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THE KATYŃ FOREST MASSACRE

AN ARTICLE DISCUSSING PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT, AND POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY

ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between political expediency, perception management, and governmental goals. The subject matter forms the research question of “How a tool such as perception management can be used to politically expedite a government’s interests and goals?” It is understood that these ends can be achieved through the usage of perception management by constructing them from a given audience’s interests and values. The concept of perception management is introduced to the reader and illustrated by the example of the United States government’s knowledge of the Katyń Forest Massacre. This article is presented in two parts – the United States’ initial conclusion that the Nazi party was responsible for the massacre and its later reassignment of fault to the Soviet Union. The first instance which involved the reconstruction of truth, was used to politically advance the United States’ cooperation with the Soviet Union in fighting Hitler’s Germany. The second instance also involved the revelation of truth and was used to justify its fight against the North Korean communists. This article should effectively demonstrate how the practice of perception management has been used historically by the United States government to expedite its political goals. The instrumentalization of Katyń is important as it may inspire the reader to consider why certain events take hold of the media’s attention versus others, and how these events specifically may relate to domestic and international political issues.

Keywords: Katyń, perception management, information, Communism, deceit

INTRODUCTION

Lo, the book exactly worded, wherein all hath been recorded.
Thence shall judgement be awarded.

(Dies Irae, Missa Requiem)

The sections enclosed in this article compose the matter of a political thriller. Intrigue, deceit, manipulation – all performed in the name of achieving an end – a state’s political interests and goals. Yet this is not a novel. It is an elucidation on reality, centered around a case study which may be familiar to the reader. It has been the subject of esoteric politics and is frequently revisited in contemporary times. However, when initially researching this topic, I found myself delving below the tangible outer layer – past what is widely known and accepted. This work goes further than the base facts that are commonly known to the average reader and probes to examine the motives for and methods used to achieve governmental political expediency in the not-so-distant past. The method focused on in this work is known as “perception management.”

This article investigates how perception management was used in the case of the United States government’s knowledge of the Katyn Forest Massacre to achieve political expediency concerning a set of interest and goals. To do this, the article defines perception management for the benefit of the reader. Later, following its refinement as a political tool, I elaborate on how this practice is understood in the modern-day world. Then, the study uses this knowledge to examine the United States government’s efforts to conceal knowledge of the Katyn Forest massacre’s true perpetrators from the American public to maintain its support for cooperation with the Soviet Union. From there, the discussion moves to the change that occurred in the official stance towards the Massacre. The United States government would go on to release certain pieces of information to portray a specific image of the massacre to the American public to gain support for its political actions in Korea. These historical actions were not built from the currently understood practice of perception management. Nonetheless, in comparison with the modern approach, many similarities with modern perception management techniques can be found and the discussed actions achieved the desired outcomes at the time. Therefore, a deeper appreciation for what historically occurred “behind the scenes” should spur further research and dialogue on such methods of political practice.

In both the acts of concealment and revelation, the United States government played on the American public’s interests and values to garner support for its actions and politically expedite its interests and goals. National governments use tools such as perception management to change societal perceptions – constructed from the interests and values of their audience – in order to support politically expedient goals. Understanding the existence of these tools and how they can be used, is helpful for political analysis. It inspires the reader to look beyond media narratives and official party lines.

The materials used to build the reader’s understanding of political expediency and perception management, as well as to answer the research question, were taken from

numerous sources. The primary source was the United States National Archives. The documents selected from these archives were gradually released, starting in 2011 – the reason for which may be pondered over while reading these pages.¹ In addition, the secondary sources referred to are composed of a variety of academic and military journals, as well as websites. The works of scholars and subject matter experts were consulted for theoretical matters and used as needed. The author has striven to approach the delicate issues connected with her topic carefully. This approach ensures the discussion remains focused on the facts that underpin the ideas presented. The author endeavored to keep emotions and political preferences out of the discussion, in consideration of the subtle nature of these topics and out of a desire to allow the reader to form an opinion solely based on the presented information.

PROPAGANDA, PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT, AND ACHIEVING POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY

Times have changed, and governments have come and gone. But politics and the human psyche remain inherently the same. A society's understanding of its country's current affairs (both domestic and international) is influenced and swayed by the perception of current and historical events and any interconnected relationships that the government allows it to see. This influencing is the art (perhaps the science) of "perception management," which involves a series of strategically managed movements used by the elite to tinker with the population's interests. Considering that individuals may be viewed as less significant than the groups they form, this mass of people (operating together) can be the key to a government's success. Groups are useful to political aims as they form majorities, which (in turn) sway elections. Thus, countries are more powerful when they are united, a united front must be portrayed at all costs to the global stage, and eventually to any real or perceived enemy (e.g., North Korea's posturing to the United States). As Thucydides said, (...) *the strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must*.²

Perception management is an everyday occurrence – it is omnipresent in a person's daily life: from a magazine advertisement w strives to convince an audience that a one-time purchase of a certain brand of detergent soap will forever change their lives, to a talk show where the host seemingly manipulates all movements of the conversation or sketches a story dedicated to pushing an exclusive personal or political view or point. Perception management seeps into the available openings of life's struggles to influence

¹ More information may be found here: R. Fahs, "Katyn Massacre Records Show Need to Prioritize Disclosure of Historical Information with Significant Public Interest", *Transforming Classification*, 28 February 2020, at <https://transforming-classification.blogs.archives.gov/2020/02/28/katyn-massacre-records-show-need-to-prioritize-disclosure-of-historical-information-with-significant-public-interest/>, April 2023.

² Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, transl. by R. Crawley, London 1874, p. 397.

the cognition in a certain direction. Generally, it is designed to work on two levels – the incidence of sensation and the consequence of perception.

Perception is the mind's reception of information from the environment.³ A person is needed, as well as an object or event for the perception to be gained from. Actions made to convey or deny selected information and indicators to foreign audiences work with the intent of influencing their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning. These might also be applied to intelligence systems and leaders at all levels to influence official estimates, ultimately resulting in foreign behaviors and official actions favorable to the originator's objectives. In numerous ways, perception management combines truth projection, operations security, cover and deception, and psychological operations. These levels work with the intention of influencing the target (e.g., individual, population, etc.) to act in the direction of the designed goal.⁴ Advanced concepts or techniques like command and control warfare, intelligence-based warfare, electronic warfare, psychological warfare, hacker warfare, economic information warfare, and cyber warfare demonstrate different applications of information warfare.⁵ More basic concepts such as propaganda, deception warfare, and perception warfare are oriented toward misinformation. The underlying target for each concept is to engage in mental combat – the controlling and manipulation of information and use of this information to create an intentional output and achieve an eventual goal.⁶

A modern example of political expediency can be a presidential ad on television that endorses the qualities and virtues of one candidate, while besmirching the reputation of another. It is obvious to the viewer what the ad is pushing. But subconsciously, the mind absorbs all the words and images used in the advertisement regarding both candidates. Audial and visual receptors capture the information. These assist in shaping the unconscious opinion of an individual and later manifest themselves in the individual's outright opinion. This unconscious self which is affected is the second level – perception. It is edited without consent and influenced unknowingly as it absorbs the ever-present surroundings.

