

FDR and the Katyn Forest Massacre

Geopolitics, Morality, and Truth in World War II

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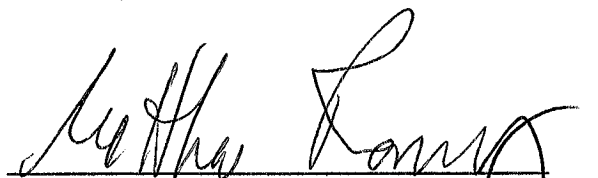
FDR and the Katyn Forest Massacre: Geopolitics, Morality, and Truth in World War II

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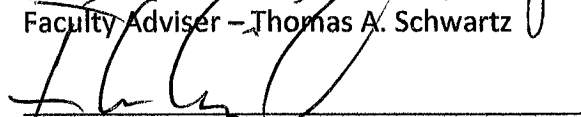
On the basis of this thesis defended by the candidate on April 30, 2013
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Introduction

We were piled into trucks, 20-25 of us at one time. We left the prison camp not knowing where we were heading. Then all of the sudden the trucks stopped, and all we could hear was the occasional muffled sound of what seemed to be systematic gunfire. The first man was pulled from our truck and all we could do was sit and watch as his jacket was ripped off and the door closed, followed only moments later by the solitary shot of a pistol. The next one was pulled from the truck and like the one before his jacket was ripped off, the door was closed and then we heard one single pistol shot. I was next. The door opened and I was pulled out. My jacket was ripped off as my hands were bound behind my back and I was walked to edge of the pit. Praying, I looked down and saw the bodies of the two men who had been pulled out of the truck before, each of them with a single bullet hole in the back of the head. I look around and could see three more stations just like the one I am at where my Polish brethren are all being systematically executed. I close my eyes as I reach the edge of the pit, and then blackness.¹

This reconstruction illustrates one of the methods of execution employed by the Soviet special police (NKVD) as they systematically massacred the Polish officer corps in the Katyn Forest. After sweeping into Poland on September 17, 1939, in accordance with the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Plan, the Soviets imprisoned 14,552 Polish Officers. In

¹ This recreation is pieced together from a variety of secondary and primary sources to illustrate the standard method of execution used by the Soviet NKVD during the Katyn Massacres. Though there was another execution method used by the NKVD, this manner seems to have been more prevalent. The other method of execution involved bringing the men into a soundproofed basement, hands bound, where they would be shot at the base of the head before being transported to the mass graves. The sources used in creating this recreation are: *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*. Edited by Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007., George Sanford. *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, justice, and memory*. BASEES/Routledge series on Russian and East European studies. Edited by Richard Sakwa. New York: Routledge, 2005., Jahunz K. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest: The Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre* (London: Macmillan, 1962).

April 1940, these officers were massacred in the Katyn Forest.² This massacre was personally ordered by Josef Stalin in March of 1940 with the hope that, by eliminating the officer corps, Poland would remain weak and easily controlled by the Soviet Union both during and after the war.³ This atrocity was covered up in the hills outside of Smolensk, Russia, and buried under young conifers as the Soviets looked towards a future where Poland once more was part of the grand Russian empire.

Several months later off the coast of Newfoundland, the two other future leaders of the Allied cause in World War II were meeting in secret to discuss a statement of ideas, beliefs, and goals that would define the actions of the two nations during the war. The synthesis of these efforts was the Atlantic Charter, a pivotal document in the forging of the Grand Alliance and one whose implications would carry through to the post-war world. For British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the Atlantic Charter served as a first step in bringing the United States into the war, a step that he and many others deemed vital for the survival of Britain. For President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Atlantic Charter served as a way to move closer to war without upsetting the isolationists in the United States and a way to illustrate the moral imperative of defeating the Nazis.

One of the most important aspects of the Atlantic Charter, the centerpiece for the alliance between Great Britain and the United States, was the moral superiority it gave to the British and American war efforts. The Charter's tenets painted World War II as a struggle of good versus evil with Western ideals as the good and the tyranny and oppression of the Nazis as the evil. The

² *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment*, 205.

³ "1943: Katyn Forest Massacre (Order for the Katyn Massacre)," *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History (SMISH)*. <http://www.soviethistory.org/index.php?page=article&ArticleID=1943katyn4&SubjectID=1943katyn&Year=1943> (accessed November 8, 2012).

Atlantic Charter extolled eight key, “hopes for a better future world.”⁴ Three of the goals would come to plague the Grand Alliance and exacerbate the geopolitical strain of Polish-Soviet relations. The first two called for the U.S. and Great Britain to, “seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other” in addition to “no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned.”⁵ These ideals were designed to promote the input of the governed and to prevent the expansion of imperialism. The third goal, which would prove to be a thorn in the side of the Alliance, was the recognition of, “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”⁶ This tenet helped prevent liberating powers from exploiting the lands they occupied and guarantee local inhabitants genuine autonomy and control over their lives and government.

These goals were meant to guide the defeat of the Nazi threat and ensure a long-lasting peace after the war. The emphasis on self-determination and national sovereignty provided moral superiority to the Allied cause. These ideals clashed severely with the actions of the third member of the Grand Alliance, the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe both before and after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Although the Soviets would come to agree with these ideals in theory, when they contradicted Soviet goals or aspirations they were promptly brushed aside; after all, the Soviets argued, they never officially signed the Charter and were not bound by its dictates. These principles would become a major challenge for the Grand Alliance in the case of Poland. While initially applied to Poland, as Britain’s first ally in the war and the reason the war began, by 1943 Roosevelt and Churchill would be willing to overlook the Soviet trampling of

⁴ “The Atlantic Conference: Joint Statement by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill,” August 14, 1941.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

these ideals with regard to Poland in order to maintain the Big Three Alliance with the Soviet Union and later to garner Soviet support for the United Nations Organization.

Beginning in 1943, the American government began covering up their knowledge of Soviet guilt for the Katyn Forest Massacre and the actions they took to subvert the truth in order to keep their most important ally in the war. As a result, Poland was to suffer as the Atlantic Charter was pushed aside and Polish autonomy was sacrificed to communist rule. The Katyn Forest Massacre and the larger issue of Poland present an interesting case study in the subjugation of moral issues in favor of the primacy of geopolitical goals. This decision, to cover-up Soviet guilt for the atrocities in the Katyn Forest, seems to fit into a larger pattern in U.S. foreign policy. For Roosevelt his post-war vision, in which the U.S. and the Soviet Union worked hand in hand to secure the peace, was more important than revealing the truth about the nature of the Soviet Union and the lives of thousands of Polish officers.

When the discovery of the graves in the Katyn Forest was broadcast around the world, the U.S. government supported the Soviet version of the truth about the massacre. This thesis will explore what exactly the U.S. government, and specifically the Roosevelt Administration, knew about the Katyn Forest Massacre going back to when the Polish government began looking for their missing officers. According to recently declassified documents, the U.S. knew about the missing Polish officers as well as who was guilty of their slaughter at a very early date. The synthesis of this material will provide the background for understanding the egregious nature of the “truth about Katyn” the Roosevelt administration would come to endorse in order to protect the Soviet Union.

The first chapter of this thesis provides the necessary background leading up to the revelation in April 1943 of the Katyn Forest Massacre. Understanding Polish-Soviet relations,

especially as it pertains to the story of the missing Polish officers, helps to explain U.S. involvement and shows how complex the relationship between the two countries was at the time. This foundation allows for a much more comprehensive exploration of the massacre and the stories that emerged from the Soviet and Nazi propaganda offices. While the details of the massacre are well chronicled in numerous other works, the differences between the Nazi and Soviet stories are the most important aspect for the purpose of this thesis.⁷ Using the actual reports and the voluminous work of other scholars, an in-depth examination of the key differences will be explored and highlighted since the U.S. would end up endorsing the Soviet version of the truth despite numerous inconsistencies and gaps in the story.

The next chapter explores how the United States sought to cover up Soviet guilt for the massacre and hide the truth. Until now the majority of the scholarly work on the Katyn Forest Massacre has been limited by continued classification of documents and a reliance on the findings of the 1951 Madden Commission. Newly declassified documents help to show how the Roosevelt administration manipulated, concealed and managed the truth about Soviet guilt for Katyn. By focusing on several key stories in the Katyn saga, including several new accounts in the historiography, this thesis will help to fill in gaps in the story and showcase the magnitude and variety of measures taken in the American cover-up. While exploring the cover-up the chapter will also investigate how domestic and foreign factors, such as Roosevelt's personal vision for the post war world, compelled him to undertake such comprehensive measures in order to hide the truth.

The final chapter shifts away from the actual massacre to the pivotal wartime conferences at Tehran and Yalta. By understanding Roosevelt's actions and negotiations at these two

⁷ The details of the massacre have been the focus of the majority of the Katyn literature to date as scholars have tried to uncover all the facts pertaining to the actual massacre. The seminal work in this field is still Janusz Zawodny's 1962 monograph *Death in the Forest: The story of the Katyn Forest Massacre*.

conferences it becomes easier to see how willing he was to sacrifice Polish issues in favor of his vision for the postwar world. These two conferences have been extensively studied and analyzed as part of the Cold War and Polish historiography. Using the Katyn Forest Massacre and what the Roosevelt administration knew about Soviet guilt provides a new lens through which to view these two events and lends to new conclusions about Roosevelt's thoughts and concessions.

The purpose of this thesis is not to accuse the Roosevelt administration of mishandling the Katyn Forest Massacre, nor to try and place Katyn within the genesis of the Cold War. This thesis seeks to explain why the U.S. hid Soviet guilt for the massacre, in addition to illustrating the lengths to which the Roosevelt administration went in order to hide their ally's guilt. This type of exploration is needed in order to understand how the Roosevelt administration sought to manage the truth about Katyn in order to prevent popular revulsion from undermining its vision for the post-war world. The measured steps taken in this story to hide the truth about Katyn illustrate the primacy of a wartime vision that did not include certain truths about their ally the Soviet Union. While we are not in a position to challenge Roosevelt's decision to support the Soviet version of the truth, an understanding of the repercussions of manipulating the truth is necessary to illuminate how sacrificing or overlooking moral questions can be more consequential than the vision one hopes to achieve.

CHAPTER ONE

Trouble on the Horizon: Polish-Soviet Relations and the Katyn Revelations

In 1939, the Nazi Army swept into Poland beginning the Second World War. Seventeen days later the Soviet Union invaded Poland in accordance with the secret protocols of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact which had divided Poland between the two countries. The same day the Polish government was sent a notification from the Soviet Union that as a result of the German invasion, the Soviets regarded the Polish government as disintegrated and the country of Poland as nonexistent.⁸ Since the Poles had no control over the country, which had served as the only path for a German invasion of Russia during the course of history, the Soviets claimed it necessary to occupy the remaining parts of Eastern Poland in order to protect the White Russians living there. The Red Army spread throughout Poland taking control of towns and local governments as they drove towards the pre-arranged border between the Nazi occupied zone and the newest addition to the Soviet Union. As the Soviets spread westward they systematically stripped Poland of resources and materials, taking things like farm equipment back to the Soviet Union while simultaneously trying to communize Poland through the imposition of things like collective farms. Plebiscites were held to legitimize this transition, but only Soviet candidates were permitted to run and they subsequently and unanimously voted to join the Soviet Socialist Republics.⁹

Destroying the previous system of Polish economy and government was just a part of Soviet attempts to cripple Poland and bring it into the Soviet Union; the most important part of the plan was the deportation and elimination of possible opponents in the Polish elite. The

⁸"Report on Polish-Russian Relations" by Lt. Col. H. I. Szymanski with Enclosures, 11/22/1942 ("Report on Polish-Russian Relations"); [383.6 U.S.S.R 3-17-42]; Project Decimal Files, *compiled 1941 – 1945*; War Department. Military Intelligence Division. (08/26/1918 - 04/19/1947); Records of the Army Staff, 1903 – 2009, Record Group 319; National Archives at College Park (NACP), MD.

⁹ "Report on Polish-Russian Relations."

Soviets persecuted all non-Communist political leaders, educated people, wealthy peasants, government leaders, police officers, judges, and members of the Polish military.¹⁰ Many of these people were deported to camps in Eastern Russia, Siberia, Kazakhstan or the Mongol Provinces, where conditions rivaled those of the Nazi concentration camps as they were worked to death for not supporting the Communists.¹¹ These deportations were not impromptu actions, but part of a coordinated and well-organized Soviet plan whose sole purpose, “was the extermination of the so called intelligentsia of Eastern Poland.”¹²

The deportations did not begin until 1940. However, the arrest and imprisonment of Polish military personnel began as soon as the Red Army invaded Poland. Without resistance, the majority of the Polish Army was arrested and imprisoned by the Soviets, who worried about a Polish uprising.¹³ The officers were subsequently separated from the soldiers and sent to different camps in the Soviet Union, including three different camps just east of the Polish border. While few of the officers would survive, many of the enlisted men were subsequently released by the Soviets. Of the 400 or so officers who survived, the majority were selected because of their potential to be converted to communism and lead Polish troops as part of the Red Army.¹⁴ The remaining 14,000, however, remained in three POW camps outside of Smolensk, Russia, awaiting their fate at the hands of the NKVD.

On March 5, 1940 the fate of these officers was decided when Lavretiy Beria, the Soviet People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs, wrote Josef Stalin a secret letter concerning Polish POWs held by the Soviets. Beria believed that all of these Polish POWs were, “hardened and

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Intelligence Report No. 5678 titled "The Katyn Mass Graves", 10/30/1951 (*Intel Report No. 5678*); IR 5678- The Katyn Mass Graves - Oct. 30, 1951, 10/30/1951 - 10/30/1951 (*The Katyn Mass Graves*); Intelligence Reports on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Eastern Europe, compiled 1942 – 1974 (*Intel Reports on USSR*); General Records of the Department of State, 1763 – 2002, *Record Group 59*, 8.

¹⁴ Intel Report No. 5678; The Katyn Mass Graves; Intel Reports on USSR; State Dept. RG 59, 12.

uncompromising enemies of Soviet authority” and must be dealt with in an appropriate manner.¹⁵ Beria recommended having his NKVD try the men before special tribunals before, “[applying] to them the supreme penalty: shooting.” Additionally Beria felt it was necessary that, “Examination of the cases is to be carried out without summoning those detained and without bringing charges...”¹⁶ This policy was signed off on by Stalin as he initialed the letter in blue pencil, sending the Polish POWs to their death at the hands of the NKVD.

This chapter explores the background to the Katyn Forest Massacre focusing on Polish-Soviet relations after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, what the U.S. knew about the missing Polish officers, and the reactions of the world to the news about the massacre. The delicate relationship between the Polish government and the Soviet Union is important for understanding how and why the Soviets changed their plan and strategy with regard to Poland after the Nazi invasion, as well as the opportunistic nature of Soviet actions. The missing officers’ saga helps to illustrate the complications in the Polish-Soviet relationship while introducing the United States as a character. All of these things build to the Nazi revelations about the mass graves in the Katyn Forest and the geopolitical strain it placed on the Grand Alliance. This chapter will briefly survey the details of the massacre then focus on the stories and information relayed by both the Nazis and Soviets to the world, highlighting the information the U.S. government had concerning who was guilty for the Katyn Forest Massacre. It is important to establish what exactly the Roosevelt administration knew early on, since ultimately they would choose to accept the Soviet story and cover-up the truth about the massacre throughout the war.

