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Dr Andrzej Slawinski, Another 'warning from history'? Stalin's Plan for the Destruction of Pro-Western Democratic Forces in Poland

Among all the East European countries marked for future conquest and subjugation by the Soviet ruler, Poland always presented the biggest problem. The Polish Government (1918-1939) and a vast majority of the Polish people were decidedly anti-communist and anti-Soviet. This was not surprising, as the Poles had already experienced Soviet rule during the 1919-1920 Polish-Soviet War, when half of Poland was overrun by the Red Army.

Communists and extreme left wing movements constituted a relatively small proportion of the political life in Poland. Although Stalin was able to entice some Poles into the ranks of the Communist Party their numbers were relatively small. It was inevitable that the Communists and virtually all the rest of the Polish population would find themselves in opposing camps.

The planning of the solution to the Polish 'Problem' already started before the Second World War. Stalin and his advisers soon realised that propaganda and indoctrination alone would not be sufficient to overcome Polish opposition to communism and to the Soviet system. Many active opponents: military and political elites, educated and professional people, potential future leaders of Polish communities would have to be physically eliminated, in fact exterminated. Still many more others, of lesser calibre, but deemed dangerous to the Soviet Regime, would have to be imprisoned for long periods of time in Soviet gulags.

A master plan was devised to achieve these aims and implemented in two stages:

Phase I (1939-1941)

Execution of the first part of the plan turned out to be very easy for Stalin. In September 1939, by the terms of a secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, half of Poland was occupied by the Soviet Union and effectively sealed off from the rest of the world. Stalin could do anything he wanted with impunity. Captured Polish Army officers, Border Guards and members of the Police Force, some twenty thousand in all, were all deported to Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostaszków and other camps. They were then murdered at Katyn, Kharkov, Miednoye and other places.

Non-commissioned officers and ordinary soldiers, Army veteran settlers and their families, civil servants and members of local government, members of the judiciary, politicians, professors, teachers, industrialists, landowners and other 'undesirables' were all deported to the Soviet Union in their hundreds of thousands. Nearly one hundred thousand Polish Jews were also deported. The elite found themselves in Soviet prisons where they were executed, frequently after torture. The remainders were sent to labour and concentration camps in the Urals or in the Arctic Circle, where many perished. The rest of the world did not know or did not want to know about this crime without parallel.

Phase II (1944- 1946)

Although the German-Soviet war of 1941 intervened with the prompt implementation of the next part of Stalin's plan for Poland, preparations went ahead without respite. Having dealt with the Polish 'Problem' in Eastern Poland, Stalin had soon to contend with the rest of Poland as the Red Army occupied territories west of the river Bug in the period between 1944 and 1945. Here he faced a more difficult problem as that part of Poland could not be so easily sealed off from the rest of the world. The vast majority of Poles favoured a western style of Democracy rather than the Soviet system. Most people supported the London-linked Underground State created during the German occupation. This State embraced all political parties, other than a small communist party. Its military wing was the Home Army (AK - Armia Krajowa), which at its peak had more than three hundred thousand members.

Stalin had to eliminate this potentially vast political and military opposition to the Soviet system and it had to look as if it was carried out by Poles themselves. He could not trust the small group of Polish communists, fellow travellers and the newly formed units of the Polish Security Forces (consisting of people of unproven loyalty or mere opportunists) to carry out the required task. After all it would involve killing, imprisonment, torture and deportations of large numbers of their compatriots. Stalin was afraid that they would not make an adequate job of it. Their numbers were therefore bolstered by the NKVD-trained Communists brought from the USSR. Their military and political 'advisers' were given typically Polish names and many wore uniforms of high-ranking Polish officers. Together they formed a special group, a task force, whose main purpose was to lead squads of police and security forces to round up, execute, imprison or deport in the first instance members of the Home Army, then active pro-Western politicians and eventually any Polish citizens who had actively pro-Western sympathies. The task force had at its disposal a whole division of Soviet NKVD troops and a number of other security units. Other members of this task force were given important positions in the Communist Regime in Poland: in central and local government, in the military police and intelligence, in the judiciary, both military and civil and in the newly formed Peoples Militia. Their role was to convert Poland into a communist state. The task force carried out their work efficiently and thoroughly: tens of thousands of true Polish patriots were killed, hundreds of thousands imprisoned and deported. By the early 1950-ies Soviet rule in Poland was firmly established.

Now, at the beginning of the new Millennium, with Stalin dead for nearly fifty years, the legacy of his evil plan lives on. Through the loss of the Nation's elite and of many patriots, and as a result of intensive indoctrination and brainwashing, the way of life and Polish attitudes were bound to be adversely affected for several generations. Under the direction of Stalin and then his successors, the communist regime in Poland succeed, on more than one occasion, to tarnish the Nation's image in the eyes of the world. The road to recovery is as always long and difficult.
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