A sovereign government is a body tasked with caring for the security and welfare of its citizenry and state. The citizens seek to avoid danger and conflict by giving up aspects of their freedom to this governing force and trust that it will use these competencies to ensure peace, safety, and the public good of the people.⁷ The resulting political power gives the authorities the *right to make laws – with the death penalty and consequently all lesser penalties – for regulating and preserving property, and to employ the force of the community in enforcing such laws and defending the commonwealth from external*

³ S.C. Pepper, *Concept and Quality: A World Hypothesis*, Illinois 1967.

⁴ Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Washington 2001.

⁵ M.C. Libicki, *What Is Information Warfare?*, Washington 1995.

⁶ H. Friman, "Perception Warfare: A Perspective for the Future", The Swedish National Defence College: Department of Operational Studies 1999.

⁷ J. Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, January 2005, at www.earlymoderntexts.com, p. 41.

*attack; all this being only for the public good.*⁸ For many governments, a moral dilemma develops when the government puts the needs of its own nation and political structure above recognized morality and decency in its dealings with the global community. It seeks to expedite its interests and goals by sacrificing its virtue. This political expediency, as such an approach may be termed, is disguised with perception management.

Perception management is not a limited practice. It covers all activities designed to influence the thoughts of a target, that is, individual, population, etc. Different pressure groups can manipulate our perceptions by creating an environment that supports the illusion that *their* own targets and benefits are consistent with *our* targets and benefits. The impression one gains is that both sides benefit. Consequently, perceptions are in constant motion – changing and transforming as needed to adapt to the interests of the government and achieve domestic and international political goals. Governments plot careful cooperation among their ranks on a multi-lateral scale. A comment from the famed Carl von Clausewitz on the subject reminds the reader that this type of self-serving behavior is nothing new to the political world: (...) *war is nothing but a continuation of politics with a mixture of other means.*⁹ Ultimately, inner cooperation is intended to protect and advance national interests and goals, both at home and abroad.

Perception management facilitates the government's public image. How this is done may occur according to any number of descriptive labels. Yet, the end remains the same. A government's goals ideally should help it to ensure the security and economic welfare of its people. Achieving these goals requires moving obstacles, either physically or figuratively. One might need to fight Hitler's Germany to ensure their country has a future. Or one might need to cleverly word a series of press releases to affect the way a group of people understand a particular idea. With a changed vision of the world and the events occurring in it (one might say, a changed "perception"), the target group is more likely to lend their support to the government's preferred path to achieving its goals. People will be more likely to take up arms and fight if they believe their very way of life is threatened, rather than in defence of nameless individuals in areas far away from home. In an effort to show Perception Management being used in the 21st century, this article now introduces the reader to a few examples.

The United States Army Psychological Operations "PSYOPS" Division defines its mission as *Psychological Operations, commonly referred to as PSYOP, for which planned operations convey selected information and indicators to audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of organizations, groups, and individuals. Used (by combatants) in all aspects of war, PSYOP is a weapon whose effectiveness is limited only by the ingenuity of the commander using it.*¹⁰

The Polish government has its own brand of Perception Management, operating under another popular term: "Public diplomacy." Public diplomacy pursued by the

⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

⁹ *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, Rev. 4th ed., Oxford 1996, p. 205.

¹⁰ E. Rouse, "Psychological Operations/Warfare", History of PSYOP, at <http://www.psywarrior.com/psychist.html>, 12 October 2023.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs consists of a set of strategic, conceptual, analytical, coordinating and executive actions seeking to impact social attitudes and public opinion abroad and thereby to secure the principal interests of the Republic of Poland across the globe. This is done by using tools and methods from outside the realm of traditional diplomacy, essentially confined to intergovernmental relations. The primary aim of public diplomacy is to foster understanding and support for the national interest and policies of the Polish government. Supplementing traditional diplomacy, it is targeted at foreign institutions, organizations and societies.¹¹

In Israel, the elusive “Hasbara” internal security group acts as the Perception Management agent for the Israeli government. Although Hasbara has no English translation available on the internet, Ambassador Gideon Meir wrote a coherent and informative description of the activities of Hasbara for the Israeli embassy website. An excerpt follows: *Success in public diplomacy requires the preparation of high-quality printed materials and multimedia materials that are distributed in quantity abroad. It requires having a state-of-the-art computerized system, including a superb Web site on the Internet, which can be used in real time to meet all contingencies. It demands that our diplomatic staff abroad go out in the field and meet not only with government officials, the media, and Jewish communities abroad – but also with students and professors, ethnic and religious leaders, as well as key people in the business world and in the arts and sciences. It also means inviting delegations to Israel, and our embassies and consulates hosting events abroad as well as their participating in those hosted by others. All this Israel’s Foreign Ministry – at home and around the world – does every single day.*

*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its diplomatic missions abroad maintain a critical dialogue with the foreign media with the aim of rectifying media distortions and promoting an equitable depiction of events in their proper context. Within the last couple of years, in an effort to reach out to our Arab neighbors, we have also established a department that maintains contact with the media from the Arab world. Quite often now, Israeli spokespeople are interviewed by the Arab press and appear on Arabic television; this was practically unheard of in the past.*¹²

The final example, that of Russia, is one that is stirring, because it shows a keen understanding of the human intellect. This excerpt was taken from the public diplomacy vision of General Valery Gasimov, the Chief of General Staff of the RFAF (Russian Federation Air Force) and now somewhat infamous for his 2014 operational framework that was based on recent conflict with Estonia and Georgia.¹³ His guidelines are extensive, but the following essentially summarizes his goal (...) *six phases as shown in figure 1: concealed origin, escalation, outbreak of conflict activity, crisis and resolution, ending with the restoration of peace. This current Russian operational concept is a whole of*

¹¹ *Public Diplomacy*, at http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/foreign_policy/public_diplomacy/, 1 February 2018.

¹² *What ‘Hasbara’ is Really All About*, 24 May 2005, at <http://embassies.gov.il/MFA/FOREIGNPOLICY/Issues/Pages/What%20Hasbara%20Is%20Really%20All%20About%20-%20May%202005.aspx>, 3 February 2018.

¹³ A.J.C. Selhorst, “Russia’s Perception Warfare: The Development of Gerasimov’s Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and Its Application in Ukraine”, *Militaire Spectator*, vol. 185, no. 4 (2016), pp. 148–164.