¹⁵“Order for the Katyn Massacre,” Seventeen Moments in Soviet History, <http://www.soviethistory.org/index.php?page=article&ArticleID=1943katyn4&SubjectID=1943katyn&Year=1943> (accessed March 28, 2013).

¹⁶ Ibid.

Renewed Polish-Soviet Relations and the Missing Officers Saga

The first efforts to find the missing officers came in February of 1941 while Poland was still occupied by the Soviet Army. General Wladyslaw Anders, the commander of the Polish Army, wrote to the Soviet NKVD asking about the location of 8,772 of his officers who had been missing since early 1940, but received no reply from the Soviets.¹⁷ Shortly thereafter, the Polish Red Cross filed a report with the International Red Cross in March 1941, noting that mail from several Soviet POW camps had ceased completely in the early spring of 1940 and had never resumed.¹⁸ The report talked about how the officers had been moved and after their last transfer to the Smolensk area mail ceased completely, only to be resumed in November by a few officers in a different camp.¹⁹

The next attempt to find the officers came at a much better time in Polish-Soviet relations. On June 22, 1941, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, codenamed Operation Barbarossa, dramatically changed the way in which the Soviets viewed the Poles as the Soviets began to worry about their own survival during the German onslaught into Russia. Once seen as the historic gateway for German and other foreign armies to enter Russia, Poland was now seen as a potential ally, which could help defeat the ruthless German offensive. On July 30, 1941, diplomatic relations were officially restored between the two countries, and an uneasy and tense relationship was formed with the signing of the Polish-Soviet Agreement. Showcasing Soviet concerns and desires for Polish support, the Kremlin agreed that, “the Soviet-German treaties of

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Report Titled: Some Facts about the 'Katyn' Massacre* (Some Facts about the 'Katyn' Massacre); *Katyn Forest Massacre* (Van Vliet Report); *Records Relating to Poland, compiled 1949 - 1952, documenting the period 1941 - 1952 (Records Relating to Poland)*; Department of State. Bureau of European Affairs. Office of Eastern European Affairs. Office of the Officer in Charge, Polish, Baltic, and Czechoslovak Affairs. (1949 - 1961); *General Records of the Department of State, 1763 - 2002 Record Group 59 (State Department, RG 59); NACP, MD, 5.*

¹⁸ Polish Red Cross to International Red Cross, March 18, 1941 (Polish Red Cross to International Red Cross); Robert H. Jackson Papers (RHJ Papers); Library of Congress, Washington (LoC, Washington); 1259-1260.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

1939 as to territorial changes in Poland [had] lost their validity.”²⁰ This was a huge shift in Soviet policy which had originally seen Poland as a historical Russian possession that they were rightfully reclaiming. Included in this agreement was a clause granting, “amnesty to all Polish citizens now detained on Soviet territory either as prisoners of war or on other sufficient grounds, as from the resumption of diplomatic relations.”²¹ With this amnesty, the Soviets also agreed to the formation of a Polish Army in the Soviet Union under General Wladyslaw Anders which would help the struggling Soviets fight the Germans.²²

The decision to create a new Polish Army gave the missing officer search more importance as General Anders continued to look for his missing officers who had been gone since 1940 and were imperative for creating his new army. General Sikorski, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile, brought up the missing officers in his first meeting with Stalin after relations had formally resumed on December 3, 1941.²³ Stalin told General Sikorski that it was impossible for the officers to be missing, as reports said they had escaped to Manchuria and had been there for some time.²⁴ Three months later in 1942, General Anders approached Stalin again on this matter and handed him a list of every single Polish officer missing from the three camps, even going so far as to list the camps and say, “So far not one officer removed from Kozielsk, Starobielsk or Ostashkov has reappeared. You certainly must have them. Where can they be?”²⁵ Stalin’s reply would become the standard Soviet answer to the question of missing Polish officers, “I do not know where they are...It may be that they were in camps in territories which

²⁰Some Facts about the ‘Katyn’ Massacre; Records Relating to Poland; State Department, RG 59; NACP, 4. “Report on Polish-Russian Relations.”

²¹ “Report on Polish-Russian Relations.”

²² Intel Report No. 5678; The Katyn Mass Graves; Intel Reports on USSR; State Dept. RG 59, 13. “Report on Polish-Russian Relations.”

²³ Some Facts about the ‘Katyn’ Massacre; Records Relating to Poland; State Department, RG 59; NACP, 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵The notes from the conversation between Gen. Anders and Stalin were forwarded by Ambassador Biddle to the State Department on April 23, 1943. Some Facts about the ‘Katyn’ Massacre; Records Relating to Poland; State Department, RG 59; NACP, 7.

have been taken by the Germans...”²⁶ The Soviets would continue to claim that all Polish prisoners of war were released by October 1941 in accordance with the Polish-Soviet Agreement and that they no longer knew where any of them were.²⁷

The exact date at which the U.S. government first came to know about the missing Polish officers remains unclear, though it is possibly as early as 1942. A State Department briefing paper acknowledges that in May of 1942 the Polish Ambassador to Washington raised the question of missing officers and was subsequently sent to the State Department.²⁸ On April 27, 1942, U.S. Ambassador William Standley approached the Soviet government about the fate of the missing officers, with the approval of the State Department.²⁹ By this time the U.S. government had been informed about the missing officers by the Polish and British governments, as well as the Polish Underground. When Standley brought up the issue with the Soviet Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, the response was unsympathetic and stated that Soviet commitments to Poland were being carried out to the letter.³⁰ American ambassadors would continue to press the Soviets on the missing officer question as late as September 1942, two full months after the Poles had given up inquiring about their missing officers; a little under a year later they would have their answer.³¹

The U.S. government received information from a variety of sources concerning the situation in Poland and the actions of the Soviets towards Polish citizens both before and after the Nazi invasion. While many sources came from the Polish Government in Exile or the Polish

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Intel Report No. 5678; The Katyn Mass Graves; Intel Reports on USSR; State Dept. RG 59, 13.

²⁸ State Department Briefing Paper, Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington.

²⁹ Louis Robert Coatney, “The Katyn Massacre: An Assessment of its Significance and Historical Issue in the United States and Great Britain, 1940-1993” (master’s thesis, Western Illinois University, 1993), 14.

³⁰ This commitment refers to protocols of the Polish-Soviet Agreement of 1941 whereby all Polish prisoners of war were to be released and allowed to rejoin the Polish Army in order to take up arms against the Nazis. State Department Briefing Paper, Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington.

³¹ Some Facts about the ‘Katyn’ Massacre; Records Relating to Poland; State Department, RG 59; NACP, 7.

Underground, which lessened the credibility of their descriptions of Soviet actions, on November 23, 1942 military intelligence received a 30 page report from the U.S. liaison to the Polish Army in Tehran, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Szymanski. He was the reason that the U.S. government knew everything it did concerning Polish-Soviet relations. Because of Szymanski's personal contacts within the Polish Army and occupied Poland, he knew many of the officers who had lived through the original NKVD persecution of Polish elites during 1939 and 1940.³² Szymanski even presented military intelligence with personal testimonies from people who had been persecuted and forced into slave labor camps such as the following:

We were taken to a forest farm for forced labour. There was no trial whatsoever and no sentence pronounced... We sold our belongings not to die of hunger... During my stay in the forest three in my family died: my two year old son, my sister and my mother. The authorities were ruthless and very strict. After the amnesty they did not want to release us, and I escaped with my family in December 1941.³³

Szymanski, realizing how important this information was, re-sent his report to Major General Strong, who was the Assistant Chief of Staff for Military Intelligence at the War Department, in Washington, D.C. in May of 1943.³⁴ The perseverance of Szymanski ensured that multiple offices in the U.S. government knew exactly how the Soviets had been treating the Poles prior to the Nazi invasion.

During this time the question of the missing officers began to play a growing part in a larger narrative concerning the Soviet failure to honor the arrangements under the 1941 Polish-Soviet Agreement. In February 1943, the State Department received a memo from the Polish Ambassador to the U.S. which laid out the development of Polish-Soviet relations since 1939

³² "Report on Polish-Russian Relations."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Report- Lt. Col. Henry Szymanski with Enclosures, 5/29/1943; 319-5937-4-4; Permanent Retention Files, compiled 1918 – 1963; Department of Defense, Department of the Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence. (07/10/1958 - 05/01/1987); Records of the Army Staff, 1903 – 2009, RG 319; NACP, MD.

and the implications for Poland and the future United Nations.³⁵ This memo, which was sent all the way up to Roosevelt's friend, Under Secretary Sumner Welles, described how the Soviets took control of many of the governments in the Baltic Region and slowly "Sovietized" them from within without the consent of the people and drew the country into the Soviet Union. The memo further hinted that the same thing was happening to Poland.³⁶ Continuing in this vein, the Ambassador discussed how even after the 1941 Agreement the Soviets still would not release nor provide accurate information on the missing Polish officers. The Ambassador goes on to speculate, as many did in Poland, "It is not improbable that this whole group of people have been exterminated."³⁷ As the Ambassador continued to list his concerns and grievances, he struck upon the issue of the Soviet Union's western border. Since the partition of Poland in 1939, the Soviet Union always insisted that the gains they made in 1939 ought to be given to the Soviets at the end of the war for helping defeat the Nazis. Denouncing this as contrary to the Atlantic Charter, the Polish Ambassador continued by highlighting the apparent imperialism of the Soviet Union and its quest to expand. The Ambassador believed the Soviets were using these land demands to test Allied resolve and see if Roosevelt and Churchill would have the courage to stand up to Stalin. While the Ambassador clearly had the survival of Poland as his motivating factor, his argument would come to be one that would echo loudly within the White House and State Department as people began to advocate taking a stronger stand against Soviet expansion. While this memorandum was issued in February of 1943, it would come to be much more important in two months time when the Roosevelt Administration began to realize how much

³⁵ Department of State, Division of European Affairs Memorandum (Dept. of State, Memo); 2/11/1943; Records Relating to Poland, *compiled 1949 - 1952, documenting the period 1941 - 1952 (Records Relating to Poland)*; Department of State. Bureau of European Affairs. Office of Eastern European Affairs. Office of the Officer in Charge, Polish, Baltic, and Czechoslovak Affairs. (1949 - 1961); General Records of the Department of State, 1763 - 2002 Record Group 59 (State Department, RG 59); National Archives at College Park (NACP), MD, 1.

³⁶ Ibid, 5.

³⁷ Ibid, 7.

effort would need to be exerted to keep the most powerful ally in the alliance in check, as the Nazis broadcast the brutality of the Stalinist regime to the world.

Discovery and Fracture: The Nazi Announcement and the Implications for the Grand Alliance

Prior to announcing their discovery of the Katyn mass graves to the world, Goebbels and the Nazis invited several small groups of Poles to Smolensk to see the graves and the evidence against the Soviets. While the first group was mainly reporters, the second contained members of the Polish Red Cross who conducted preliminary investigations into who the officers were and their estimated date of death.³⁸ The Germans had hoped that by bringing these Poles to the graves they might elicit a statement from them that could be turned into propaganda against the Soviets and cause a division amongst the Allies. However, none of the Poles who saw the graves were willing to make any sort of statement that might help the Nazis. Although the graves appeared very real, everyone was very suspicious of their authenticity because of Goebbels' and the Nazis' ability to create masterful propaganda.

On April 13, 1943, Nazi radio began to broadcast across Europe that they had discovered mass graves filled with executed Polish officers who were killed by the Soviet Union in early 1940. International journalists were flown in by the Nazis to see the graves and exhibits, and even witness the opening of a previously undisturbed mass grave.³⁹ The proof of Soviet guilt displayed by the Germans was expansive and varied. The main exhibits were documentary and consisted of postcards, letters, and diary entries all of which were dated before March 1940.⁴⁰ Forensic evidence, which looked at decomposition of the bodies and the soil, confirmed that the soldiers were indeed killed early in 1940. In addition, the winter clothing and jackets of the deceased also pointed to an execution date sometime in the winter or early spring. The final

³⁸ Intel Report No. 5678; The Katyn Mass Graves; Intel Reports on USSR; State Dept.; RG 59; NACP; 16.

³⁹ Some Facts about the 'Katyn' Massacre; Records Relating to Poland; State Department, RG 59; NACP, 10.

⁴⁰ Intel Report No. 5678; The Katyn Mass Graves; Intel Reports on USSR; State Dept. RG 59, 16.

pieces of evidence came from local testimony about the arrival of Polish POWs by train in March 1940, never to be seen again, in addition to the presence of three year old trees planted on top of the burial sites to help cover them up. In order to validate these claims and provide more objective evidence, the Germans brought in an “International Commission” to exhume and examine the bodies of the dead. The twelve members of this group reached the unanimous conclusion that the men in the graves had been murdered sometime in early 1940 and all signed the final forensic report which was released for the world to see.⁴¹ While this group did lend an air of objectivity, as the majority were physicians, forensic scientists, and criminologists, the nationality of its members, who were all from Germany or occupied countries, with the sole exception of a doctor from Switzerland, continued to undermine the credibility of the story which began to be seen in the international news as a desperate attempt by the Nazis to try to cause strife among the Allies.⁴² While publicly the scientific inquiry was discredited as propaganda, a member of the German sponsored inquiry, Dr. Trasmén of Denmark, was interviewed by a British agent upon returning from the graves. Secretly reporting to the British spy, Dr. Trasmén confirmed that he and the other members of the investigation had been given the independent ability to investigate the pits and that none of the documents they discovered on the bodies they pulled out were dated later than 1940.⁴³ While a report on this information has never been found in US government material from the time, it is not difficult to believe that such important evidence would be sent from London to Washington, especially given Churchill’s later decision to send the more controversial O’Malley report to FDR. In an attempt to validate their findings in the eyes of the world, the Nazis also allowed the Polish Red Cross to conduct their

⁴¹ George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, justice, and memory* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 130.

⁴² Intel Report No. 5678; The Katyn Mass Graves; Intel Reports on USSR; State Dept. RG 59, 16.

