken other measures to try to make people forget the incident. In 1969 the Russians announced the unveiling of a memorial complex on the site of the village of Khatyn, located about 160 miles from Katyn. The Katyn with an "h" was one of the 9,200 Byelorussian villages destroyed by the Germans and one of 136 in which all the inhabitants were killed. After erecting the monument, the Russians tried to erase Katyn from maps and history books, and replace it with Khatyn:

1954 - A map of the Minsk Region in the Large Soviet Encyclopedia does not show Khatyn at all.
1956 - A map of the Smolensk area in the Large Soviet Encyclopedia shows Katyn.
1969 - A large atlas of the USSR shows neither Khatyn or Katyn.
1974 - A map of the Minsk Region in the Large Soviet Encyclopedia shows Khatyn but not Katyn.[1]

Few in Poland harbor doubts that the officers who died in Katyn were put to death at Stalin's order. In 1980, Polish dissidents put together a memorial service commemorating "the 40th anniversary of Katyn." A Katyn institute was founded clandestinely in Krakow to condemn the Soviet Union and to publish a pamphlet setting out the details of the massacre. The Soviets reportedly came close to admitting the truth about Katyn late in 1956 after Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader at the time, had launched the de-Stalinization process with a carefully

worded denunciation of Stalin's policies. Khrushchev thought that owning up to massacre would smooth relations between Poland and the Soviets. He was dissuaded from making the admission by Polish Communist Party leader Wladislaw Gomulka, who feared the reaction in Poland might be too strong to control (Krushchev's offer came only weeks after the Hungarian revolt in 1956, which was put down with Soviet tanks and troops).[2]

Over the years, the Katyn massacre has continued to make cordial relations between the Soviets and Poles, including Communist Poles, an impossibility. Leopold Unger, a Belgian journalist of Polish origin who specializes in Eastern European affairs, describes Katyn as "the greatest unanswered crime against Poland." The Poles have the criminal's name, but no confession. "If there is ever to be a reconciliation between the Polish and Soviet peoples", Unger feels, "it must start by way of Katyn."[3]

Where does the United States figure into all this? Katyn had a dramatic impact on American politics, both at home and abroad. Both Roosevelt and Truman manipulated the issue to further their policy objectives. Truman, during the early days of his Presidency, shared similar circumstances and policies that Roosevelt had worked under. Yet as Truman grew increasingly frustrated, and then angry, with Russian actions he began to move away from Roosevelt's policies. With different foreign policy objectives, Truman discarded Roosevelt's position on the Katyn issue and adopted a more vocal attitude. Katyn was thus an indicator of changing American-Soviet relations.

The calculated use of an issue, the organized murder of thousands of human beings, appears ruthless in retrospect. Yet Roosevelt's hopes for postwar cooperation with Russia perhaps justified a "whitewash" of the facts. The saving of American lives was also a noble cause but it must be remembered that saved American lives meant more young Russians dead on the battlefield. Either way, the tolls of war were just as real. Truman also covered up the facts when he thought there was still a chance for postwar friendship. When it became apparent such cordiality was not to be, Truman realized that, with a Presidential election approaching and Russia becoming a menacing foe, he had nothing to lose by exposing the facts behind the Katyn massacre. Roosevelt and Truman thus both had reasonable objectives in mind when they stifled public debate on the Katyn story.

Still, America must face certain realities stemming from the Katyn cover-up. Edwin O'Malley, discussing England's role in the supression of the facts in a telegram seen only by Winston Churchill's Cabinet and King George VI, wrote that "we have, in fact, perforce used the good name of England to cover up the massacre." Poland still lives with the dark memory of the slaughter of its officer corps. The United States, in the same manner as Great Britain, attempted for years to disguise or ignore the true culpability in the Katyn massacre. This did not make this country an accomplice to the Katyn crimes, but it was hardly our finest hour either. After all, World War II was fought for a basically moral purpose: to rid the world of a

barbarous creed. Perhaps the ultimate moral of the Katyn affair is that if one fights evil by ignoring still other evils, the strength of one's moral purpose is inevitably compromised.

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