*systems, methods, and tasks to influence the perception and behavior of the enemy, population, and international community on all levels. It uses a systems approach based on 'reflexive control' (Perception Management) to target enemy leadership and alter their orientation in such a way that they make decisions favorable to Russia and take actions that lead to a sense of despair within their leadership and establish a base for negotiation on Russian terms. This reflexive control thus considers psychological characters of humans and involves intentional influence on their models of decision making.*¹⁴

These multi-national excerpts demonstrate that there is not a singular method or form that Perception Management employs. Instead, Perception Management covers a broad range of activities designed to influence the thoughts of a target, such as individual, population, government, etc. Beyond supplying mere information, different pressure groups (often working in unison) can manipulate our perceptions by creating an environment wherein their ends appear to be consistent with our desires.

Political Expediency, the process of advancing political goals through various strategies, is a fitting summary to this section. Politicians, political interest groups, governments, and even commercial entities all seek to gain something from a population, political body, government, or interest group. The best way to do this is to develop the political or other ideals of the target. Political expediency produces the need to convince people of a specific idea or concept on a mass scale to supply the support that the government requires.

An expedient object or method is something that is suitable for achieving a specific and useful goal or purpose, even if it lacks morality. "Political expedience" gives the suggestion, then, that what the government attempts to implement in a certain situation is based on what is useful for its greater purpose, or convenient, or even productive politically, rather than what really benefits the population. Therefore, as Niccolò Machiavelli said, *it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity.*¹⁵

To this end, political expediency is an embodiment of the elements specified in Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*. In his writings, Machiavelli found that Christian values and politics were often at odds. In a way, this was his unlocking of the Pandora's box in politics, as he dared to separate political thought from the realm of accepted morality. Such work was justified because, according to Machiavelli, the goal of politics is the preservation, unity, and well-being of the Commonwealth.¹⁶ Therefore, in all deliberations, one must consider where it is possible to encounter the least inconvenience and accept that path as the course to be preferred, since a line of action that exists entirely free from disadvantage will never be found.¹⁷

While changing the public's perception has never been a simple task, the process has become easier over the last few decades. With the advent of mass-communications and

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, transl. by W.K. Marriot, London 1958, p. 71.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ N. Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*, transl. by N.H. Thomson, London 1883, p. 30.

rapidly evolving technology, it is easy, nearly effortless, and incredibly effective. Governments (the usurper) (...) *ought to examine closely all those injuries which it is necessary for them to inflict, and to do them all at one stroke so as not to have to repeat them daily; and thus, by not unsettling men he will be able to reassure them and win them to himself by benefits.*¹⁸ The quandary faced by governments, then, is getting their voice heard first, ensuring their message is the right message to effect the needed change, and ensuring what is being heard is absorbed completely by the target listener.

THE KATYŃ FOREST MASSACRE AND THE BETRAYAL OF POLAND

When considering the concept of political expediency, the Soviet Union and the Katyń Forest Massacre present an interesting study. Russia, as a sovereign country, historically holds the belief that it has a specific destiny. This was embodied in a letter by Russian writer Pogodin to Alexander II, from which some excerpts are given below:

*Russia, what country can compare with thee in magnitude?... A population of sixty million people... Who can compare with us? Whom will we not force into submission? Is not the political fate of the world in our hands whenever we want to decide it one way or the other?*¹⁹

Russia, therefore, envisages itself as destined to rule over others. Its leaders feel the weight of this responsibility and understand that Russia's purpose must be fulfilled. And so, this section discusses an incident wherein the sole purpose was to abet in politically expediting that goal.

On 5 March 1940, four members of the Soviet Politburo (Josef Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov, and Anastas Mikoyan) signed a written order authorizing the execution of an estimated 25,000 Polish "nationalists" and "counter-revolutionaries" who were confined at camps and prisons in occupied western Ukraine and Belarus.²⁰ The 1940 order of the Soviet Politburo to terminate the lives of an estimated 25,000 imprisoned Polish officers and intelligentsia was an act of political expediency as it aimed to facilitate the smooth takeover of a sovereign country.

This section examines the Katyń Forest Massacre (henceforth referred to as "Katyń"). Using historical Russian documents, we see (from the Soviet side) why Katyń was planned, enacted, and who was involved with the process. This section provides the necessary setting for explaining the greater use of political expediency by both the United States and the Soviet Union during World War II in the case of Katyń. This section also demonstrates how the Soviet Union used the tool of Perception Management to politically expedite its interests and goal of creating a Soviet satellite in Poland. The Katyń Massacre was a travesty. It is a perfect case study to demonstrate the usage

¹⁸ N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 42.

¹⁹ P.J.S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After*, London 2000, p. 25.

²⁰ A. Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, New York 2009, p. 96.

of perception management as – in this particular situation – the Soviet Union expediently treated human life as little more than an accessory for its political agenda. Achieve Soviet Goals – the “Revolution,” at all costs. And with such an attitude, a few thousand lives are little more than petrol to the engine on the road to success. For this success, the justification may be reworded as is necessary.

This historical section is valuable to the reader, as it utilizes fragments of letters taken from the Federal Archive Agency of the Russian Federation and the United States national archives. On the Russian side, the documents chosen for the article were written in the 1940s and 1950s. They showcase the thought process that went into devising the Katyń Massacre, and the later understanding that this incident needed to be concealed from the political realm. The documents are letters – correspondence between high-profile figures in the Soviet politburo.

From the American side, the chosen documents were taken from various years in the 20th century. They consist of letters between military and governmental groups who found themselves confronted with an atrocity (the massacre) that inconveniently occurred during a period of time when a particular government (the Soviet Union) was being courted to help fight Hitler. Unfortunately, that particular government had an agenda of its own that contradicted the battle for freedom idea that the United States was trying to rally its people behind. The massacre demonstrated this, and therefore needed to be adjusted in such a way as to paint the Soviets as an aid in the fight against evil.

The politicians of the world's countries often find themselves in situations where they are given the role of “god” to play by their governments. They discuss global politics and decide the fates of their peoples definitively with the smooth slash of a pen. Such was the case of the Central and Eastern European peoples who disappeared behind the Iron Curtain with the signing of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. The document was signed on 23 August 1939 – only a few days before the commencement of the Second World War.²¹

The Pact itself was a matter of political expediency. The Soviets had been attempting to conclude a collective-security agreement with Britain and France against Nazi Germany. But these efforts were inconclusive. In the face of invasion, the Soviet powers therefore chose the path of “sleeping with the devil”: an alliance with Hitler for self-protection. It was the option that advanced the Soviet concerns for self-preservation and strategic success. Cooperating with Hitler would ensure their strategic goals were achieved, not hindered by outside diplomatic relationships and concerns. The Soviets needed time to develop their military capabilities in the event Hitler broke his part of the pact, and the Western reluctance to take too strong of a stance against the Nazi regime was an additional factor. On the opposing side, Hitler wanted to ensure a smooth takeover of Poland with no interference from his Eastern neighbors.

Once concluded, the Pact would last for ten years, with the extension of another five years (provided neither participating party requested termination from the Pact).