⁴³ Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 131.

own independent investigation of the graves, including examining new bodies.⁴⁴ Although it confirmed the Nazi story concerning time and date of death, despite their initial skepticism, the Polish delegation refused to make a final formal report, fearing that the Nazis would try to use it as propaganda.⁴⁵

After two days of being completely silent about the discovery of the graves the Soviets fired back against the “vile fabrications” of “Goebbels’ slanderers” stating that:

The German-Fascist reports on this subject leave no doubt as to the tragic fate of the former Polish prisoners of war who in 1941 were engaged in construction work in areas west of Smolensk region, fell into the hands of the German Fascist hangmen in the summer of 1941 after the withdrawal of Soviet troops.⁴⁶

The Soviet story fell on deaf ears amongst the Poles. By this point the Polish government knew that their officers had been evacuated from the three camps in April 1940, so they were left to wonder why the Soviets would not have told them this during the previous two years of inquiry. While the Soviets continued to denounce the Nazi findings and stick to their own statement, the Polish Government in Exile reached out to the International Red Cross in order to have it investigate and give an objective opinion on the date of death of the Polish officers. Capitalizing on the Polish request, the Nazis agreed to allow the International Red Cross to investigate hoping this would lend credibility to their story about Soviet guilt.⁴⁷ This move by the Polish Government, observed in concert with the German request, provided the Soviet Union with the perfect excuse to sever relations with Poland and begin to bolster their position within the country. Treating the request as a betrayal of the Soviet Union, the Soviet government and the

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Some Facts about the ‘Katyn’ Massacre; Records Relating to Poland; State Department, RG 59; NACP, 11 & 19.

⁴⁷ In order for the Red Cross to investigate they must receive permission from all parties involved in the investigation. The Soviet Union promptly refused to give permission preventing what would have been an impartial investigation into the massacre. This is not to be confused with the Polish Red Cross investigation mentioned earlier which did not need Soviet approval. Coatney, “The Katyn Massacre: An Assessment of its Significance and Historical Issue in the United States and Great Britain, 1940-1993”, 14.

state-sponsored press accused the Polish Government in Exile of having Fascist supporters in its midst who were working with the Nazis to undermine the Soviet Union. Additionally Stalin wrote to President Roosevelt that he felt the Poles had betrayed a fellow ally during a crucial time in war and that he was going to sever diplomatic relations with the Polish Government in London.⁴⁸ Stalin carried through on this threat and on April 21st ended relations with Poland even though the Poles had issued a statement on April 17 that the Polish government denied Germany the right to use the Katyn Massacre for their own purpose of disrupting the alliance.⁴⁹ According to Ambassador Biddle, the Poles went even further after the break in relations to show that they were in no way collaborating with the Nazis. General Sikorski issued orders explicitly telling the Chief of the Polish Underground to stay quiet about the Nazi charges against the Soviet Union and to remember that the primary enemy of Poland was not the Soviets but the Nazis.⁵⁰ Additionally, measures were taken in Poland and London to ensure that the Polish press took a more positive stance on the Soviet Union and discredited Nazi attempts to use a tragedy for their own ends.⁵¹ Stalin's actions in the face of such remarks and statements by the Polish government and press make it abundantly clear that the Soviets were using Katyn as an excuse to sever relations with the Polish Government in Exile, which would in turn allow them to exercise their will in Poland, since it would no longer be considered an ally. In order to expand their control in Poland, the Soviets announced that a Union of Polish Patriots had been organized in Moscow, a quasi-governmental body that would eventually evolve into the Communist dominated Lublin

⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R., *Stalin's Correspondence with Roosevelt and Truman, 1941-1945* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), 60-61.

⁴⁹ Statement by the Polish Government-in-Exile, 4/17/1943, Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁵⁰ Portion of Message from Ambassador Biddle in London dated April 23, 1943; Documents Given to Congressional Committee Investigating Katyn; Records Relating to Poland, *compiled 1949 - 1952, documenting the period 1941 - 1952 (Records Relating to Poland)*; General Records of the Department of State, *1763 - 2002 Record Group 59 (State Department, RG 59)*; *National Archives at College Park (NACP), MD, 2.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Committee, the main challenger to the democratically elected and Western supported Government-in-Exile.⁵² In reality this group had been created in Russia in March 1943, before the revelations, further confirming that the Soviets had been waiting for an excuse to take back control of Poland.⁵³ This was the first time the Soviets began to create and support a sovereign Communist government in Poland. The Soviets were only able to take this type of action because Katyn provided a convenient pretext for severing ties in the midst of growing concerns over borders and territory which the Soviets deemed pivotal.⁵⁴

Even after severing relations with Poland, the Soviets continued to push their story that the Nazis had murdered the Polish officers in 1941 in order to try and divert attention. Their claims against the Nazis were completely unsubstantiated until the Soviets retook the Smolensk area from the Germans in 1944 and were able to start providing evidence for their claims. As the Soviets neared the Katyn Forest, a commission was created under a renowned Soviet scientist named Nikolay Burdenko. Dr. Burdenko, a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences led an eight man team tasked with showing the forensic evidence of Nazi guilt for the massacre. The final scientific findings of the Burdenko Commission unsurprisingly disputed all of the findings of the Nazis and Polish Red Cross. The Commission reported that the Polish officers had been killed between September and December of 1941 and that the graves had been disturbed sometime in spring or summer of 1943. The disturbance of the graves in 1943 was important because this was the period of time the Soviets stated the Nazis dug up the graves and removed all documentary evidence they could find dated later than April 1940.⁵⁵ This was a key distinction and one that the Soviets would press, especially after claiming to find nine additional

⁵² Some Facts about the 'Katyn' Massacre; Records Relating to Poland; State Department, RG 59; NACP, 12.

⁵³ Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 127.

⁵⁴ Intel Report No. 5678; The Katyn Mass Graves; Intel Reports on USSR; State Dept. RG 59, 16.

⁵⁵ Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 138.

items on the bodies dated later than April of 1940.⁵⁶ For many the scientific information was highly debatable, but the presence of or lack of diary entries, letters, or newspapers from after April 1940 was a very easy way to place the blame in one direction or the other. In order to bolster these claims even more, the Soviets also collected new eye witness accounts including two of the key Nazi witnesses who changed their story and claimed they were coerced into testifying by the Nazis.⁵⁷ This testimony played into many of the initial suspicions people had about the Nazis' story because of the reputation of the Nazis and their use of force and fear to coerce people into siding with them. Fearing that their account would not be taken seriously, the Soviets also introduced over 100 new witnesses who testified about a variety of different things ranging from the discovery of the graves to the type of work the Polish officers were supposedly doing in the Smolensk area.⁵⁸ Unfortunately the testimony of these new witnesses did not always line up with the official story or findings of the Burdenko Commission. Some of the more notable errors included the testimonies of several witnesses who claimed that the massacre had been carried out sometime in August of 1941 and not Septemeber-December as stated in the official Soviet version of events.⁵⁹ These types of inconsistencies and the many omissions from the Burdenko Commission's findings cast serious doubt on the Soviet story and the validity of the report. The International German report found many bodies had bayonet wounds from a distinctly Soviet style four cornered bayonet. The Soviets never mentioned this fact. The Soviets did mention that the bullets used in the shootings were manufactured in Germany. However, the Nazi report also mentioned this fact and it was later confirmed that the ammunition had been part of an order sent to the Soviets while the two countries had still been allies. The rope used to bind

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 136.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 137.

all of the officers' hands was confirmed as being made in the Soviet Union, yet this issue was never brought up in the final Soviet version of the story. For many the most damning omission by the Soviets was the conifers that had been planted on top of the graves. The Soviets never accounted for the trees and never tried to refute the findings of the German forester who had used the trees' rings to determine when they had been planted over the graves. Overlooking the glaring inconsistencies in this story the U.S. endorsed the Soviet claim of Nazi guilt, throughout the war, and never once officially questioned the Soviet version of the truth despite reports and information to the contrary.

The Balance Beam: The American Response to Katyn and the Severing of Relations

The revelation of the Katyn Massacre put the Americans and British into a precarious position: one ally had massacred the officer corps of a fellow ally. Western leaders knew that the position they took on who was guilty of this massacre would have serious repercussions, and that it was important to balance the truth with the larger goals of war when deciding which story to endorse. While both countries knew of the missing officers, as early as 1941 for the British, neither country knew how to respond to the Nazi allegations. Initially both governments took a very tentative stand by refusing to comment or endorse one side or the other. The main goal of both sides during the weeks after the revelation was to maintain the alliance and keep the Soviet Union from making a separate peace with Germany.⁶⁰ This was an important strategic decision

⁶⁰ As unlikely as it seems today, there was great concern in the US and British camps that the Soviets would settle a separate peace with Germany. Stalin's willingness to conclude a pact with Hitler in 1939 and his anger at the Allied hesitance to invade Europe made many worry that he would once again cut a deal with Hitler. The presence of Soviet peace feelers in the first half of 1943 add credence to Allied concerns as Stalin seemed to have been seriously contemplated negotiating a "'breathing space' akin to the treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany in 1918, and spoke of giving Hitler the Baltic states, Belorussia, Moldovia, and part of the Ukraine." Additionally after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad the Soviets created a Free Germany Committee consisting of officers from Stalingrad and German Communists whose explicit purpose was to help defeat the Nazi regime from within Germany by encouraging Germans to surrender to the Soviets both individually and collectively. David Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37 & 108 and Andreas F. Lowenfeld, "The Free Germany Committee. An Historical Study," *The*

for Britain and the U.S. because at the time the Soviets were the only members of the alliance actively engaged with the Nazis in Europe and thus far had been bearing the brunt of the German onslaught. However, as information began to trickle in from Polish as well as independent sources, it became clearer that the evidence pointed very strongly to Soviet guilt.

The most important evidence against the Soviets was written by the British Ambassador to the Polish Government-in-Exile, Sir Owen O'Malley. On May 24, 1943, O'Malley sent a dispatch to Churchill's Foreign Minister with evidence of Soviet guilt as well as the moral implications of choosing to side with the Soviet story. The report was requested by Churchill, who wanted to have a complete view of the massacre and what the British government knew to date. O'Malley provides evidence from a variety of sources within the British government as well as personal Polish sources which provide damning though not definitive evidence of Soviet guilt. O'Malley chronicles every detail of the execution, from the warnings scratched into the cars that would take the Poles to their final resting place to every attempt made by the Poles to find their missing officers.⁶¹

While the evidence, argument, and discussion of Soviet inconsistencies are interesting, the most important part of the telegram is when he discusses the moral implications of handling this massacre and the need to maintain, "...cordial relations with the Soviet government..."⁶²

O'Malley recognized that, "unless the Russians are cleared of the presumption of guilt, the moral repercussions in Poland, in other occupied countries and in England of the massacre of Polish

Review of Politics, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Jul., 1952), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1404896> (accessed March 31, 2013), 352.

⁶¹ The O'Malley Telegram was found in the President's Secretary's File indicating that Hopkins thought it was important enough to flag so that the President would read it. While FDR never explicitly comments on the telegram we do know that it was eventually sent back to Britain as Churchill had requested indicating that it was read by at least one person in the White House. O'Malley to Eden, 24 May 1943, FO 371/34577.

⁶² *Ibid.*

officers may well have more enduring results than the massacre itself.”⁶³ In his conclusion to the dispatch, O’Malley wrote about the repercussions of hiding this event from the media and how regrettably this is the only option given the situation and how they will be using, “...the good name of England like the murderers used the little conifers to cover up a massacre; and in the view of the immense importance of an appearance of Allied unity and of the heroic resistance of Russia to Germany, few will think that any other course would have been wise or right.”⁶⁴ This is the first and only time, to date, that any member of the British or American government openly calls into question the idea of and implications of covering up the Katyn Massacre. The dispatch itself was very controversial in the British Foreign Office and many people did not want it circulated, even within the British government for fear that it might get out and upset the Soviet Union. In the end though, Churchill decided the document was too important to conceal and forwarded O’Malley’s “grim, well written story” and the accompanying annexes to President Roosevelt on August 13, 1943.⁶⁵ Recently released documents have confirmed that FDR did receive this dispatch, finally proving that both leaders were forced to consider the moral weight of their actions as they contemplated covering-up this massacre to protect the Soviets at the cost of Poland.⁶⁶

With O’Malley’s dispatch in his possession, FDR was left in a terrible quandary about how to handle the situation between the Soviet Union and Poland. In May 1943, when the Katyn revelations had left the future of the alliance up in the air, the Office of Strategic Services issued several special reports to the State Department concerning Katyn and its effects on the long term

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Message to President Franklin D. Roosevelt from Winston Churchill, 08/13/1943; *Great Britain- Churchill, Winston S., 1943-1943; Diplomatic Correspondence, compiled 1933-1945; President’s Secretary’s File (Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration), 1933-1945. National Archives at College Park, MD.*

⁶⁶ Recently declassified copy of letter held in PSF, dated as received by President’s office, *ibid.*

goals of the war. The first special report delineated between the long term and short term policies of the Allies moving forward with the war. For example, despite the statements by Churchill and Roosevelt after signing the Atlantic Charter in 1941, the special report assigned little importance to the new Polish border with the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ While originally these two Allied leaders had agreed not to allow territorial expansion, including Stalin in his agreement with the Poles in 1941, this report stated that the original Polish boundaries could not be realistically kept as the Soviets continued to win and advance on Berlin.⁶⁸ The report said that short term goals such as the Polish border question should not prevent the attainment of long term policy goals such as having the Soviets agree to some form of inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. According to this report, for Roosevelt especially, it was more important to try to “liberalize” the Soviet Union and bring it into the new United Nations than to recognize the territorial sovereignty of Poland. FDR hoped that bringing them into the United Nations would not only secure peace around the globe but also make the Soviets a better partner in the post-war world. In conclusion the report states, “To express it bluntly, if there is reasonable hope that a sympathetic gesture in the question of frontiers can consolidate the union of Russia with the

⁶⁷ The Soviet-Polish border issue was based on whether Poland’s eastern border would be what it was prior to 1939 or if it would be moved to the Curzon Line. The Curzon Line was created in the aftermath of World War I to serve as the demarcation between Poland and Bolshevik Russia. Originally designed to be the initial border, the line was disregarded when the Polish-Soviet War of 1920 broke out. With its victory, Poland pushed the boundary further east before a ceasefire was called. Capitalizing on the fact that the line had originally been drawn by a British Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, Stalin pushed for this line to be the new border of postwar Poland. The Poles, especially those based in London, did not want to concede all the land they had won in the 1920 war nor did they want to give up the city of Lwow, which had historically been a center for Polish cultural heritage. Additionally by moving their border to the Curzon Line, Poland would lose a large piece of its eastern territory in exchange for land in the conquered Germany. See Appendix A for map of Curzon Line and Polish Borders.

