

## **2020 KATYN REMEMBERED - 80 YEARS**

I welcomed the commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Katyn Massacre by the US Congress with true appreciation. Especially because the facts of this unprecedented modern historical war crime, the slaughter of defenseless prisoners-of-war, were suppressed by not only the perpetrating Soviet Union, but also by the American and British governments.

After receiving the letter from President Spula asking to organize support for the Resolution 566 by lobbying our Senators in California, I researched the case of Katyn in the US. I called and talked about it with many members of the Polonia community in the San Francisco Bay Area. However, after I had provided them with a copy of the Resolution, there was a lot of criticism.

In the Resolution, killing of the Polish officers in Katyn because they were prisoners-of-war was changed into a narrative that they were victims of the nebulous world-wide communistic terror lasting over the course of many years. This implies that Polish officers were either Soviet citizens, or that this narrative makes possible a nonsensical interpretation of WWII as a struggle between multiple political parties, rather than the fighting armies representing different states and nationalities. Obviously, the officers murdered in Katyn were not murdered because of a political tussle between German Nazis, Soviet Communists, US Democrats or Republicans, British Conservatives, etc. They were killed in April 1940 because they were Polish prisoners-of-war taken by Soviets in the fall of 1939, in the course of WWII. Therefore, this new and baffling narrative text astounded those who read the Resolution.

It was so ridiculous to position the Katyn Crime, as being trapped in the quagmire of political plots and crimes, while assuming evidently artificial and false premises, that it called for criticism of the strongest language with ignorant and illiterate being the mildest terms used. This was a harsh reaction, but one must consider that many of the postwar emigration had personal contact with the Soviet reality, with their experiences acquired in the most difficult circumstances, and the sagacity to perceive the value and significance of the words used in political documents.

One must agree, that for anybody with a rudimentary knowledge of the war time history (and perhaps simple common sense) a reclassification of the

Polish officers, prisoners-of-war, as the Soviet citizens is an incredible falsification. That was exactly what the Soviets were doing in the war of 1920 and also tried in WWII, breaking international laws and conventions. When I mentioned that the Resolution most probably used such infelicity due to suggestion by an outsider and the possibility that perhaps it was somebody connected with the Polonia organization, I was met with complete incredulity: no, there are no renegades among us. Look elsewhere.

My research summary:

### **Short Review: PAC (Polish American Congress) and the Katyn Case**

It is worthwhile to be reminded that the PAC was instrumental in making the truth about Katyn public knowledge in the US and in the world.

It started as early as 1949 when PAC President Rozmarek sent a letter to the US ambassador to the United Nations, with no results. At the same time the PAC consulted with Prof. Raphael Lemkin of Yale (born and educated in Lwow), the author of *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* which coined the word “genocide”, about the possibility of using the UN convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as a legal basis for an international investigation of the Katyn Massacre.

In 1951, President Rozmarek sent a letter of appeal to the secretary general of the UN to raise the case of Katyn.

In my discussions, someone noted that first there was the American Committee for the Investigation of the Katyn Massacre, etc, chaired by Ambassador Bliss Lane and organized by some distinguished personalities. The work of this committee and the mobilization into action of the Polonia resulted in the creation of the House Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation and Study of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Massacre in 1951. The Representative Ray Madden of Indiana was the chairman and Roman Pucinski, journalist and PAC Illinois state activist, was the investigator.

In 1952, two reports totaling 2,362 pages were published with a recommendation to refer the case to the United Nations. The Madden Committee was the top achievement in the PAC’s actions in the Katyn case.

In 1971, PAC President Mazewski approached George W.H. Bush, then the US ambassador, at the UN proposing to start an international investigation of Katyn crime within the UN. Bush, however, declined.

In 1976, the PAC covered half of the costs of the Katyn Monument in London, UK.

In 1979, the PAC protested the distorted image of the Katyn Massacre in a TV series about WWII. In the 1980's, PAC President Mazewski promoted the construction of a commemoration of the Polish officers killed at Katyn in the Museum of Holocaust, located in Washington, D.C.

In 1989, the PAC was successful in commemorating the Katyn Massacre with the publication of a new edition of the 1952 report by the House Select Committee.

### **Short Review: US Authorities and the Katyn Case**

One should start with the very beginning - in 1943 the United States Office of War Information presented the case of Katyn as a point of discussion in the WWII German war crimes against Poland and other occupied countries. Unfortunately, President Roosevelt personally took steps in preventing the true facts of the massacre from becoming known. The reports about Katyn were suppressed and subsequently disappeared.

By 1951, the US was involved in the Korean war and the treatment of prisoners-of-war was of considerable concern. With President Truman being a previous general, the American political circumstances formed a support for the creation of the special House Committee to investigate the Katyn massacre.

In 1952, both thorough reports of the Madden Committee proved Soviet guilt without any doubt. However, in order for the Katyn case to be referred to the UN, the recommendations had to be approved by the House Foreign Affairs Committee which refused to do so upon letter instruction from the State Department. Subsequently, the Eisenhower administration also took actions to ensure that the case would not be tried by the international court.

The Madden Committee unpublished records were kept secret until 1988, with the congressional votes on the Committee's recommendations still secret. It is incredibly significant and telling that bills to implement the Select Committees' recommendations were all rejected by private and/or secret vote in order to avoid a public roll call vote. This was also done quite recently in the case of Resolution 577 in 2017.

In 1989, Roman Pucinski (investigator of the 1951 Madden Committee) said that there were constant efforts from the State Department to downgrade and downplay the Katyn investigation and its' results.

### **Conclusions:**

The above shows that in the case of Katyn, it has always been the State Department which had the last say and the attitude has always been negative. The question now – is this still the case? What is the present situation concerning the commemoration of the 80th Anniversary in light of the above?

The Katyn problem proved to be intractable in 1943, in 1946, in 1953, and in 1990. During war time it was a matter of a possible alliance with the Soviets and in the postwar period it was the US policy of containment.

Is Katyn to be so intractable now as well, 80 years after the murders. Resolution is 566 proof that it appears to be so. The Resolution is rife with mean, vile, debasing defamation, and willful misinformation instead of being a solemn and dignified commemoration.

But what is the reason this time? Do we know it or will it remain another secret? As it currently stands, Resolution 566 is a political manipulation, not a stately commemoration of a solemn anniversary of war crimes against humanity. Resolution 566 reads like it is being written by Soviet propagandists because it accepts their total disregard for the factual truth, as well as international law and conventions.

It is a political manipulation of the cruelest kind.

**We cannot support nor propagate this new falsification of history.**

Instead, it needs to be asked who is responsible – and answer to which has deeply troubling political and moral implications. This time we must make our reaffirmations of our allegiances to truth, justice, and compassion.

It is poignantly disappointing and discouraging that we must deal with such a situation. We will follow in the steps of our PAC predecessors in defending the truth of the Katyn massacre, the identity, dignity, and honor of the Katyn victims, their respectability and reputation. This is the only way that we can be at peace with ourselves as Polish-Americans and members of the Polish American Congress, honoring its' traditions.

As Poles and members of the Polish-American community we have a right to our identity and dignity, and to sincere respect for our history – which HR 566 fundamentally lacks. That is a shameful act of writing Poles out of their own WWII history and re-writing the Soviets out of their criminal WWII history. That is why, so long as our rights to dignity and respect are violated, we cannot support Resolution 566.

Respectfully,

Andrzej Prokopczuk