²¹ “The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, 1939”, *Internet Modern History Sourcebook*, at <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1939pact.html>, 30 December 2017.

Within the Pact there were several secret addenda that were not released to the public until after the war.²² One such addendum was made with the intent of preventing patriotic agitation within Poland: *The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish State and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.*²³

In 1939, German and Soviet soldiers, who approached the sovereign country from opposite sides and divided it according to the Ribbentrop-Molotov line, tore Poland apart. Poland rose up to meet the Nazi army and, in the midst of its plight, was attacked by its Eastern neighbor. On 17 September 1939, the Soviet Red Army crossed into Poland. That same day, at three o'clock in the morning, the Deputy Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Potemkin, summoned Polish Ambassador Wacław Grzybowski to his office.²⁴ There he read Grzybowski a formal note explaining that the Soviet Red Army had been ordered by their government to cross the Polish border: *The Polish-German war has revealed the internal bankruptcy of the Polish State... The Polish government has disintegrated, and no longer shows any signs of life. This means that the Polish State and its government, in fact, have ceased to exist... Left to her own devices and bereft of leadership, Poland has become a suitable field for all manner of hazards and surprises which may constitute a threat to the U.S.S.R. For these reasons the Soviet government, which hitherto has preserved neutrality, cannot any longer observe a neutral attitude towards these facts. The Soviet government further cannot view with indifference the fact that the kindred Ukrainian and White Ruthenian people, who live on Polish territory and who are at the mercy of fate, are left defenseless... the Soviet government has directed the High Command of the Red Army to order the troops to cross the frontier and to take under their protection the life and property of the population of Western Ukraine and Western White Ruthenia... The Soviet government proposes to take all measures to extricate the Polish people from the unfortunate war into which they were dragged by their unwise leaders and enable them to live a peaceful life.*²⁵

As mentioned earlier on in the first section, Perception Management is often used to manipulate perceptions to create an environment that will facilitate the achievement of goals. This idea certainly seems to have been utilized by the Eastern aggressors. The Soviets firmly pushed their twist on ideology to the Polish people: (...) *The government of the U.S.S.R. and the German government declare that the operations of these armies do not involve any aim contrary to the interests of Germany or the U.S.S.R. or to the spirit and letter of the German-Russian pact of non-aggression. On the contrary, the aim of these*

²² "Secret Supplementary Protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact, 1939", History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, September 1939 (original date of publishing), at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110994>, 7 January 2018.

²³ "The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, 1939", *Internet Modern History Sourcebook*, at <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1939pact.html>, 30 December 2017.

²⁴ Z. Stahl. *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents*, London 1965, p. 4.

²⁵ K. Marek, *Identity and Continuity of States in Public International Law*, Geneva 1954, p. 429.

*armies is to restore peace and order destroyed by the collapse of the Polish state and to help the Polish population to reconstruct the conditions of their political existence.*²⁶

The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact dissected Poland into two parts. Half of the country was sterilized of its identity through Nazi propaganda and the systematic deportation of Jews, intelligentsia, ethnic undesirables, and other parties potentially threatening opposition to the Nazi party. Ethnic Poles were deprived of their rights and made strangers in their own country. The other half of Poland experienced multiple mass deportations estimated at 1.2 million of the general Polish population to Communist labor camps in Siberia over a period of six months.²⁷ All of this was justified via the claimed intent to “restore peace” and “reconstruct the condition of their political existence.”

If the Polish people wanted to live in safety, they needed security. To be safe, they would need a functioning government and a society free from dissent, which could potentially interrupt the government’s work. The stronger voices that could identify what was politically happening needed to be weeded out and removed from the playing board. The evident aims of both Germany and the U.S.S.R were to aid in the restoration of Poland’s peace and political existence. This was the “party line” and the story on which further politics could be built.

This article now turns its focus to the estimated 25,000 soldiers and intelligentsia who were arrested in 1939, following the Soviet invasion of Poland, and never seen again. For years, they were missing, and the remnants of the Polish government (now in exile) simply could not locate them. The fear concerning their fate was especially alarming in light of the Soviet refusal to both sign and ratify the 1929 Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of prisoners-of-war.²⁸ Twenty-five thousand men simply were no more. And their arrest had occurred at the order of a body that had not agreed to the international standard for treatment of prisoners of war.

The soldiers’ disappearance can be traced back to the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) Chief of Secret Police, Lavrenty Beria. The following is an excerpted section of a letter from Beria to his commander, Jozef Stalin (emphases added):

USSR

People’s Commissionaire of Internal Affairs

March 1940

Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party

To Comrade Stalin

Nowadays, in the NKVD’s camps for prisoners of war and in the prisons of Western Ukraine and Belorussia, there are several categories: former officers of the Polish Army, former members of the Polish police and intelligence services, members of Polish nationalist counter-revolutionary parties, counter-revolutionary rebel organizations, defectors and

²⁶ R.J. Sontag, J.S. Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941: Documents from the Archives of The German Foreign Office*, Honolulu 2003, p. 14.

²⁷ A. Paul, *Katyń: Stalin’s Massacre and the Seeds of Polish Resurrection*, Annapolis 1991, p. 94.

²⁸ J.D. Morrow, *Order Within Anarchy: The Laws of War as an International Institution*, Cambridge 2014, p. 297.

others. All of them are archenemies of Soviet Power and full of hate towards the Soviet system.

Imprisoned officers and policemen, while being in the camps, are trying to continue their counter-revolutionary work and pursue anti-Soviet agitation. Each of them waits for the moment when they will be released from the prison and have the opportunity to actively restart their anti-Soviet struggle.

In the western regions of Ukraine and Belorussia, NKVD members have arrested a number of counter-revolutionary rebel organizations. In all of these organizations the leading role was held by former officers of the Polish army, policemen, and gendarmes...

In the camps for prisoners of war there are in total (not including soldiers and non-commissioned officers): 14.736 former officers, officials, lairds, policemen, gendarmes, jailors, osadniks, and spies. In 97% of cases their nationality is Polish.

(...)

Considering the facts that all of them defective, are archenemies of the Soviet Power, NKVD of USSR considers it necessary:

I. I suggest to NKVD of USSR:

1) The cases of 14.700 prisoners of war, which are located in the special camps: former officers, officials, lairds, scouts, gendarmes, osadniks, and jailors.²⁹

2) Also, the cases of the arrested and relocated inmates in the prisons of Western Ukraine and Belorussia – 11.000 of people: members of different counter-revolutionary and diversionist organizations, former Polish officers, fabricants, lairds, officials, and defectors.

– to consider with the special order and possibility of usage of highest measure of punishment – execution.³⁰

II. To provide the investigation of the mentioned cases without the indictment. The decisions concerning the end of the investigation and final indictment provide for, in the following order:

a) individuals who are located in the camps for the prisoners of war, according to the references provided by the Control Services of NKVD of USSR for the prisoners of war.

b) individuals who were arrested upon the recommendation of Ukrainian and Belorussian branches of NKVD.