⁶⁸ Letter from Whitney H. Shepardson to the Honorable George A. Gordon Enclosing Copies of Reports on the Katyn Forest Affair and the Break of Diplomatic Relations Between Russia and Poland, 05/28/1943; 760c.61/2056-760c.61/2099 ½; *Central Decimal Files, compiled 1910-1963; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, MD*; 4.

democracies, and, in the long run, bring to full development a tendency to reestablish the primacy of man in the state, the price in short range concessions is not too high.”⁶⁹

Even in May of 1943, just weeks after the discovery of Katyn, some in the United States were contemplating sacrificing the primacy of Polish sovereignty and self-determination in order to achieve their broader long term goals for the post-war world, despite the commitment and ideals that had been laid in the Atlantic Charter and given the Allies a moral superiority over the Nazis. Two months after this report, U.S. Army Intelligence would receive further confirmation of Soviet guilt from an American POW taken to the graves by the Nazis. Major Donald Stewart was part of a crucial team taken to the graves by the Nazis to confirm their findings and show that the investigation was not tampered with or tainted in any way. While originally Stewart had tried his hardest to find fault with the Nazi findings, in secret coded messages sent back to U.S. Army Intelligence in July, 1943, Maj. Stewart confirmed that the Nazi investigation was untainted and more importantly that based on the evidence presented, the Soviets were the only ones guilty of the massacre. Maj. Stewart’s secret report to military intelligence is important not only because it provided firsthand affirmation of Soviet guilt, but also because this information would be suppressed by the Roosevelt administration in order to justify their support for the Soviet version of the truth. This would become one of many different ways in which the truth was hidden as the Roosevelt administration chose to put geopolitical necessities over moral issues such as who really carried out the Katyn Forest Massacre.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Katyn & Constituencies: The Domestic Cover Up and the Importance of Domestic Factors

“This is the people’s war, and to win it the people should know as much about it as they can. This Office will do its best to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, both at home and abroad.” Office of War Information Poster

The Stewart report is just one part of a much larger and protracted cover-up that the United States would carry out after officially accepting the Soviet story concerning guilt for the massacre. This cover-up, which followed the Nazi revelations in April 1943, would begin slowly and was fueled not only by the desire to maintain cordial relations with the Soviet Union, but also to pacify various domestic groups within the United States. Certain groups, specifically Polish-Americans, Slavic-Americans, and Catholics, were very distraught by the news from the Eastern Front, while other Americans seemed to be more concerned with winning the war than the issues of a country like Poland. However, while those affected and agitated by the discovery were a smaller group of the American population, because of their political and ethno-national loyalties the White House, and more specifically President Roosevelt, paid significant attention to the reactions and sentiments of these strongly Democratic groups which were a crucial part of his electoral coalition.⁷⁰ The importance of these groups cannot be overlooked when talking about the importance of Katyn to President Roosevelt who, like all politicians in democratic systems, was forced to consider re-election when handling his response to, and the decision to cover up, Soviet guilt.

This chapter seeks to paint an impressionistic picture of the American cover-up of Soviet guilt from available fragments. These fragments show a deliberate campaign to suppress information that could harm the Grand Alliance and Roosevelt’s ability to achieve his post-war goals. This picture will help to show how the actions of the cover-up were related to the various

⁷⁰ Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 160.

political groups that President Roosevelt sought to appease and keep in his political coalition. The expansive and complete cover up that the United States carried out from 1943 into the first years of the Cold War has not been heavily examined and requires investigation in order to understand the tone Roosevelt created concerning the Soviet Union's image. The various aspects of the cover-up ranged from active suppression of information and the truth by the Office of War Information to simply not reporting or acknowledging the existence of the cover-up or truth about Soviet guilt. Using the previous chapter as background on what was known, this chapter will show how and what the Roosevelt administration suppressed. Additionally, this chapter will argue that the purpose of this cover-up was twofold: 1) to maintain the alliance with the Russians and 2) to insulate Roosevelt from domestic concerns and preserve the loyalty of important voting constituencies which ensured his ability to prosecute the war as he saw fit and focus on his post-war goals. By examining the important constituencies that the cover-up was designed to placate, the importance of domestic factors in Roosevelt's thinking will be explored. In the end a complete picture of the cover-up and the domestic reasons behind it will help to illustrate the lengths the Roosevelt administration went to ensure the success of its post war vision over the truth about Katyn.

Influencing the Public: The Cover-Up of Katyn in the American Press and the Importance of Domestic Political Interests

Throughout the war many of FDR's advisors kept him updated on how relations with the Soviets, as well as the Poles, could impact various groups within the United States. This advice corresponds with the second reason Roosevelt sought to cover-up the truth about the Katyn Forest Massacre. For Roosevelt one of the most immediate concerns with the Katyn revelations was his ability to court and secure Polish, Slavic, and Catholic voters during the 1944 wartime election. Winning re-election ensured that he would be able to continue the war as he saw fit and

continue to work towards his ideal postwar world with the United States and Soviet Union leading the way together. Roosevelt and the U.S. government had worked hard to change the popular image of the Soviet Union so that they could justify cooperation with a regime that many thought to be just as barbaric as the Nazis and one the U.S. had historically opposed. President Roosevelt was frequently updated on American public opinion which informed him of issues such as, "...increased public confusion and disillusionment [underlined by original author] have developed as a result of: Events in Europe which the public interprets as British and Russian attempts to create 'spheres of influence' and as desertion of announced peace aims, such as the Atlantic Charter."⁷¹ These types of public opinion created issues for Roosevelt as he was continually balancing public opinion from a variety of groups while also trying to diplomatically handle delicate foreign policy issues. Some indicators made things easier for Roosevelt by specifying that, "Preponderant American opinion is not categorically opposed to Russian acquisition of territory in pre-1939 Poland: it is opposed to Russian acquisition of Polish territory without Polish consent."⁷² This sentiment would give FDR some room to maneuver. However, to make matters more difficult, many Eastern-Europeans in the United States were staunchly anti-Soviet making it very difficult for Roosevelt to reconcile this Democratic bloc with his friendly position towards the Soviet Union. In order to maintain this crucial Democratic-leaning bloc of voters FDR had to compete with the Polish Government in Exile which was continually working to mobilize voters and spent about \$1 million a year drumming up support for the London based government against the Soviet Union.⁷³ After the Nazi broadcast about Katyn, Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle dispatched a note to Secretary of State Hull and Under Secretary

⁷¹ Memorandum for the President: American Public Opinion on Recent European Developments, December 30, 1944; Departmental- Department of State; PSF; FDRL.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 190.

of State Sumner Welles concerning reports he had received that European political refugees were beginning to appeal to “[ethnic] nationals” within the United States to bring pressure on the State Department concerning recent developments in Eastern Europe.⁷⁴ The developments referred to by Assistant Secretary Berle are the Katyn revelations which are corroborated by the last line of his note which comments on how over 50% of the defense workers in the United States are Slavic.⁷⁵ In December 1943, a letter was sent to Assistant Secretary Berle by people within the State Department with the advice that he meet with a particular group of people at the White House to discuss the current situation in Europe since they represented, “four or five of the most powerful labor unions in the country, [and] have stood by us through thick and thin on foreign policy. There are enough Poles and other Eastern Europeans in them to occasion serious worry.”⁷⁶ Those within FDR’s administration understood the importance of these types of constituents and made sure that key members of the administration, like Berle, knew what was going on and could report to FDR on how his foreign policy and international events were impacting domestic politics. The steps taken by various people in the Roosevelt government to cover-up the massacre and suppress the idea of Soviet guilt helped ensure that Polish voters were not forced to choose between the Polish Government in Exile and President Roosevelt.

In addition to worrying about the Polish and Slavic communities, the FDR administration was also concerned with the views and electoral support of Catholics in the United States, many of whom felt strongly about the mistreatment of the Poles by the Soviet Union. In a letter from 1944, several prominent Catholic bishops, speaking on the behalf of their congregations and the majority of American Catholics, expressed their faith in the President and the importance of

⁷⁴ Memorandum for the President, Reply to letter from Catholic Archbishops, December 29, 1944; President’s Secretary’s File (PSF); Departmental, Box 75; FDR Library; Hyde Park.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Letter from A. Berle to Secretary of State, November 20, 1943; Manuscript Collections, Alfred Berle; Box 58; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library (FDR Library); Hyde Park.

justice in creating a postwar world.⁷⁷ For the bishops, their concern was centered on the Soviet Union's disregard for justice, its intolerance for classical liberal democratic ideals, and its subjugation of millions of Catholics in Eastern Europe.⁷⁸ Echoing a call that would emanate from within FDR's own State Department, the Catholic bishops stated that, "[We] are convinced that a strong stand for justice in our relations with the Soviet Union is a postulate for our winning of the peace and for setting up an international organization which will command the support of our people."⁷⁹ Sent after the 1944 election, the note never directly hints at the importance of the Catholic vote to the President, however, it is not difficult to understand why this letter was sent to the upper echelon of the administration, especially when taken in concert with the traditional support given to the Democrats by Catholics.

While this may seem speculative to some, reviewing the telegrams and communications between FDR and various leaders during the war reveals how important the 1944 election and maintaining constituents was to his wartime decisions. Roosevelt did not hide the importance of elections to his decisions from any of the world leaders, including Stalin. Late in 1944 FDR would confide in Stalin privately that he agreed with the contested Soviet borders from 1941 which included most of Stalin's territorial demands on Poland, but he could not recognize them at the time because of the upcoming 1944 election and Polish-American sentiment.⁸⁰ In 1944 while conversing with the new Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile about the long standing question of Polish borders Roosevelt responded, "I haven't acted on the Polish question because this is an election year. You as a democrat understand such things."⁸¹

⁷⁷ Memorandum for the President, Reply to letter from Catholic Archbishops, December 29, 1944; President's Secretary's File (PSF); Departmental, Box 75; FDR Library; Hyde Park.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, 202.

⁸¹ Paul Allen, *Katyn: Stalin's Massacre and the Triumph of Truth* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 228.

The 1944 election pitted FDR against the Republican Governor of New York Thomas Dewey. From the outset the election was very close, as many people were unsure about re-electing the ailing Roosevelt when many believed the war was nearly over. With the race for the presidency so close, FDR understood the importance of Polish and Eastern European voters to his campaign especially in key states like New York and Michigan. Both of these states were strongly contested by Dewey, who was born in Michigan and was a popular governor of New York. Having been notified earlier by Berle about the prominence of Eastern European voters in unions, FDR utilized his advantage with unions and went out of his way to court their vote. FDR made specific stops in Detroit, MI in September 1944 to speak to both the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Labor.⁸² Dewey also tried to court the labor vote by promoting the restoration of the exiled Polish government to power in Warsaw. At a campaign stop Dewey proclaimed to Polish voters that, "...one of the results of victory [be] the re-establishment of Poland as an independent and sovereign nation reborn upon a basis which will be permanent."⁸³ FDR had to work hard to win over the Polish-American vote and in October 1944 met with a delegation of Polish-Americans for 45 minutes who asked him to promise to prevent an alien or puppet government being imposed on Poland.⁸⁴ In response to this visit, and Dewey's claim, a spokesman for FDR reported that, "the aim and intent of the Administration of Franklin Roosevelt," was to bring about, "the complete restoration and protection of [Poland's] boundaries reflecting the history and aspirations of the Polish people."⁸⁵ Roosevelt's politicking worked when several weeks later Charles Rozmarek, the president of the Polish National Alliance, pledged support for FDR's campaign because of his assurances, "that he will see to it

⁸² Stanely Weintraub, *Final Victory: FDR's Extraordinary World War II Presidential Campaign* (Boston: De Capo Press, 2012), 115.

⁸³ David M. Jordan, *FDR, Dewey, and the Election of 1944* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 261.

⁸⁴ Jordan, *FDR, Dewey, the Election of 1944*, 262

⁸⁵ Ibid.

that Poland is treated justly at the peace conference.”⁸⁶ In the end the hard won Polish vote was crucial to Roosevelt who won New York by a mere 316,591 votes out of 6.2 million and Michigan by only 22,476 out of 2.1 million.⁸⁷ The Polish vote in these strongly ethnic states was crucial to FDR’s re-election and his ability to carry out his post-war vision. As a politician, Roosevelt always had re-election looming in his mind and maintaining the coalition that elected him to an unprecedented number of years as president.

Information conveyed to these constituency groups and the general public in the United States was primarily distributed through the Office of War Information (OWI). This organization, quoted at the outset of this chapter, was responsible for all approved communications from the White House on positions and opinions about the events of the war. Created by Executive Order 9182 in 1942, the OWI was designed to consolidate most wartime information into one agency, which according to Elmer Davis, the first director of the OWI and former CBS radio news analyst, “...would issue all news and background information essential to a clear understanding of the war.”⁸⁸ This task was managed through reviewing and approving all government sponsored radio broadcasts and motion pictures and coordinating the news with the Office of Censorship.⁸⁹ Additionally the OWI was responsible for combating enemy propaganda coming into the United States and “nailing the lie” as soon as it was told.⁹⁰ The main task of the OWI was to keep the American public informed about the war and ensure that the public knew why the U.S. was fighting. In order to do this, the OWI dictated war themes to all

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “United States Presidential Election Results, 1944,” United States Election Atlas. <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/> (accessed January 14, 2013).

⁸⁸ Betty Houchin Winfield, *FDR and the News Media* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 157 & Coatney, “The Katyn Massacre, 82.

⁸⁹ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 156-157.

⁹⁰ Lamar Seal Mackay, “Domestic Operations of the Office of War Information in World War II” (doctorate’s thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1966), 103.

branches of media about what topics were to be covered and which were to be neglected.⁹¹ One way this information was handled was through pamphlets published by the OWI that would answer the American peoples' questions about issues of war and respond with answers about the Atlantic Charter and the Declaration of the United Nations.⁹² This office and all its communications and publications were directly under the control of the President. The director reported directly to Roosevelt, providing FDR with the ability to manage, critique, and recommend changes to the stories and news coming out of the office.⁹³

With the Katyn revelations in April, and as the news trickled in from around the world, many in the U.S. turned to the OWI to see who the White House believed to be guilty. Five days after the release of the Nazi's Katyn information and the Soviet counterclaim, the official U.S. government position was to not take any position on the Katyn Massacre and actively counter any indictment of the Soviets.⁹⁴ At 11 a.m. on April 16, 1943, a memo was issued to all desks at the OWI by the control desk that the, "Purpose of Germans is clearly to disturb Polish-Soviet relations. This propaganda trick should be exposed as such in all languages so that it may be discredited to both occupied and Allied countries."⁹⁵ Interestingly the memo does not say the Nazi story is wrong but simply calls for the discrediting of the story and not its rebuttal. Later the same day another memo was issued emphasizing the necessity of "[showing] up this story for the

⁹¹Mackay, "Domestic Operations in the Office of War Information in World War II," 105.

⁹²Roger Burlingame, *Don't Let Them Scare You: The Life and Times of Elmer Davis* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1961), 211.

⁹³Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 161 & Report - Facts and Documents Concerning Polish Prisoners of War Captured by the U.S.S.R. During the 1939 Campaign, 12/01/1944; 319-5937-1; Permanent Retention Files, compiled 1918 - 1963; Department of Defense. Department of the Army. Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence. (07/10/1958 - 05/01/1987); Records of the Army Staff, 1903 - 2009; NACP.

⁹⁴Material Relating to the Discovery of the Bodies of Polish Officers Near Smolensk and Polish-Soviet Relations, 04/1943; 760c.61/4-943-760c.61/7-2144; Central Decimal Files, compiled 1910-1963; Department of State. Office of the Secretary. (09/1789-); RG 59; NACP and State Department Briefing Paper, Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington.

⁹⁵Report on alleged killing of 10,000 Polish officers by Russians in Smolensk area. OWI radio treatment, 04/19/1943; Katyn Massacre; Personal Files, compiled 1928-1978; Lilly, Edward P., 1910-1994; Edward P. Lilly Papers, 1928-1978; NACP.

propaganda trick it is” in addition to two stories to use in discrediting the Nazis.⁹⁶ On April 17 a new order was issued to stop focusing on the Katyn story because, “it was the feeling of the 2:30 p.m. meeting in Washington that the whole subject was dangerous and had better be dropped.”⁹⁷ The goal of this interference was to attempt to remain publicly neutral in the argument over blame, with the hope of a resumption of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union. While the preferred result was the resolution of the diplomatic conflict, in the end the most important issue for the United States was keeping the Soviet Union in the Allied camp and preventing them from settling a separate peace with Hitler.

This position would be maintained throughout the federal government. However, beginning in August 1943, the OWI and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began to actively engage in silencing radio commentators who voiced the opinion that the Soviets were guilty of the Katyn Massacre.⁹⁸ This would continue throughout the war with the two most notable instances occurring in Detroit, Michigan and Buffalo, New York. WJBK in Detroit and WBNY in Buffalo were broadcasting in Polish to mainly Polish constituencies and were continually reporting on the Katyn discovery and facts that indicated that the Soviets might be guilty.⁹⁹ In response to these actions the OWI and FCC reached out to the Wartime Foreign Language Radio Control Committee for help in solving this problem and stopping the disc

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ This information was not uncovered until the 1950s when a U.S. House of Representatives Investigative Committee was convened. This investigation lasted several years and is one of the key events in the Katyn saga as it was the first time the U.S. formally admitted that the Soviets were guilty of the Katyn Forest Massacre and that detailed the deceptive actions taken by the U.S. Government from 1941-1946. Rep. Madden, who chaired the committee, and the majority of the other members all represented strongly Polish districts ironically illustrating the importance of constituency in dealing with international relations. Final Report (House Report No.2505) of House of Representatives Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre (Madden Commission) 9(82d Congress, 1st and 2d Session, 1951-1952).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

jockeys.¹⁰⁰ Together these organizations put pressure on the station owners to suppress the disc jockeys, Marian Kreutz and Kazimierz Soron, and force them to stick strictly to the approved news about Katyn transmitted over the wire service.¹⁰¹ While these actions were not explicitly sanctioned by the Office of Censorship, which usually had wartime control over these types of issues, the FCC had no jurisdiction over the radio stations and was forced to use license renewal as a way to force the stations into compliance.¹⁰² According to testimony given by the OWI, the rationale behind these decisions was to prevent an “ill-fated uprising in Poland” in addition to wanting to keep Polish-Americans from lessening their cooperation with the Allied war effort.¹⁰³ These excuses for censoring are very weak, as there was little chance of the Poles switching to the side of Hitler, and it was even less likely that an uprising would be attempted in Poland when the Polish Government in Exile had forbidden its army and resistance groups from acting because of the Katyn accusations. The reasoning of the OWI points to several convenient excuses designed to mask the attempts by the Roosevelt administration to suppress coverage of Katyn and the guilt of the Soviets.

Americans at the Graveside: The Reports of Stewart & Van Vliet

During the fiasco following the Katyn revelations, the United States was supposedly entirely dependent on reports from Polish and German sources when talking about the actual graves and what the evidence showed. However, the recent declassification of Katyn documents

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. The 1952 Madden Commission investigation requested information from all branches of the federal government in order to understand the depths of the Katyn cover-up and how much information was suppressed. The Office of Censorship received multiple requests from the Madden Commission for specific documents concerning not only the Polish disc jockeys but also other stories of censorship concerning the truth about Katyn. In many instances the Madden Commission attempts were thwarted by red tape and classified documentation. All Office of Censorship WWII submission sheets were held under Presidential seal and could not be released without Presidential consent. To date these same submission sheets are still held under Presidential seal. Memorandum-Policy Concerning Office of Censorship WWII Submission Sheets, *04/15/1952*; 319-5937-3-2; Permanent Retention Files, compiled *1918-1963*; Department of Defense. Department of the Army. Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence. (07/10/1958-05/01/1987); Records of the Army Staff, *1903-2009*; NACP.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

in the National Archives has shown that contrary to scholarly belief, the U.S. received a report in July 1943 from an American officer taken to the graveside by the Nazis. Traditionally in Katyn literature Major Donald Stewart has only been seen as the man who went with the more highly documented Lieutenant Colonel John Van Vliet to the graves. However, Maj. Stewart was actually a registered code user with U.S. military intelligence (G-2) and sent coded messages back to G-2 upon returning to his P.O.W. camp from the graves in May 1943.¹⁰⁴ Maj. Stewart reported to military intelligence through coded letters to his mother in Detroit that, “German claims regarding Katyn substantially correct in opinion of Van Vliet and myself.”¹⁰⁵ These messages were subsequently forwarded to Washington and provided first hand acknowledgement in July 1943 that Western forensics believed the Soviet Union was guilty of massacring the Polish officers.¹⁰⁶ The classification of the coded Stewart letters in May 1943 illustrates that less than three months after hearing about the graves the U.S. government chose to suppress this information in favor of a version of the truth that favored their most important wartime ally.

The most documented and publicized suppression of information about Katyn involved the other American officer, a West Point graduate who was taken from his prisoner-of-war camp by the Nazis to see the Katyn graves.¹⁰⁷ In May 1943 Lieutenant Colonel John Van Vliet was taken, along with Maj. Stewart and several British officers, to inspect the Katyn graves and hopefully corroborate the Nazi allegations and story. These officers were granted full and

¹⁰⁴This information is newly available because of the National Archives Katyn Declassification Project. Previously the status of Maj. Stewart was classified and not a part of the Katyn narrative. His coded messages add to the story by providing more information about what the U.S. government knew and who people believed was guilty of the atrocity even during the early days of the revelation. Maj. Stewart was called to testify before the Madden Commission on his role at the graves and never mentions his position as a code user, even when under oath. Memorandum – AKAAG-M 1954, 09/10/1950; 319-5937-4-4; Permanent Retention Files, *compiled 1918-1963*; Department of Defense. Department of the Army. Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (07/10/1958-05/01/1987); Records of the Army Staff, Record Group 319; NACP.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 162.

unrestricted access to the grave site by the Nazis and observed everything. Lt. Col. Van Vliet would report that the group witnessed the excavation and examination of multiple bodies from the mass graves while members of the Polish Red Cross watched and took part in the exams.¹⁰⁸ Van Vliet recalls in his report the thorough examination of all pockets in order to find any identifying articles and how, “the search of the bodies was very thorough, including removal of shoes or boots where it was possible. (sometimes the whole leg from the knee down came off with the boot)”¹⁰⁹ The group viewed every imaginable source of evidence from bullet holes in the skulls of the deceased to a variety of letters, news clippings, and diaries which had been found on the Polish officers.¹¹⁰ At the end of the trip, the Germans tried to get a statement from the group but all of the men refused understanding, “...that we were involved in an international mess with terrific political implications.”¹¹¹ According to Van Vliet, he and his fellow servicemen, “pursued every line of attack to weaken the German story and avoid the conclusion that the Russians had done the killing...But the sum of circumstantial evidence, impressions formed at the time of looking at the graves, what I saw in peoples faces ---all forces the conclusion that Russia did it.”¹¹² Many of the men who were brought with Van Vliet by the Germans were not medical personnel. However, a British medical captain was with the Americans and arrived at the same conclusion based on his examination of the bodies and the Nazi methodology.¹¹³ None of this information was reported until the end of the war and Van Vliet’s liberation from his prisoner of war camp.

¹⁰⁸ John H. Van Vliet, Jr, Lieutenant Colonel to F.L. Parks, Major General, Chief of Information, 11 May, 1950 (Van Vliet to Parks, 11 May 1950); Records Relating to Poland, 1941-1952 (Records Relating to Poland); Officer-in-Charge Polish, Baltic, and Czechoslovak Aff.(OIC PBC); General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (RG 59); NACP

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Van Vliet to Parks, 11 May 1950; Records Relating to Poland; OIC PBC; RG 59; NACP.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Upon his release in 1945, Van Vliet filed a report on his experience at the Katyn graves with U.S. Army Intelligence in Berlin. Upon hearing what Van Vliet was saying he was immediately flown to Washington D.C. to recount his story and opinion to the assistant chief of staff for intelligence, Major General Clayton Bissell. After dictating his story Van Vliet was handed a gag order by Maj. Gen. Bissell forbidding him from talking about his experience at the graves and who he believed was guilty.¹¹⁴ The Van Vliet Report, as it would be called, was classified as top secret and subsequently was “deep-sixed” in the military intelligence archives by Maj. Gen. Bissell who said the material had the potential to embarrass an important ally during a crucial time in U.S.-Soviet relations.¹¹⁵ Maj. Gen. Bissell also admitted that what happened to the Van Vliet Report happened to many anti-Soviet reports because of the importance of the Soviet Union to the United Nations and the desire to keep them in the war and keep American popular support for the Soviets intact.¹¹⁶ The Van Vliet Report was suppressed even after the conclusion of the war as government officials continued to place more emphasis on securing Russian support than dealing with moral and ethical issues such as the guilt for the Katyn Forest Massacre.

The Ignored Personal Emissary: George Earle

Many of the active attempts to cover up the Katyn Forest Massacre took place with some distance from President Roosevelt. As a result no direct evidence has ever been found in which he explicitly ordered his administration to hide the truth about Soviet guilt. While many of the examples discussed above show some connection to FDR or those high up in his administration, the case of George Earle shows how FDR personally handled the issue of the cover-up and the truth with a close personal friend. While initially a Republican, Earle had first endorsed FDR for

¹¹⁴ Final Report, Madden Commission, 1952.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

President in July 1932 and became a Democrat spending the next thirteen years of his life serving the President.¹¹⁷ Earle was never a member of the State Department; instead he served as Roosevelt's personal emissary to the Balkans and reported directly to the President from the American embassy in Turkey. When the Nazis uncovered and disclosed the graves in the Katyn Forest, FDR asked Earle to use his contacts in the Balkans and Poland to try and discover who was really responsible for the massacre. From the embassy Earle would send hundreds of pages of material from his sources in the region directly to Roosevelt. Earle sent several booklets of a varied nature to both FDR and his assistant Harry Hopkins dating back to August 1943, several with pictures displaying the Katyn graves as well as the documentary evidence found in the victim's pockets.¹¹⁸ One collection of documents sent by Earle to the White House included a report from a former Gestapo officer who wanted to defect to the American side. While the officer talked at length about the rise of Russia, he also posited a daring question which Earle endorsed; "Is America giving its life blood to exchange one bunch of gangsters for another as masters of Europe, and as a world menace?"¹¹⁹ Initially Earle's reports were not definitive about Soviet guilt, but as his sources had time to investigate he became surer of Soviet guilt and provided pages upon pages of proof. This steady stream of information from Earle, which only told Roosevelt things he did not want to hear, caused Roosevelt to push Earle's advice to the side in handling the Soviet Union. As Earle was being pushed out by Roosevelt, he sent a letter to FDR's daughter to forward to her father letting her know that, "...before I am out of the picture, unless your father objects I want to present the following to the members of Congress and to the

¹¹⁷ George Earle to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1 October 1943; Subject-George Earle (Subj-Earle); President's Secretary's Files (PSF); Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY (FDRL).

¹¹⁸ Katyn, A Record Booklet; Box 138; Harry Hopkins Papers, FDRL. The complete booklet can be seen in Appendix B.

¹¹⁹ George Earle to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 24 March 1944; Subj.-Earle; PSF; FDRL.

American people.”¹²⁰ The following Earle referenced was a long list of what he had observed about the Russians culminating in his key point that, “I shall point out why Russia today is a far greater menace than Germany ever was, because of its manpower, natural resources, prospects for Bolshevizing Europe, including Germany, and because of its millions of unpaid fifth columnists.”¹²¹ FDR immediately replied, “I not only do not wish/but I specifically forbid you to publish any information or opinion about an *ally* [emphasis added] that you may have acquired while in office...”¹²² The result of Earle’s request was a prompt severance of association with the White House and Roosevelt, who disavowed his long time friend.¹²³ Additionally Earle was transferred from his powerful position with expansive network to the remote island of Samoa in the South Pacific, where he served until the end of the war without ever publishing his views and facts concerning Katyn and Soviet guilt.¹²⁴

Even before banishing him to the South Pacific, President Roosevelt refused a request by Earle to be transferred to Germany or another country in Europe so as to continue his work on Eastern Europe, the Soviets, and Katyn.¹²⁵ Earle was informed that he did not get the position because of his “anti-Russian attitude” or as he eloquently put it, “In other words, because I told [President Roosevelt] the truth about conditions in Russia and countries occupied by Russia, that near-Bolshevik group of advisers around the President had persuaded him to force me out of the picture.”¹²⁶ In accepting his President and friend’s decision to force him out of office Earle sent FDR a final letter professing that, “...my gratitude for the honors you have conferred upon me and made possible for me compels me to give you my word of honor that I shall issue no public

¹²⁰ George Earle to Mrs. Boettiger, 21 March 1945; Subj.-Earle; PSF; FDRL.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Franklin D. Roosevelt to George Earle, March 24, 1945; Subj.-Earle; PSF; FDRL.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt to George Earle, March 29, 1945; Subj.-Earle; PSF; FDRL.

¹²⁵ George Earle to Mrs. Boettiger, 21 March 1945; Subj.-Earle; PSF; FDRL.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

statement of any kind...I shall certainly do all in my power in Pennsylvania to have you reelected.”¹²⁷ Earle was a staunch supporter of FDR till the end and agonized over having to break with his long time friend over this issue. Earle’s final words to the President were:

Your friendship for me has been one of the most valued possessions in my life. When I wrote you that [letter about publishing his views] I realized it might cost me that friendship. You may know, therefore, when I deliberately took such a risk how intense and sincere were my feelings and convictions.¹²⁸

The decision to push Earle out of the picture originated with President Roosevelt who was willing to ostracize a close friend in order to protect his alliance with the Soviet Union and prevent the American people from knowing the truth not only about the Katyn Forest Massacre, but also the true nature of the Soviet Union. These conscious efforts to cover-up and suppress information about Soviet guilt for the Katyn Forest Massacre occurred sporadically throughout the war as a result of perceived threats to the Grand Alliance and consequently Roosevelt’s postwar geopolitical goals. During this time Roosevelt was continually meeting and conversing with Stalin and Churchill as they planned for the ultimate defeat of Germany, as well as what the postwar world would look like. The aforementioned cover-up and suppression that occurred during the final years of the war, when taken in concert with the decisions and beliefs of Roosevelt at the important conferences at Tehran and Yalta, illustrate the primacy he placed on his postwar geopolitical vision, and his willingness to subjugate the truth about Katyn and Poland to achieve those goals.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸ Letter from George Earle to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 26 March 1945; Subj.-Earle; PSF; FDRL.