III. The investigation and adjudication should be made by the team of Merkulov, Kabulov and Bashtakov (the chairman of the first NKVD special department).

USSR NKVD

Signature of Beria³¹

²⁹ Translator's Note: Osadniks were Polish veterans who were awarded and thus owned land on occupied territories of Ukraine and Belorussia. Their class was considered criminal under Soviet penal system codes.

³⁰ Translator's Note- in Soviet Russia, all administrative procedures were quite lengthy and slow. In order to expedite something, an order was made "special" to indicate that it warranted a rush.

³¹ Memorandum of the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs of the USSR. By Beria to Stalin. March 1940. Federal Archive Agency of the Russian Federation, F. 17. Op. 166. D. 621. L. 130-133, at <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1943-2/katyn-forest-massacre/katyn-forest-massacre-texts/order-for-the-katyn-massacre/>, 12 October 2023.

Following the release of prisoners from 138 Soviet prison camps, the exiled Polish government began increasing their efforts to find the missing soldiers and to assist with rebuilding the Polish army. Of the 3,300 personal letters, documents, postcards, and identification papers collected by three different commissions looking into their disappearance, the latest date found indicating activity in the three largest camps was April 1940.³²

The Poles ran into resistance from the Soviet government, who, although denying any knowledge as to the whereabouts of the missing soldiers, refused to cooperate in locating them. The Polish Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Tadeusz Romer, testified that 50 formal inquiries had been lodged to the Soviet government, requesting assistance in locating the men.³³ But no such abetment was given. All evidence of the existence of those men ended with the traces of transports outside Smoleńsk.³⁴ The vestiges of the missing prisoners were gathered by some survivors of the camps who sought to find out what had happened to their colleagues.

The Soviets, after the fact, recognized the potential situation which they could be presented with, should the outside world discover their actions. Therefore, they intended to avoid such discovery at all possible costs. It would not be politically wise to have the mass murder of several thousand Polish officers and intelligentsia attributed to the same political group aiding in the fight against Hitler's Germany. The following excerpts are from a letter written by Aleksandr Shelepin to Nikita Krushchev regarding Katyń (emphases added):

To Comrade Khrushchev

Since 1940, in the Committee of State Security of USSR Minister's Council, the cases and other materials concerning the imprisoned officers, gendarmes, policemen, osadniks, lairds, and other individuals of former bourgeois Poland who were murdered in the same year. (...)

All operations concerning the liquidation of the afore-mentioned individuals were carried out according to the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from the 5th of March, 1940. All of them were condemned to the highest measure of punishment according to the cases by which they were accused, as prisoners of war, and internees in 1939.

(...)

... there exists an official version concerning the murdered in the Katyń Forest. This was confirmed after the investigation, which was made by the initiative of the Soviet Power Organs in 1944...

According to the results of this commission, all liquidated Poles are considered to have been killed by the German occupants. The materials of this investigation were successfully propagated in that period of time in both Soviet and foreign press. The

³² J.K. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest: The Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre*, Notre Dame 1962, p. 88.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

results of the commission have a strong position within the opinion of the international community.

(...)

*The Chair of Committee of State Security of Minister's Council of USSR – Shelepin
3rd of March 1959.³⁵*

This was the Soviet's retelling of the story. The Soviet press and foreign press shared the same story and the official commission which investigated Katyn' echoed these results. The Soviets would staunchly maintain their innocence and pursue an alliance with the United States against Germany. The perceptions of people and leaders were blurred as stories were changed, and details blatantly omitted. The Soviets withheld information to keep the United States firmly fixed in a partnership – to the detriment of the Nazis. But evil is always found out, and this secret was soon discovered. It is of paramount importance to realize that a country must act first and foremost in its own interests – the Prince does as he must. And so, a country must consider its people and its needs when acting. If necessary, it must be prepared to participate in what could be viewed as evil to achieve the eventual good for itself and its citizenry.

The denial of Katyn' was a ruse employed to politically expedite interests on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The Americans (as will soon be shown) hoped that by ignoring Katyn' and claiming ignorance on the global scene, they could achieve an alliance with the Soviet Union and expedite the war on the Japanese and Russian Fronts. Furthermore, there was a desire to stay in a positive light with the Soviets, as they seemed to be a more permanent fixture in world politics. The Soviets perpetuated the story of Nazi guilt so they could secure the assistance necessary to fend off their former ally. They continued their denial of Katyn' to secure the Soviet Union's position in the post-war world order (as is seen in the results of the Yalta Conference). When the truth was finally revealed by the United States, it was made known only for the purpose of politically advancing American interests and goals. In this way, truth was made a tool of the government and a matter of convenience.

In keeping with the historical underpinning of this article, we introduce two new characters from the opposite side of the Atlantic. Lieutenant-Colonel John Van Vliet and Colonel Donald Stewart were American Prisoners of War who were taken by the Nazis during the North African campaign in February 1943.³⁶ Following the Nazi's discovery of the bodies at Katyn', the deciding powers in Berlin concluded it was in the best interest of the Third Reich to have a group of American military (including Van Vliet and Stewart) officers inspect the burial site for themselves. The hope was this inspection would absolve (with certainty) the Third Reich of culpability in the Katyn massacre.

³⁵ Note by the Chairman of the KGB Under the Council of Ministers of the USSR Shelepine, Kruswhchev, on the Liquidation of All Records on Polish Citizens Shot in 1940 with the Application of the Draft Resolution of the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee, at https://runivers.ru/doc/d2.php?SECTION_ID=6332&CENTER_ELEMENT_ID=150897&PORTAL_ID=7462, 13 March 2018.

³⁶ N. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*, New York 1994, p. 180.

AMERICAN KNOWLEDGE

The intention of having the American officers witness the remains of Katyń was that they would come away from the experience with the understanding that although the Nazi party was responsible for any number of atrocities, Katyń was not one of them. And so, after an extensive examination of the graves, bodies, and effects of the deceased, a realization came to the American soldiers which was best worded by Gorbachev's advisors in 1989 (...) *the Soviet Union is no better—and perhaps even worse—than Nazi Germany*.³⁷ This, as well as that, in essence, the Soviet Union was “no less responsible” for the outbreak of World War II, and the resounding 1939 defeat of the Polish Army.³⁸

The officers later testified to the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on the Katyń Forest Massacre in 1951 that, as the Soviets were their military allies, they were more prone to believing that the Germans were attempting to convince the Americans of a lie.³⁹ However, after inspecting the site, and reviewing the evidence presented to them, they came away with the conclusion that the evidence could not have been falsified and planted by the Germans. Thus, they had the opinion that the Soviets executed the men.⁴⁰ Shortly afterwards, Stewart sent a coded message in 1943 to the Head of Military, General Clayton Bissell, detailing what he and Van Vliet had seen and explaining that they believed the Soviets were guilty of the massacre.⁴¹