Chapter Three:

The Big Picture: Katyn and Poland at the Tehran and Yalta Conferences

The American cover-up of Soviet guilt for the Katyn Forest Massacre also took place during two of the most important conferences of World War II. The conferences at Tehran and Yalta were pivotal in the development of the Grand Alliance, but also played an important role in the treatment of the future of Poland by the Roosevelt administration. It is at these two conferences, especially at Yalta, that Roosevelt's willingness to sacrifice Poland for his post-war international peace organization became clear. Roosevelt compromised the democratic ideals laid out in the Atlantic Charter in favor of not upsetting Stalin and his agreement to join the United Nations. Complicating these conferences was the decision by Stalin to recognize the Lublin Government as the official government of the newly liberated Poland. Placing himself directly at odds with Roosevelt, who had committed himself to the Polish Government in Exile, Stalin's recognition made it clear that Poland would be a central focus of the Yalta Conference, as both sides wanted to emerge from this conference with a strong alliance.

The Katyn Forest Massacre played a very indirect role in both of these conferences, its exposure having occurred only months before the beginning of Tehran. However, connected to the Katyn issue was the future of Polish borders and what type of government would rule post-war Poland. Katyn and the Polish decision to petition the International Red Cross provided the pretext for the Soviet Union to sever relations with the Polish Government in Exile, making it easy for them to implant the Lublin Committee as a replacement government. This, coupled with the recognition extended to the Lublin Committee by the Soviet Union, created a crisis over which government would assume power after the war and represent the Polish people. The debate over government was even more important because of the ongoing debate over what the borders of post-war Poland would look like. The Polish Government in Exile insisted that Poland

should maintain her pre-war borders, while the Lublin Committee was willing to cede half of eastern Poland to the Soviet Union in return for compensation from German territory. These were the issues facing Roosevelt as he sat down with Stalin at Tehran and Yalta and tried to balance the future of Poland, and subsequently the Polish-American vote, against his goals of creating a post-war international peace organization based on American-Soviet cooperation. In the end, Roosevelt would choose these post-war goals over the future of Poland.

This chapter examines Roosevelt's handling of Poland at the Tehran and Yalta Conferences with an emphasis on the concessions he decided to make to Stalin in order to ensure the creation of the United Nations Organization. While moving away from the Katyn Forest Massacre, this chapter will connect Katyn to the issue of Polish borders and government in order to further highlight how willing Roosevelt was to sacrifice Poland for post-war aims. An exploration of both conferences and the situation surrounding them will help to illustrate the conscious decision by Roosevelt to subjugate the moral principles surrounding the future of Poland in favor of his own vision for the post-war world.

The Tehran Conference

The Tehran Conference began on November 28, 1943, only seven months after the Katyn revelations and shortly after the beginning of the Roosevelt administration's attempts to mitigate the damage the incident caused to the Grand Alliance. To complicate the situation President Roosevelt arrived in Tehran before the U.S. invasion of Europe, during a push by the Soviet Union which was turning the tide of war in the east in Allied favor with victories at Stalingrad and Kursk.¹²⁹ The success of the Soviets made it very likely that the Red Army would liberate Poland and Eastern Europe, putting Roosevelt at a marked disadvantage.¹³⁰ Roosevelt's

¹²⁹ Allen, *Katyn*, 250.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

weakness was increased by the difficult aforementioned re-election campaign. As a result of the 1944 election, FDR was willing, at least in the short term, to subordinate Europe's political interest to the primary need to keep Stalin in the war at all costs.¹³¹

On his way to Tehran, Roosevelt received a memo from his Secretary of State that had been sent to him by the Polish Government in Exile, which was not represented at Tehran. In their memo the Poles expressed their fears as the Soviets approached Poland's eastern border and their hope that FDR would push for a resumption of Polish-Soviet relations prior to the entry of the Red Army into Poland.¹³² The Exiled Government reaffirmed to FDR that they were not willing to negotiate on Poland's eastern border because, "1. Poland has never given up the fight against Germany since 1939 and is fully entitled to emerge from the war without reduction of territory 2. Soviet claims to Eastern Poland comprise half of total Polish territory and contain important centers of Polish national life."¹³³ This strong stance by the Government in Exile was not a politically savvy move given the fact that the contested eastern parts of Poland did not contain large numbers of ethnic Poles, but rather were a mix of Poles, White Russians and Ukrainians.¹³⁴ Additionally the Poles were afraid to negotiate or concede to the Soviets because, "...the absence of effective guarantees of Poland's independence and security on the part of the United States and Great Britain would be sure to lead to ever new demands [from the Soviet

¹³¹Fraser J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130.

¹³² Foreign Relations of the United States diplomatic papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran (FRUS-Cairo & Tehran), Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office (USGPO), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1943CairoTehran>, 309.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The land the Poles were so passionately demanding stay part of Poland were lands that had actually been taken from the Soviet Union during a war with the Soviets which lasted from 1919-1921. The Soviets harbored deep grievance over this loss of territory during the fledgling years of the Soviet Union, especially Stalin, who served in this war with Poland. As a result of the war, Poland and Bolshevik Russia divided the territories of Ukraine and Belarus leaving 5 million Ukrainians and 1 million Belarusians in the contested portions of Eastern Poland where there were between 2-3 million Poles. (Istavan Deak, "Could Stalin Have Been Stopped?" *New York Review of Books*, March 21, 2013 and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 7.)

Union.]”¹³⁵ The final point the Poles wanted to express to Roosevelt was that Soviet attempts to justify their position with honest elections were not, “a genuine expression of the will of the population inhabiting these territories in view of the ruthless methods applied there today...”¹³⁶ The purpose of this memo was very clear, as it laid out the Polish Government in Exile’s views on Poland’s future if relations were not resumed with the Soviets before the Red Army entered Polish lands or they were not allowed to represent themselves at meetings which would determine the fate of Poland.¹³⁷ By making these strong claims the Poles appeared to be very uncompromising and had somewhat unrealistic expectations concerning their power and entitlement, as well as what Roosevelt would be willing to do on their behalf. This memo clearly illustrates the pressure being placed on Roosevelt by the Poles, who expected him to stand in their stead and defend the future of Poland when meeting with Stalin and Churchill.

Upon arriving in Tehran, FDR first met with Stalin on November 29, 1943. This was a private meeting between the two men and one Roosevelt had been trying to organize for some time. During this meeting President Roosevelt explained to Stalin in detail his idea for the United Nations as well as his separate concept for the Four Policemen.¹³⁸ FDR explained both concepts at length, highlighting the global reach of the United Nations as a way to bind all the countries of the world together to promote peace.¹³⁹ Stalin was very concerned about the ability of the United Nations to control the war capability of countries like pre-war Germany, and Roosevelt provided detailed examples of how the Four Policemen would be the ones to stop someone like Hitler with

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ FRUS-Cairo & Tehran, 529. The Four Policemen was an idea that the United State, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China would ally themselves together and serve as policemen of their respective spheres around the world ensuring peace. These “Policemen” would work together to prevent the rise of issues such as Nazism and would use their collective military power to ensure world peace.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

their combined military power.¹⁴⁰ In his first meeting with Stalin, the first thing FDR wanted to talk about was his vision for the post-war world, implanting in Stalin's mind the importance of this idea to his American ally.

The issue of Poland would not emerge in the formal plenary sessions of the Tehran Conference until December 1, 1943. Interestingly though, it was covered during the first private meeting between Roosevelt and Stalin. According to notes from the meeting,

[FDR] said personally he agreed with the views of Marshal Stalin as to the necessity of the restoration of a Polish state but would like to see the Eastern border moved further to the west and the Western border moved even to the Oder River. [FDR] hoped, however, that the Marshal would understand that for political reasons outlined above, he could not participate in any decision here at Tehran or even next winter on this subject and that he could not publicly take part in any such arrangement at the present time.¹⁴¹

During this meeting with Marshal Stalin, FDR expressed his interest in having some sort of election in the Baltic States or an "expression of the will of the people" to highlight the people's choice to join the USSR.¹⁴² After these remarks about Poland, Roosevelt agreed to Soviet control of the Baltic States, even though he acknowledged there were American voters of Baltic descent in the United States who would object.¹⁴³ The agreements FDR made with Stalin during this meeting went against everything the Polish Government in Exile had asked. Roosevelt conceded territory in the east and even asked for some sort of election so as to legitimize the government which would take over Poland. After all of this talk about Poland, Roosevelt shifted topics and returned to his requests about the United Nations Organization. It is not difficult to see that Roosevelt began the conversation placating Stalin's concerns about Poland so as to have him do

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ FRUS-Cairo & Tehran, 138.

¹⁴² FRUS-Cairo & Tehran, 595.

¹⁴³ Harbutt, *Yalta*, 132.

the same thing when FDR's largest concern came up later in the conversation. FDR's tactic seemed to have worked as Stalin changed his mind and said, "...that after thinking over the question of the world organization as outlined by the President, he had come to agree with the President that it should be world-wide and not regional."¹⁴⁴ By giving ground to Stalin on Poland, FDR believed he was able to convince the Soviet leader to join in his vision of a world-wide United Nations Organization.

Later that day Roosevelt and Stalin were joined by Churchill for a Tripartite Political Meeting. During this meeting, Stalin informed his western allies that the reason the Soviet Union severed relations with the Polish Government in Exile was, "not because of a whim but because the Polish [*Poles*] had joined in the slanderous propaganda with the Nazis."¹⁴⁵ This is the only time Katyn emerges during either the Tehran or Yalta Conferences explicitly, and is used by Stalin to discount the London-based exile government. Later in the meeting Stalin expressed an interest in working with a sympathetic Polish government that was joined in the struggle against the Nazis. However, Stalin questioned whether the Polish Government in Exile was such an ally.¹⁴⁶ While this was the only time Katyn explicitly emerged, a jest that could have been taken as an allusion to Katyn was made by Roosevelt during one of the most interesting dinners of the conference. At this meal Stalin joked that in order to keep Germany from rising again, 50,000 Nazi soldiers should be shot after the war. Churchill was enraged by this comment and Stalin's blatant disregard for human life while Roosevelt replied with his own callous joke, "I have a compromise to propose, not 50,000 but 49,000 should be shot."¹⁴⁷ While much has been made about how this comment references the scale of death and disregard for human life in World War

¹⁴⁴ FRUS- Cairo & Tehran, 138.

¹⁴⁵ FRUS- Cairo & Tehran, 142.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ FRUS- Cairo & Tehran, 554 & Simon Berthon and Joanna Potts, *Warlords: The Heart of Conflict 1939-1945* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2005), 222.

II, it is more important for the subtle signals it could have sent to Stalin and its tangential connection to Katyn. Coming just months after the revelations, this quip could easily have been seen by Stalin as FDR acknowledging what happened at Katyn as well as his willingness to let death on such a massive level go unpunished. This line is not usually associated with Katyn; however, given the new materials which prove how much FDR knew about the massacre before entering the conference, it is not difficult to associate this remark with Roosevelt's desire to go along with Stalin's wants in order to improve their relationship.

On the next to the last day of the conference, Churchill and Roosevelt met to discuss a plan for the future of Poland. During this meeting, the two Western leaders agreed not to wait to come up with a plan for Poland together with the Poles, but instead to create their own plan for Poland and then impose it upon the Poles after leaving the conference. This decision ran contrary to what the Poles had hoped that FDR would do as their representative and showed willingness on both countries' part to place their own ideas and vision ahead of that of an ally.¹⁴⁸ The next day Roosevelt mentioned negotiating on Polish-Soviet relations during the final meeting of the conference, and Stalin exploded saying, "Yesterday there was no mention of negotiations with the Polish government. Yesterday it was said that the Polish government must be directed to do this and that!"¹⁴⁹ The conclusion of the Tehran Conference left the future of Poland up in the air, as no agreement was reached on how the issue would be handled. During the conference, though, FDR exhibited an incredible willingness to sacrifice Polish desires in favor of his own vision, a desire that could have possibly influenced Stalin's decisions during the pivotal months in between Tehran and Yalta in which the future of the post-war Polish government became more contested.

¹⁴⁸ Allen, *Katyn*, 251.

¹⁴⁹ Allen, *Katyn*, 252.

1944, The Swelling of the Tide: The Lead-up to Yalta and the Lublin Government

The year 1944 saw many a conflict and much confusion over the future of Polish-Soviet borders. The failure of the Tehran Conference to reach any concrete conclusions about any of the Polish questions left the situation of the Polish Government in Exile in limbo. One of the most important events to the future of Poland and the London based government occurred in August 1944. As the Red Army approached Warsaw, the Polish Underground and Polish Home Army began to plan an uprising that would install a Polish political authority before the Soviets were able to liberate the city and implant the Lublin Committee.¹⁵⁰ On July 29, 1944, as the Red Army neared the city, Soviet radios began broadcasting and calling for an uprising against the Nazis, which they said would be subsequently reinforced by the Soviets.¹⁵¹ The Warsaw Uprising began two days later as members of the Polish Army and Warsaw resistance groups began to raid and attack Nazi outposts within the city. The poorly armed and supplied Polish fighters took heavy losses and could not compete with the battle tested Wehrmacht, which had better weapons and supplies. As the uprising began to flounder, the Red Army stopped its advance before reaching the city and never came to the aid of the uprising.¹⁵² Polish leaders began to clamor for aid for the fighters in Warsaw but received no help from the Soviets.¹⁵³ The lack of aid led to the

¹⁵⁰ Robert Forczyk, *Warsaw, 1944: Poland's Bid for Freedom*. (New York, NY: Osprey Publishing, Ltd., 2009.) 13.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² The debate continues today about whether or not the Red Army intentionally stopped short of Warsaw or was actually held up because of supply issues. Even Roosevelt apologists, like Costigliola, believe that, "Though the Red Army did need to pause, it probably could have taken Warsaw by late August." Documents from the Soviet archives do not provide clear answers to this question even though the Soviets insisted that it was a tactical supply issue. However, the actions of the Soviets when it came to supplying the Polish Uprising make it very clear they did not intend to support the Poles, making it easy to believe their halting before the city was designed to eliminate Polish resistance. (Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, 218.)

¹⁵³ When the Soviets refused to aid the Poles in Warsaw, they appealed to the U.S. government who agreed to airdrop supplies into the beleaguered fighters. However, there was not a U.S. airbase close enough to Poland to allow for fighter cover for the B-17 Flying Fortresses and the Soviets would not allow the U.S. to use airbases in the Ukraine to help the Poles. The Soviet refusal to allow the use of airbases makes it even clearer that the Soviets did not want to help the Warsaw Uprising, and wanted the Polish fighters to be eliminated. (Forczyk, *Warsaw 1944*, 13 & Włodzimierz Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, ed. Barbara Harshav (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 89 & 95)

eventual crushing of the Warsaw Uprising by the Wehrmacht which was able to eliminate the majority of the Polish Underground and Home Army. This loss was crippling to the Polish Government in Exile, which had hoped that the uprising would install a pro-London based government. Instead the London Government lost its only military power in Poland. The blow dealt by this defeat destroyed the Polish Government in Exile's bargaining power as they lost their main source of leverage concerning their place within post-war Poland. With nothing to really contribute to negotiations or the struggle against Germany, it was much easier for the London based government and their desires to be pushed to side when the future of Poland was being negotiated.

With the loss of their direct influence in Poland, the Polish Government in Exile worked hard to make their desires known to Roosevelt, especially since they were never present at the conferences where Poland's future was decided. In October of 1944, President Roosevelt once more received a letter from the Polish Prime Minister Mikolajczyk pleading for the President to ensure that Poland was able to keep its eastern territory.¹⁵⁴ By now news had trickled back to the Poles about FDR's apparent willingness to sacrifice Poland, and Mikolajczyk reminded the President of his statement in June 1943 promising the historic, cultural city of Lwow to the Poles.¹⁵⁵ In response FDR wrote to the Polish Prime Minister that, "...if a mutual agreement on [Polish borders], including the proposed compensation for Poland from Germany is reached between the Polish, Soviet, and British governments, this Government would offer no objection."¹⁵⁶ In the same letter Roosevelt reminded Mikolajczyk,

As you know, the United States Government is working for the establishment of a world security organization through which the

¹⁵⁴ *Foreign relations of the United States. Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*(FRUS- Malta & Yalta), U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1945>, 208.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 210.

United States together with the other member states will assume responsibility for general security which, of course, includes the inviolability of agreed frontiers.¹⁵⁷

FDR's response clearly placed the onus for border negotiations back on the Poles who up till this point had stubbornly refused to give any of their territory to the Soviet Union. The second part of his note served to ensure the Poles that the "...effective guarantees of Poland's independence and security" from the 1943 letter were in fact being addressed and depended on FDR's vision of the United Nations, whose purpose would be the resolution of such issues and grievances. While the initiative returned to the Polish Government in Exile, many in the government did not want to concede lands to the Soviets in return for rewards in Germany. Many of the leaders refused this plan, and as a result Prime Minister Mikolajczyk resigned in protest of the stubbornness being shown by his fellow countrymen with regard to Poland's future borders. Mikolajczyk understood that Poland must make some concessions to Stalin in order to ensure their place in the new government, however, the others in the London based government refused to budge, making themselves appear to be hardliners to the West and the Soviets.

With the resignation of Mikolajczyk, the United States government began to re-evaluate its position on Polish borders. Acting Secretary of State, Edward Stettinius, believed that because of the loss of this more moderate and liberal prime minister, the Soviets would move to expand the power of the Lublin government in Poland and intensify their attempts to establish them as the sole political power in Poland.¹⁵⁸ An American Briefing Book Paper from the time suggested that the American government not recognize the Lublin Government, but accept the Curzon Line

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 212.

as the basis for Poland's future eastern border.¹⁵⁹ This was the first time the American government officially contemplated accepting the Curzon Line as Poland's new border, as the British had done for some time. However, the resolution of the border issue did not solve the problem that the United States and Great Britain recognized the Polish Government in Exile as the official government of Poland, while the Soviet Union recognized the Lublin Committee. In December 1944, FDR and Churchill commiserated with each other about the upcoming difficulties they would have over Poland at the Yalta (Crimea) Conference because each side recognized a different government.¹⁶⁰ These feelings were complicated on January 1, 1945, when Stalin officially recognized the Lublin Government, now called the Warsaw or Provisional Government, as the sole government of the newly liberated country of Poland. In response to Stalin's recognition of the Lublin Government, which up until this time had been operating as an interim government, President Roosevelt promised in his January 7, 1945 State of the Union speech, "to use our influence to the end that no temporary or provisional authorities in the liberated countries block the eventual existence of the peoples' right freely to choose the government and institutions under which, as free men, they are to live."¹⁶¹ This set of events would set up a massive conflict at Yalta in which Roosevelt was forced to choose between standing his ground on the moral questions surrounding Poland, or sacrifice them in order to achieve his grand vision for a peaceful post-war world under the United Nations Organization.

¹⁵⁹ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 230. Interestingly, this briefing book also posits that, "the future of the Polish state would in all probability be forced to depend completely on Moscow for protection against German Irredentist's demands and in fact might become a full-fledged Soviet satellite (*FRUS-Malta & Yalta*, 232)

¹⁶⁰ Warren F. Kimball, *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence III. Alliance Declining February 1944-April 1945*(*Churchill and Roosevelt III*) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 480-482.

¹⁶¹ Lloyd C. Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe, from Munich to Yalta* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 224.

The Yalta Conference: The Final Showdown

When Roosevelt arrived at the Black Sea resort town of Yalta on February 4, 1945, he was once more at a disadvantage, as he had been at Tehran. This time the Allies had successfully invaded the continent, however, the U.S. Army was 250 miles from Berlin while the Red Army was a mere 45 miles, making it very clear that the Red Army would reach Berlin first.¹⁶² Notes from that first day of the conference indicate that, "...it appears that the president was most concerned about confusing a statement of principles for the peace with Big Three interference in the internal politics of liberated areas. He did not wish to burden Allied unity with more than it could bear at the most vulnerable moment in the peace process."¹⁶³ Roosevelt seems to have known how important this conference was and how vital it was that the Big Three emerge from these meetings unified with a solid plan achieved.

The issue of Poland was discussed every day during the Yalta Conference, but the first important debate surrounding Poland began during the Fourth Plenary Meeting on February 7, 1945. During this meeting President Roosevelt proposed that the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union set up a new democratic government in Poland until the Polish people could choose for themselves via elections.¹⁶⁴ FDR wanted to create, "something new and drastic-like a breath of fresh air."¹⁶⁵ This was a radical change in that it essentially called for the dissolution of the Lublin Government supported by the Soviet Union, and the creation of an entirely new provisional government with free unfettered elections.¹⁶⁶ FDR hoped that by doing something like this it would be easier to bring in leaders from the Polish Government in Exile,

¹⁶² Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, 243.

¹⁶³ Gardner, *Spheres of Influence*, 226.

¹⁶⁴ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 718.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Robert Beitzell, *Tehran, Yalta, Potsdam: The Soviet Protocols* (Hattiesburg: Academic International, 1970), 91.

since the new government would be representative of all Polish political parties.¹⁶⁷ Towards the end of this meeting the Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, presented a six-point proposal for the handling of all the facets of the Polish question including a new Polish government.¹⁶⁸ Molotov's plan called for Allied recognition of the Provisional (i.e. Lublin) Polish Government, and the inclusion of some democratic leaders from London, a big step for the Soviet Union, which had refused to include members of the Polish Government in Exile.¹⁶⁹ This plan would be the basis for the rest of negotiations as the Big Three decided the fate of Poland. One of the roadblocks to this plan was removed earlier in the day during a meeting between Roosevelt and Stalin. The issue of Soviet involvement in the Pacific theater, after the defeat of the Nazis, had the potential to derail the entire proceedings as the U.S. hoped to bring in Red Army troops to what they believed would be a bloody final push to take the main Japanese home islands. In order to secure a Soviet commitment to enter the war with Japan, Roosevelt made multiple concessions to Stalin including granting territorial acquisitions from Japanese lands and control over Manchurian railroads in China, without consulting the Chinese.¹⁷⁰ The concessions, which were eerily similar to ones made on Poland, may have alleviated some of Stalin's anxieties about the creation of an entirely new Polish government.¹⁷¹

The Fifth Plenary Session on February 8, 1945 began with all sides agreeing to the Curzon Line as the eastern border of postwar Poland.¹⁷² With this issue now out of the way, the members directed their attention to the issue of Polish governance. It is during this session that Roosevelt agreed to withdraw his recognition of the London based government if Stalin would

¹⁶⁷ Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, 248.

¹⁶⁸ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 176.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Harbutt, *Yalta*, 299.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 777.

accept his proposals for the Molotov plan.¹⁷³ This was the first time Roosevelt agreed to withdraw support from the Government in Exile in favor of a combined government which included elements of the Lublin Committee. Stalin willingly accommodated Roosevelt, though Molotov brought into question one of FDR's proposals for creating a new presidential commission. FDR's proposal had been to create a commission of three Polish leaders who would represent the future Polish presidency.¹⁷⁴ These leaders would form a government consisting of members of the current Warsaw/Lublin government in addition to other democratic groups to form an interim government with the purpose of holding elections to create a new Polish Government of National Unity.¹⁷⁵ For Roosevelt, this was the ideal arrangement because it helped bring about elections that would legitimize the permanent government in Poland and bring in people from outside the Lublin government. However, Molotov protested, saying, "It would be better to talk on the basis of the existing situation and then how to improve it. Therefore, my conclusions are how to enlarge and by what basis the national council."¹⁷⁶ This proposal prevented the creation of a new government and kept Lublin in place with only a few members of the exiled government included. The meeting adjourned with this issue unsettled and both Roosevelt and Molotov's competing plans still available.

The Foreign Ministers meeting the next morning changed everything as Stettinius revealed Roosevelt's concessions on Poland. FDR had agreed to drop his Presidential council idea, and the new government that would go with it.¹⁷⁷ This one concession allowed for the continuation of the Lublin government with a slight reorganization to include some more

¹⁷³ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 786.

¹⁷⁴ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 792.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 787.

¹⁷⁷ Harbutt, *Yalta*, 302.

democratic members.¹⁷⁸ According to Secretary of State Stettinius these concessions were tied to, “the damage the various European problems, including Poland, were causing to the prospects for American postwar internationalism.”¹⁷⁹ These telling words show Roosevelt’s thinking as he was willing to sacrifice a new non-Communist dominated government in order to ensure that his vision for “American postwar internationalism” was achieved. Later that afternoon during the Plenary Session with the Big Three, Roosevelt insisted that he, “...would like to have some assurance for the six million Poles in the United States that these elections would be freely held.”¹⁸⁰ Once more FDR wanted to ensure that the actions of the Big Three would not damage his chances electorally and that he would have something to take back to the U.S. to show that they had worked to bring democracy to Poland. When the session ended, FDR had made serious progress towards securing elections in post war Poland and proving that he was working towards a democracy in the new Poland.

The Foreign Ministers meeting on the morning of February 10, 1945 saw the final concession to the Soviet Union. Stettinius told his British and Soviet counterparts that FDR was willing to drop his original call to have U.S. election observers check on the elections that would occur in Poland.¹⁸¹ This concession would allow the Soviet Union to carry out the elections how they saw fit, with no interference from the United States, bringing Poland’s earlier fears of rigged Soviet elections to fruition. Stettinius summed up the President’s actions once again, telling his fellow ministers that, “The President, however, is so anxious to reach an agreement that he is willing to make this concession.”¹⁸² This final concession shows how willing FDR was

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Harbutt, *Yalta*, 303.

¹⁸¹ Harbutt, *Yalta*, 304.

¹⁸² Ibid.

to sacrifice the basic principles of the Atlantic Charter, such as self-determination, in order to achieve an agreement that would benefit his vision for the world.

The result of all these negotiations was a set of final agreements approved by all members concerning the issues discussed at the conference, including Poland. The first line of the Polish section states that, “A new situation has been created in Poland as a result of her *complete liberation by the Red Army*. [emphasis added by author]”¹⁸³ This line completely ignored and invalidated the efforts made by the Polish people, Underground, and Army to help liberate Poland. With one line, the Big Three had brushed aside all of those killed fighting in Warsaw and around the country in favor of the now occupying force. As a result of the liberation by the Red Army, the communiqué called for the reorganizing of the Polish government, “on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad.”¹⁸⁴ This decision, taken without any input from Poles in Poland or abroad, went directly against Roosevelt’s earlier promise before Yalta that he would fight for a new government that was more representative of the Polish people and less dominated by Lublin Communists. At the time of the release of this document in February 1945, Poles would not know about FDR’s concessions on the creation of a new government. This, however, would make it abundantly clear to everyone that the new Polish government would be a continuation of the current government with several pro-Western Poles added instead of an entirely new government. Once created, this new government would be officially recognized by the Big Three as the sole government of Poland, and U.S. and British relations with the Polish Government in Exile would be severed permanently. Everything in this section of the communiqué went against the wishes of the Polish Government in Exile and many Poles around the world: the new

¹⁸³ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 938.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

government would be based on the pre-existing Soviet dominated model, no Polish input was used in formulating the agreements, and the eastern border of Poland was formally established as the Curzon Line. While many had hoped the conference would save Poland, it turned out to be where it was sacrificed for a post-war vision. FDR's concessions on Poland in favor of the United Nations Organization, made it easy for the Soviets to manipulate Poland and position themselves in such a way as to dominate their former neighbor and eventually turn it into a satellite state.

The final communiqué from Yalta and Roosevelt's actions during the conference make it very clear that he was willing to sacrifice Poland in favor of getting Soviet approval for the United Nations. His deliberate concessions and demands at this final conference were all geared towards his personal vision for the post-war world and nothing was going to prevent him from achieving it. With this final decree Poland's sovereignty fell to FDR's post-war goals just as the truth about the Katyn Forest Massacre did.

CONCLUSION

“You can’t invoke high moral principles where high moral principles do not exist. In international politics they don’t always apply”¹⁸⁵

Under President Roosevelt, the United States carried out a deliberate campaign to suppress and subvert the truth about Soviet guilt for the Katyn Forest Massacre. Driving Roosevelt’s willingness to sacrifice the truth, initially, was his desire to keep the Soviet Union in the war and prevent a separate peace with the Nazis. The Soviet’s early exit from World War I, under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, provided a clear example of Soviet actions during war when they were losing, and provided the foundation for fears about a separate peace. As the tide of war on the Eastern Front changed in favor of the Soviets, Roosevelt’s reason for covering up the truth about his most important ally’s actions evolved and centered on his desire to create a strong post-war organization founded upon a strong U.S.-Soviet relationship. This organization, which would become the United Nations, was deemed much more important by Roosevelt than the guiding principles of the Atlantic Charter, as well as the sovereignty and future of Poland. FDR wanted his experiment with the United Nations to work and to fill the gap in foreign relations that had been left by the failure of the League of Nations. His dedication to this cause was seen as more important than the truth not only about the Katyn Forest Massacre, but the true character of what would become one of the United Nation’s founding members.

This thesis demonstrates that beginning in 1942, the FDR Administration had strong proof of Soviet guilt for the massacre and still proceeded to cover-up this evidence throughout the war in order to ensure that long-term geopolitical goals of defeating the Nazis and creating the United Nations, were achieved. This commitment by FDR to the ideals behind the United Nations was weighted carefully, and in the end was deemed more beneficial to the post-war

¹⁸⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, President to Lieutenant Miles, 12/20/1943. Quoted in Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances*, 191.

world than a showdown with the Soviets over Poland or the Katyn Forest Massacre. The reasons Roosevelt adopted this position are easy to understand, however, that does not make the actions taken by him and his government easy to accept. When placed together with Roosevelt's actions and quotes from Tehran and Yalta about Poland, the cover-up of the truth about the Katyn Forest Massacre appears even more egregious and makes it clear that FDR truly believed high moral principles are not always paramount or even applicable in international relations. The high moral principles to which many hold Roosevelt accountable are the ones enumerated in the Atlantic Charter. The principles of this pivotal document, which provided the moral overtones of U.S. entry into World War II, were used in the final proclamation from Yalta to veil the concessions that Roosevelt had made to Stalin in order to get his final approval for the United Nations Organization.¹⁸⁶ This proclamation, called the Declaration on Liberated Europe, was signed by the Big Three and called for numerous democratic ideals such as, "...assisting the peoples liberated from the domination of Nazi Germany and the peoples of the former Axis satellite states of Europe to solve by democratic means their pressing political and economic problems."¹⁸⁷ Roosevelt's concessions to Stalin on the make-up of the new Polish government essentially made this part of the Declaration null from the outset, as the Lublin Poles dominated the government without the consent of the Polish people. With regard to voice of the people in choosing their government, the Declaration on Liberated Europe called for the people:

...to create democratic institutions of their own choice. This is a principle of the Atlantic Charter - the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live - the restoration of sovereign rights and self-government to those peoples who have been forcibly deprived to them by the aggressor nations.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Kimball, *Churchill and Roosevelt III*, 526.