Van Vliet wrote down in detail what he observed after the episode. In 1951, Stewart would testify before the Congressional Committee about the events which he witnessed and the sites that he saw; he would also testify about the reports that he and Van Vliet wrote about in 1945 and 1951 – the first of which mysteriously disappeared.⁴² Furthermore, both Van Vliet and Stewart sent encoded messages discreetly while held in captivity to the American army intelligence, expressing their private opinions of Soviet culpability.⁴³ These secret messages are relevant as they revealed just how early on the Roosevelt administration knew about the Soviet Union's actions. Yet, despite knowledge of the atrocity, the administration ignored the details for the sake of an alliance with Stalin. Hitler was the threat seen by everyone, and Russian cooperation was needed to eliminate the threat.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ US House of Representatives, Select Committee on the Katyn Forest Massacre, *The Katyn Forest Massacre. Final Report on the Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation and Study of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre*, 82nd Congress, 2nd Session, Washington 1952, p. 22.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ D. West, “The Secrets of Katyn Forest”, *The Mercury*, 20 January 2014, at <https://www.pottsmmerc.com/2014/01/20/diana-west-the-secrets-of-katyn-forest/>, 22 December 2017.

⁴² The Associated Press, “Memos Show U.S. Kept the Katyn Massacre by Soviets Quiet”, *CBC News*, 10 September 2012, at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/memos-show-u-s-kept-Katyn-massacre-by-soviets-quiet-1.1263665>, 31 December 2017.

⁴³ Ibid.

On 22 May 1945 (following his release from the prisoner-of-war camp), Van Vliet reported his recollections to the head of the military intelligence, General Clayton Bissell in Paris.⁴⁴ On the orders of General Bissell, Van Vliet dictated his conclusions and remarks on what he observed at Katyń. He repeated his firm belief that, based on what he saw, and the evidence presented to him, the Polish officers were murdered by the Soviets. General Bissell immediately labelled the report "Top Secret" and ordered Van Vliet to maintain absolute secrecy regarding his report.⁴⁵ Van Vliet later emphasized this order to Congress during its investigation of Katyń in the 1950s. Many years later, Bissell would defend his actions before Congress during the ensuing investigation of Katyń by arguing that it was (...) *not in the U.S. interests to pursue the embarrassment of an ally whose forces were sorely needed to defeat Hitler's Germany and Japan*.⁴⁶

The report made by Bissell was intended for the perusal of the U.S. government. However, it went missing.⁴⁷ The whereabouts of this report are still unknown. Having been sworn to secrecy, Van Vliet would not be able to make inquiries about the report upon his return to the United States. In a Memorandum to the Secretary of the United States Air Force, Robert Stevens (Secretary of the Army) stated:

What thereafter happened to the document cannot be determined for it has never been seen, nor any receipt of record thereof discovered, even after exhaustive search... It is possible to conclude that the report was either classified or considered to be Top Secret and was deemed by General Bissell to require handling as such and thereupon to frame three alternatives:

- a. Under the direction of General Bissell, the report was filed in the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, 0-2, and was thereafter either lost, stolen, or deliberately suppressed.*
- b. Under the direction of General Bissell, the report was transmitted by mail or courier to the Department of State or to the War Crime Commission, without obtaining a receipt.*
- c. General Bissell handed the report personally to Mr. Julius C Holmes, then Assistant Secretary, Department of State; or to Mr. Frederick B. Lyon, then Acting Director, Office of Controls, Department of State, without obtaining a receipt.*
- d. Army Regulations 380-5, dated 15 March 1944, in force and effect at the time in question, provided (par.14 a) that "The safeguarding of classified military information is the responsibility of all military personnel" and (par. 26) "It is mandatory that transmission and custody of such Top Secret matter be covered by a receipt system."*

⁴⁴ M. Scisłowska, "US Witness Report Found on Stalin's Katyn Massacre", *AP News*, 8 January 2014, at <https://apnews.com/general-news-5e862051c8ee45dbb5fc31ed93558f0b>, 30 January 2018.

⁴⁵ US House of Representatives, Select Committee on the Katyn Forest Massacre..., p. 7.

⁴⁶ Fischer B.B. "The Katyn Controversy: Stalin's Killing Field", *Studies in Intelligence*, Winter (1999-2000), at <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter99-00/art6.html>, 16 January 2018.

⁴⁷ The Associated Press, "Historical Testimony Reveals Gruesome New Details of Stalin's Massacre of 22,000 Polish Soldiers", *National Post*, 8 January 2014, at <https://nationalpost.com/news/historical-testimony-reveals-gruesome-new-details-of-stalins-massacre-of-22000-polish-soldiers>, 16 January 2018.

*e. In my opinion, the evidence does not establish such a direct casual relation between General Bissell's actions and the loss, filing, or disposition of the report without a trace as would have supported punitive action against him... Because of General Bissell's status as a retired United States Air Force officer, no recommendation is made as to appropriate action.*⁴⁸

The mysterious loss of such an important document pushes one to consider the possible agendas that needed to be carried out which would require silence on the topic. The Yalta Conference would occur within a few months of the report's dictation. Perhaps government figures were anticipating this meeting, and the necessity of appeasing certain participants to achieve the most positive outcome possible dictated the fate of the report. Therefore, a comment in the Select Committee's "Final Report" on Katyń is quite interesting. According to the investigation, three high-ranking American Army officers testified that when General Bissell was in command of the agency, there were *pro-Soviet civilian employees and some military in Army Intelligence... who found explanations for almost everything that the Soviet Union did.*⁴⁹

For Van Vliet, the realization that the Soviets were guilty had been a blow. In his Report he said: *(...) I believe that the Russians did it. The rest of the group that visited the site stated to me that they believed the Russians did it... I hated the Germans. I didn't (sic) want to believe them. At that time, like many others, I more or less believed that Russia could get along with us... I wanted to believe the whole thing was a frame-up... But the sum of circumstantial evidence, impressions framed at the time of looking at the graves, what I saw in peoples' faces – all forces the conclusion that Russia did it.*⁵⁰

Within the report, Van Vliet explained his understanding of the circumstances presented to him: *(...) degree of wear on the clothing and particularly the wear on the shoes led me to believe that these officers had been dead a long time, otherwise the shoes would show much more wear. This was a point that was called to our attention by the Germans. It is one of the strongest arguments by which to fix the date of the killing.*⁵¹

A troubling factor in this situation is that, in retrospect, General Bissell *admitted to the committee that, had the Van Vliet report been publicized in 1945 when the agreements for creating a United Nations (UN) organization reached at Yalta were being carried out in San Francisco, Soviet Russia might never have taken a seat in this international organization.*⁵² But the Report was not published. The Final Report of the State Department on the matter produced a memo on 22 April 1943, which stated *(...) on the basis of the*

⁴⁸ Department of Defense. Department of the Army. Office of the Chief of Staff. Office of the Inspector General, "Official File Regarding Alleged Loss of Top Secret Document Concerning the Katyn Massacre", 1955-1974, at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6850555>, 10 March 2018.