¹⁸⁷ *FRUS- Malta & Yalta*, 971-972.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

The forced imposition of the Lublin Government upon the Poles, clearly goes against this section of the Declaration, even though at the time of the Declaration no one outside the Big Three knew that the future government of Poland had already been decided upon. Additionally, territory in Eastern Poland was ceded to the Soviet Union, one of the original aggressor nations, clearly violating Polish sovereignty, which should have been protected under the Declaration.¹⁸⁹ This fact was purposefully left out of this declaration. This document coupled with the agreements from the Yalta Conference, would be Roosevelt's main tool for convincing the American people to get behind his peace plan for the post-war world. According to a statement by FDR, after the conclusion of the conference and the issuing of these declarations, the conference had created, "...the foundation for a lasting peace settlement based on Atlantic Charter principles."¹⁹⁰ Once more Roosevelt relied on the fact that many were not privileged to the deals that had been made at Yalta and believed deeply in the ideas of the Atlantic Charter as he tried to persuade the American people to not let what happened in 1918 with Wilson's League of Nations Plan occur again. Moreover, this also allowed Roosevelt to argue against a "perfect solution" in international relations and distance himself from any potential criticism that could emerge once the details of Yalta were revealed.¹⁹¹

Since the details of Yalta have emerged, a debate has been ongoing about why President Roosevelt behaved the way he did. Some scholars argue that Roosevelt was attempting to start relations with the Soviets in the best manner possible under the circumstances, while others argue that Roosevelt was weak from his sickness and gave into Stalin's pressure. At the start of the Cold War, Republicans began to use FDR's actions at Yalta concerning Poland to attack the former President and blame him for selling out Poland and appeasing Stalin. Instead of focusing

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Harbutt, *Yalta*, 324.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

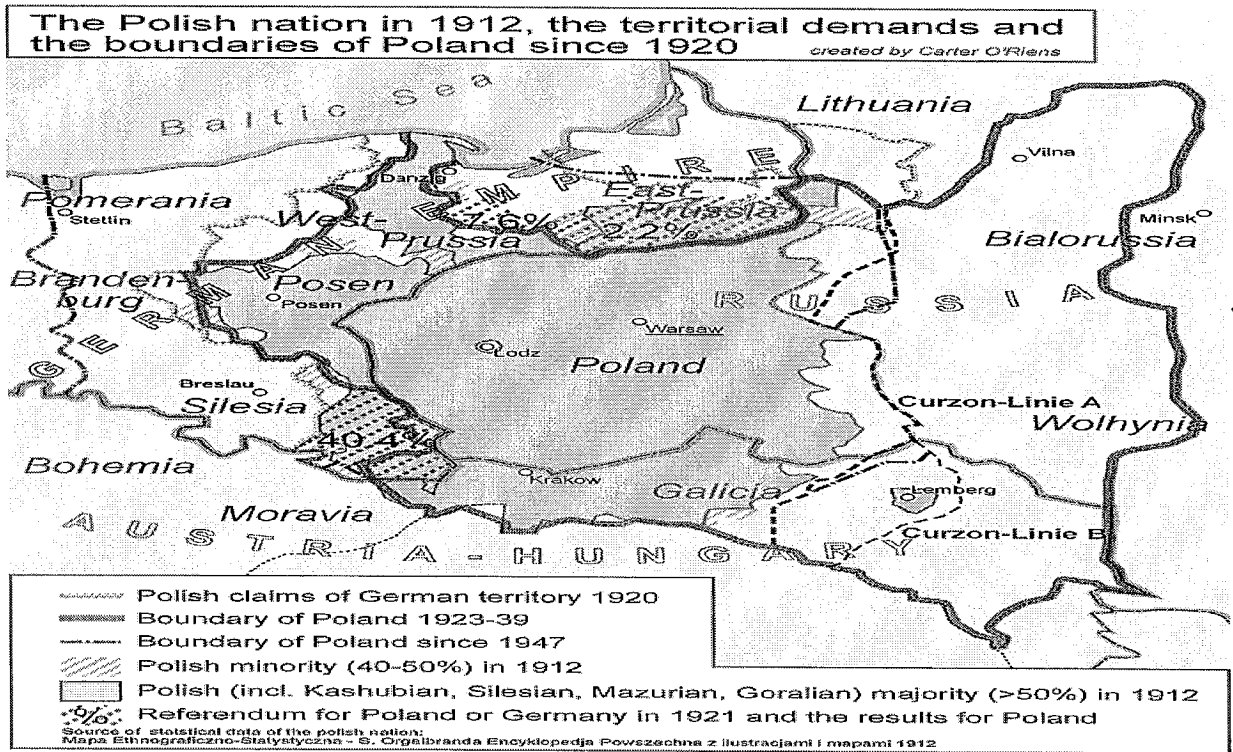
on blame, it is more important to look at why Roosevelt refused to acknowledge what the Soviets were capable of. The existence of documents dating to 1942 concerning Katyn that showcase the ruthlessness of the Stalinist regime should have served as a warning to Roosevelt about the nature of Soviet foreign policy. Compounded by the ridiculous reasons behind the severing of relations with Poland and Soviet actions during the Warsaw Uprising, there could have been little doubt in Roosevelt's mind about Stalinist policy towards Poland and Soviet supremacy. However, despite the actions of the Soviets, Roosevelt continued to push for a United Nations which included the Soviet Union as a principal partner. In order to achieve this result, Roosevelt and his administration had to be willing to deceive not only the American people, but also themselves concerning the truth about the Soviet Union. The handling of the Katyn Forest Massacre and the extent to which the Roosevelt administration went to fabricate, manipulate, deny, and suppress the truth about Soviet guilt for the massacre is representative of the lengths they were willing to go in order to achieve, what they perceived to be, a larger good.

This realpolitik style of decision making in international relations is not new, even to the Roosevelt administration. Throughout the course of the war while they were hiding the truth about Katyn, FDR was also forced to think about the Holocaust and how to balance stopping this horrendous crime while also devoting all assets to defeating the Nazis. In the end decisions were made that placed winning the war over possibly stopping the Holocaust as planes were used to bomb Berlin instead of the rail lines going into Auschwitz. As with Poland and the United Nations, Roosevelt was forced to make the calculated decision that ending the war with Germany would be better for the Jews of Europe than expending resources attacking the camps. Just like the aftermath of Yalta, Roosevelt has been indicted multiple times for making what many

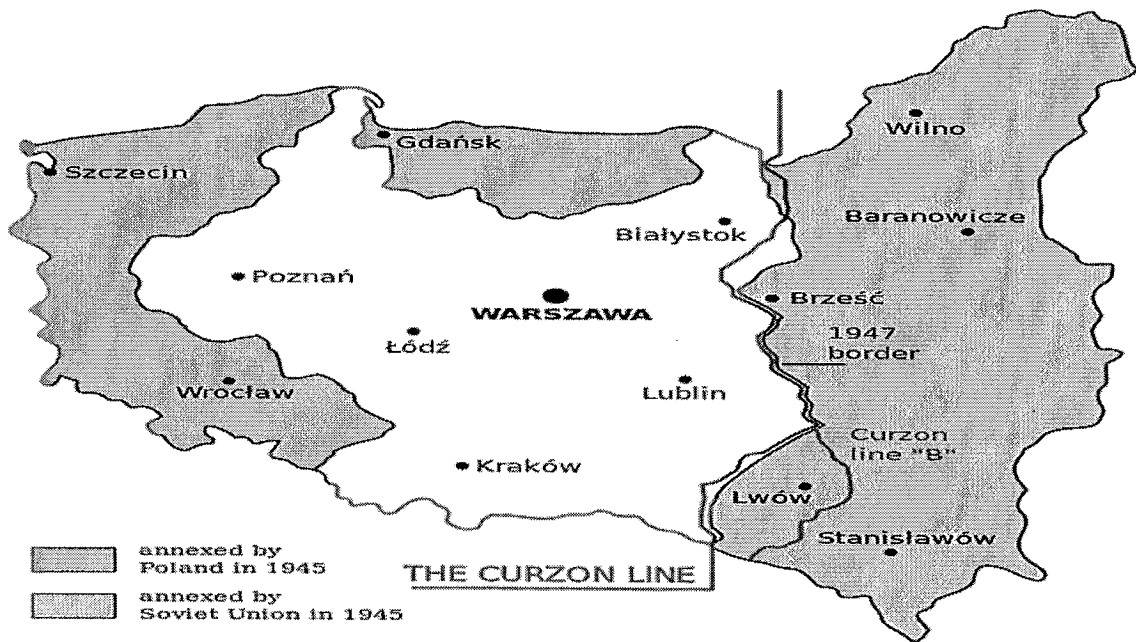
perceived to be the wrong choice with regard to the handling of the Holocaust as he placed war-fighting objectives over what many saw as a moral issue.

Many people see the handling of Katyn and Poland as a moral issue as well; however, it is important to step back and view the calculated decisions that were made and the reasoning behind them. The recently declassified documents used in this thesis allow for a much clearer vision of how the Katyn Forest Massacre was handled by the Roosevelt administration and the reasons behind the actions. Understanding these domestic political and geopolitical considerations which Roosevelt was forced to take into account in dealing with Katyn make the story much more complicated from both sides. It is not, as many would argue, a clear cut case in which Roosevelt ignored morality for the sake of his personal vision, nor is it a man who was always trying to do what he thought was best for the world. Instead it is a very murky situation which leaves one thinking about whether issues of morality and truth or geopolitical objectives and vision are more important during wartime and in international relations. There is no clear answer but the story of Katyn should serve as a reminder about choosing between these two very distinct sides and the implications they can have for forming international relationships.

Appendix A: The Curzon Line



Carter O'Riens, *The Polish nation in 1912, the territorial demands the boundaries of Poland since 1920*, <http://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furrgr/research/mlg09/curzonline.html>.

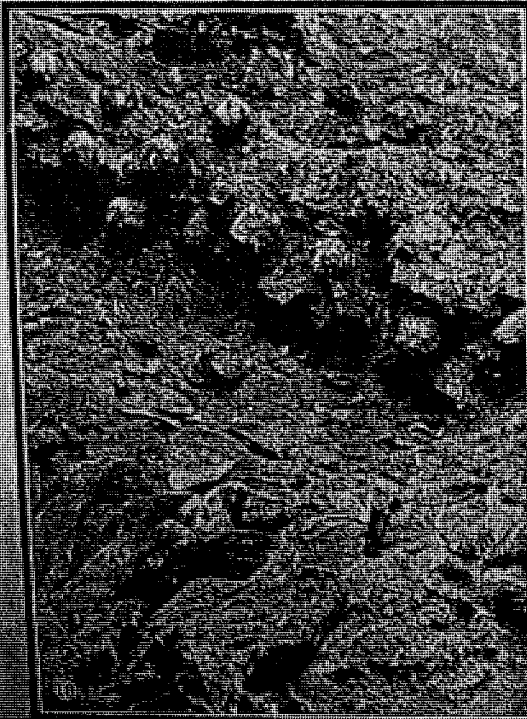


A map presenting Poland and the Curzon Line (World War II), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Curzon_line_en.svg



One large after another. The bodies of the sacrificed were laid out together and on top of one another. When the photographs were taken, the bodies had already been removed. The remaining ones were left in place.

A grave containing a few bodies. The bodies of the victims were placed in rows and in layers and masses of the same size as the bodies of the victims and the same. It was only the bodies of the victims that were left in place.



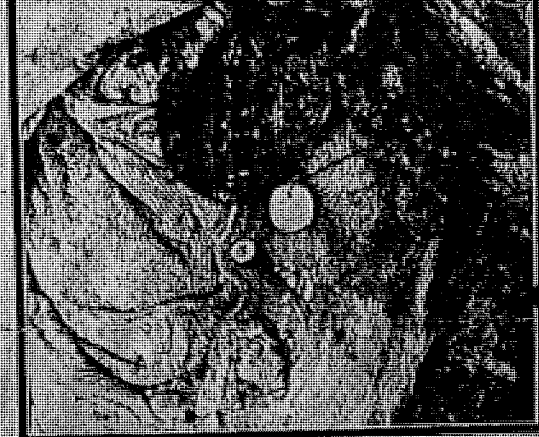
Forensic work at the scene. The bodies of the victims were placed in rows and in layers and masses of the same size as the bodies of the victims and the same. It was only the bodies of the victims that were left in place.

Corpses and the bodies of the victims were placed in rows and in layers and masses of the same size as the bodies of the victims and the same. It was only the bodies of the victims that were left in place.





A patient's stretcher is lowered through the side of a plane and placed on the ground in the vicinity of the medical officers. They are here being examined by members of the staff of the hospital. The patient is being treated for a severe case of malaria.



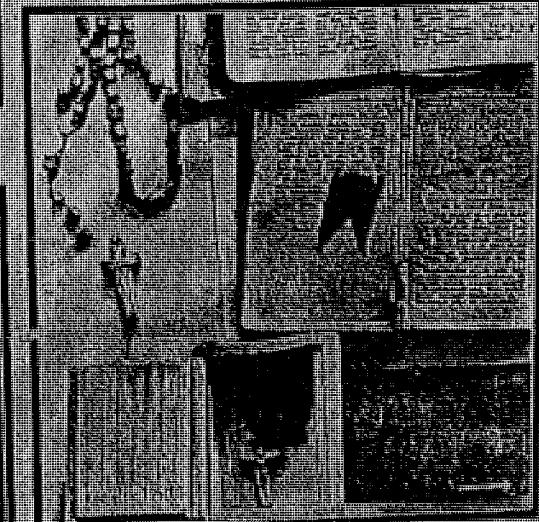
The patient is being examined by the medical officers. The patient is being treated for a severe case of malaria.



The patient is being examined by the medical officers. The patient is being treated for a severe case of malaria.



The patient is being examined by the medical officers. The patient is being treated for a severe case of malaria.



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Katyn, A Record Booklet; Box 138; Harry Hopkins Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

Letter from A. Berle to Secretary of State, November 20, 1943; Manuscript Collections, Alfred Berle; Box 58; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library; Hyde Park, NY.

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Letter from George Earle to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 24 March 1944; Subject-George Earle; President's Secretary's Files; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

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