⁴⁹ US House of Representatives, Select Committee on the Katyn Forest Massacre..., p. 9.

⁵⁰ United States Archives, *Katyn Forest Massacre*, at <https://ia800701.us.archive.org/1/items/Katyń-ForrestMassacre/KatyńForrestMassacre.pdf>, pp. 5-7, 12 October 2023.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵² US House of Representatives, Select Committee on the Katyn Forest Massacre..., pp. 7-8.

*various conflicting (concerning Katyn) of all parties concerned, it would appear to be advisable to refrain from taking a definite stand in regard to this question.*⁵³

Additionally, in the time elapsed between the original report and the new one, political decisions had been made, alliances formed, and the fates of entire nations written.

By choosing the Soviets as allies, the United States made an error in strategy. When planning its alliance with Russia, it clung to the hope that Russia was of the same mindset as itself. The mistake was in its misreading of the supposed foreign ally; civilizations differ intrinsically from each other. The Russian civilization (the "Orthodox" civilization) operates with the remnants of a centuries-old belief that Russia is the "Third Rome." This principle is built around the teleological notion that Russia is divinely ordained to lead the world. And in order to fulfill this destiny given by God (nothing motivates more than religion, after all), it must use any and all means available to gain a seat at the table of world affairs as one of the controlling powers.

Yalta enabled this crucial step to happen. Truman stated in his memoirs that after reading the reports presented to him by the State Department and seeing the "secret cables and messages" between the Big Three regarding the Polish question, he concluded *that the Russians had no intentions... of seeing a new provisional government of national unity organized on the lines to which they had agreed on at Yalta.*⁵⁴ Looking at history in retrospect is enlightening. Glancing at the present through historical lenses can ensure that hindsight has no regrets. Had Truman and the U.S. government understood the Russian mind before acting and kept, as a frame of reference, the Katyn Forest, history might not be as it is now. Half of Europe might not have disappeared behind an iron curtain that had descended across the Continent.⁵⁵ One might even ask what kind of progress science might have made had not so many brilliant minds been extinguished.

From the beginning, the Soviet government offered a convenient explanation for the Katyn massacres. The Nazis were the enemy to be defeated. This enemy was known for its human rights violations, and therefore blaming them for another atrocity was manageable. For as long as the U.S. government saw a need to be on positive terms with the Soviet Union, the Western media supported the Russian version of events in Katyn. It was not until the Americans needed a way to disassociate themselves from Stalin (and especially the ideology he represented) that the true story of Katyn was admitted and later shared with the American public.

The "Special Soviet Commission" which investigated the Katyn murders conclusively decided that (...) *both officers and men missing in the U.S.S.R. were held... murdered by the Germans in the Autumn of 1941 and their bodies to be (sic) lying in the Katyn graves... These convenient conclusions went unchallenged by the whole Soviet and pro-Soviet press and were also used for Soviet propaganda to encourage the soldiers fighting for Russia to fight*

⁵³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁴ H.S. Truman, *Memoirs of Harry S. Truman*, vol. I: *Year of Decisions*, Cambridge 1986.

⁵⁵ W. Churchill, "The Sinews of Peace ('Iron Curtain Speech')", *International Churchill Society*, at www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/, 29 January 2018.

yet harder against the Germans in order to take their 'revenge for Katyń.' This propaganda was naturally directed at the Red Polish Army organized by Berling on the Soviet side...⁵⁶

Robert Sherwood, Director of War Information Overseas Branch, wrote a communique of how the media should portray Katyń. He specifically wanted to target the Polish audience and shape their allegiances. Excerpts from this message are below:

Continue to treat the Polish nation as a valued and highly esteemed member of the United Nations. Do not commiserate them nor apologize to them. Almost every European nation emphasizes its periods of martyrdom and its historical difficulties. Refrain from all allusion to the Poles' hard lot and refer to the Poles as manfully taking part in a global anti-Nazi crusade that is moving towards a grand climax... Make no appeal for Polish unity... Report without comment official American expression of regret that strained relations have come to exist between two of our Allies... Play up the Nazis as arch-enemies of our freedom; especially pointing out their horrible cruelties toward Poles, their outrageous disdain for Poles... In contrast to the attitude and conduct of the Nazis, point out the United States, Great Britain, and other United Nations have for centuries been best friends of the oppressed country...⁵⁷

Sherwood also sent a memorandum to the President in 1944: *In reference to the proposal to coordinate British and American propaganda with Russian propaganda: I have discussed this matter with Mr. McDermott of the State Department, and we agreed on the text of the attached cable which, if you approve will be attached to Ambassador Winant.*⁵⁸

Perhaps the most significant part of this letter, however, comes at the conclusion: *Try to prevent this rift between the Russian and Polish governments from distracting Polish attention from Hitler, the enslaver of common men and women.*

Ambassador Robert Ciechanowski observed the trends in public communication and commented on how the United States was sharing information: *Of all the United States government agencies, the Office of War Information [where Voice of America was placed]... had very definitely adopted a line of unqualified praise of Soviet Russia and appeared to support its shrewd and increasingly aggressive propaganda in the United States. The OWI broadcasts to European countries had become characteristic of this trend.*⁵⁹

And so, the stage was set, and the script written for a definite American partnership with the Soviets against Hitler. To do this, two projections were made to the public perception. The occupied people of Eastern Europe were painted a picture showing America's cooperation with and respect of the Soviet Union. The American people, to that effect, were shown the Soviet Union in a positive light. A depiction that inspired

⁵⁶ Poland. Committee of Enquiry into the Question of the Polish Prisoners of War from the 1939 Campaign, Missing in the U.S.S.R., "Facts and Documents Concerning Polish Prisoners of War Captured by the U.S.S.R. During the 1939 Campaign", p. 409.

⁵⁷ R.E. Sherwood, Director, Overseas Branch, Office of War Information; RG208, Director of Overseas Operations. Record Set of Policy Directives for Overseas Programs-1942-1945 (Entry 363); Regional Directives, January 1943-October 1943; Box 820.

⁵⁸ R.E. Sherwood, Director, Overseas Branch, Office of War Information, Item 2374, 12 January 1944.

⁵⁹ R. Ciechanowski, *Defeat in Victory*, New York 1947.

the trust and the willingness needed to send American boys to fight in Europe – knowing that they would not be alone in the fight. The Soviet friends were also helping. This would be the story. But only for a time. Just as people are apt to change their personalities, so are governments. And only a few years after this artful management of the public's perception in favor of Stalin, the tide would turn, and a storm would rise on the American horizons.

THE TRUTH IS REVEALED: HOW TO INSTRUMENTALIZE TRUTH TO CONSTRUCT SUPPORT

From 1950-1953, the United States was engaged in a war with Communist North Korea. In previous years, the United States had remained silent on the topic of Katyn out of a sense of political necessity. It needed the Soviet Union as an ally to win the Second World War and shape post-war Europe. But on the Korean Front, it found itself in a situation where that silence had to be broken to save lives. The atrocities committed against American POWs in North Korea produced a fear in the United States government that *this* communist government could commit a massacre in the same vein as its comrade government in Soviet Russia. More specifically, the Americans feared that the North Korean communists might use the Katyn Massacre as an exacting blueprint to exterminate their invaders.⁶⁰

With this possible terror in mind, the “United States House Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre” (also known as the Madden Committee) was convened on September 18, 1951, to investigate all records and evidence of Katyn, including material from the State and War Departments.⁶¹ After an exhaustive examination of all materials and extensive deliberation, the American investigation unanimously declared that (...) *beyond any reasonable doubt, the Soviet NKVD committed the mass murders of the Polish officers and intellectual leaders in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk, Russia.*⁶²

Additionally, in the final report, the committee offered the conclusion that American government officials failed to properly evaluate, and so act upon, clear danger signals visible in Soviet methods, which were evident as early as 1942.⁶³ Finally, the committee found that the American policy toward the Soviet Union might have been different if information which had been deliberately withheld from the public (and

⁶⁰ B.B. Fischer, “The Katyn Controversy: Stalin's Killing Field...”

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Reprinting of House Report No. 2505, 82nd Congress Concerning the Katyn Forest Massacre, Committee of House of Representatives. 100th Congress, 2nd Session. Document 100-183, p. 48.

⁶³ “Records of the Select Committees of the House of Representatives”, *National Archives*, at <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/guide/house/chapter-22.html>.

only selectively distributed within the upper echelons of the government) had been made available sooner.⁶⁴

The committee's formation and eventual declaration of Soviet guilt was not done in pursuit of justice for the Polish victims. It was not derived from a sense of loyalty to military brothers. These were both simply instances of perception management being used to politically expedite interests and advance goals. An act in the same vein as concealing the Katyń Forest Massacre from the American public for the purpose of allowing their perceptions to be manipulated enough to accept the Soviet Union as an ally and offer public support for the fight against Hitler with the Soviets. The impressive image of the fearless and loyal Soviet army fighting against the diabolical Nazis at the Stalingrad Front was the only needed reference. Thus, the very public brandishing of evidence, testimonials, and photographs shocked the American government and people. It soured the goodwill they had previously held towards Russia and gave the U.S. government the support it needed to act against the Korean Communists – who, by virtue of the shared Soviet Communist ideology, had the potential to enact a similar tragedy.

Anti-regime Polish groups hailed the news of the committee as a sign of evolving American policy towards the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ Not only were the hearings considered to be anti-Russian, but also, they were allowing the long-concealed truth to be shared with the public. It was hoped that following the committee's conclusions, the Western world would review their foreign diplomatic relations. Further, it was even thought to possibly herald an overturning of the Soviet regime and allow for changes to be affected as a result of growing Western military power and the formation of a firm policy towards Russia.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

National governments use tools such as perception management when and where they are needed to change societal perceptions and advance politically expedient interests and goals. This is visible in the conclusions of this article's research. The United States Government was made aware of the Katyń Forest Massacre in 1943. However, it did not formally acknowledge Soviet Guilt until 1951, when it was necessary to turn the American public against communism and so build support for its fight against the North Koreans.

This article is intended to deliver an understanding of how a government could affect change in societal perception. How could the United States government facilitate enough public animosity to encourage the American public to support its war against

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Department of State. Office of the Secretary, "Warsaw Despatch No. 384 Regarding Polish Interpretation of Katyn Hearings and Related Material", at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6850496>, 12 October 2023.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea – whereas a few years before, cooperation was fostered between the United States and the Soviet Union? Why were the Russian communists allies during the Second World War, but the North Korean communists were considered to be enemies? Naturally, the answer is more complex than simply Katyń. However, the legacy of Katyń played its own role. It fostered the fear that the average American might have had held regarding the fate of imprisoned U.S. soldiers. If the Soviet Union did not blink at eliminating so many thousands of Polish soldiers in the World War II era, what was to stop communists in North Korea from likewise resorting to such a crippling and repulsive solution in the cases of South Korean, Coalition, or American soldiers?

Katyń was hidden until it was needed to further American political interests and goals. This article has endeavored to familiarize the reader with available evidence from various archival databases and scholarly works that demonstrate the U.S. government had and concealed early knowledge about Katyń. Although this would not have prevented the necessary alliance with the Soviet Union to defeat Hitler, had it been made public and discussed among the U.S. government and politicians, there are a few potential outcomes that could have been affected – such as the events at Yalta. We will never really know what would have happened, or what impact Katyn might have had if the full truth had been revealed. Nonetheless, one might consider if the truth of the Katyń Forest massacre's executors had been made public from the start, then perhaps:

- It could have influenced the construction of the post-war order (the East versus West, the United States versus the Soviet Union division around which other alliances conflicts were built).
- It could have influenced the diplomacy efforts at Yalta.
- It could have influenced the manner in which the Polish government-in-exile was treated by the Western powers, thereby reflecting back onto Western diplomacy and influencing their work.

To answer our question at the beginning of this article, perception management can be used to expedite a government's interests and goals by reorienting a population towards these interests and goals. Reorientation is done by invoking the population's economic and security related interests and connecting these with the government's national and international goals.

In the case of the Katyń Forest massacre, the wartime tragedy was used by the United States government to build public support (or at least sympathy) towards the Soviet Union during the Second World War, insofar as it was needed for the fight against Hitler. It was then used again during the Korean War to eradicate that respect and build a staunch opposition to communism, thereby facilitating a patriotic support for the war effort. This article has sought to lay a methodical foundation that interprets the circumstances of the times and demonstrate how and why certain political decisions during that time were made. The events at and relating to Katyn were deftly planned to manipulate the perceptions of peoples to politically expedite the goals of governments. To accomplish this manipulation, the truth was altered, hidden, and revealed as required

in communications and media sources and portrayed in such a way as to toy with the emotions of the audience to win support for immediate interests and long-term goals.

The article has fabricated nothing, but rather relied on the available, historical sources to demonstrate its argument. It is now left to the reader to make conclusions of their own from this information. And with these conclusions, the reader is asked to carefully watch the politics of their times. As mass graves and wartime travesties come to life – even in areas as close as Ukraine – it should be pondered, were the deaths that formed these graves incidental? Mere casualties of war? Were they consequential? And upon what interests and goals were these devastating ends based on?

When the Judge his seat attaineth,
And each hidden deed arraigneth.
Nothing unavenged remaineth.
(*Dies Irae, Missa Requiem*)

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