WHAT WOULD BE THE HARM?:

SOVIET RULE IN EASTERN POLAND, 1939-1941

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by

PATRICK E. CAMPBELL JR.

has been approved for

the Department of History

and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Steven M. Miner

Professor of History

Benjamin M. Ogles

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Abstract

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Director of Thesis: Steven M. Miner

This thesis traces Soviet attempts to integrate eastern Poland into the USSR from 1939-1941. In September 1939, the Soviet Union, in collusion with Nazi Germany, invaded the eastern provinces of Poland and soon after annexed them. Over the following twenty-one months, the Soviets assimilated this territory through physical repression of the population and through reorganization of local cultural, political, and economic institutions along Soviet lines. Although some people initially welcomed Soviet rule, unpopular policies turned much of the local population against the USSR.

Soviet rule in Poland can be divided into two concurrent phases: the preparation of the population for Soviet life through repression and the transformation of Polish capitalism into Soviet communism. Moscow approached each phase with ideology at the fore, but enacted policies tailored not only to promoting class conflict, but to securing and enhancing Soviet control as well. The ethnic diversity of eastern Poland was a key factor that all facets of Soviet integration policy had to address. The German invasion of the USSR in June 1941 temporarily ended Soviet rule in this region and laid bare its widespread unpopularity.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Steven M. Miner

Professor of History
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Introduction

On Sept. 17, 1939, the Soviet Union became the fourth major power to enter the Second World War when the Red Army invaded eastern Poland. Although the June 1941 Nazi attack greatly escalated the Soviet role in the war and fixed for good which side the Red Army fought on, the 1939 campaign marked the real beginning of Soviet involvement. The ensuing twenty-one months of Soviet rule in the Polish eastern provinces illustrated Soviet approaches to integrating and controlling populations and territory.1 It was the first in a series of expansions of Soviet borders and influence during the war years and after.2

The fate of Poland was at the center of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of Aug. 23, 1939. Secret protocols of the pact delineated Soviet and German spheres of influence in Poland and along the Baltic coast. While they did not contain language specifically committing the USSR to assist Germany in dismantling Poland, the implications were clear.3 Stalin’s

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1 The Soviet invasion and annexation of eastern Poland has never received anywhere near the amount of attention as German activities in Poland. The English-language historiography on the subject is quite limited. In the late 1980s, there was a brief flurry of interest in the topic. In 1988, Jan T. Gross published Revolution From Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1988), which is still the definitive work on the subject. In April 1989, the University of London held a conference dedicated to examining eastern Poland under Soviet rule from 1939-1941. Some of the essays presented there were collected and published as a book two years later. See Keith Sword, ed., The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces (New York: St. Martin’s Press 1991). As of August 2007, there is still no book-length work dedicated to this topic based primarily on materials made available after the opening of the Soviet archives.

2 In 1939, the USSR took control of over 200,000 square kilometers of Polish territory, though they temporarily ceded a small slice of it around Wilno to Lithuania. Soviet eastern Poland (after the annexation of Lithuania in 1940) comprised all of Poland’s prewar Wilno, Polesie, Nowogródek, Tarnopol, Wołyń, and Stanisławow voivodships, as well as portions of Lwów and Białystok voivodships. Stalin annexed eastern Poland to the Belorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics on Nov. 1-2, 1939. In 1940, the USSR annexed Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, formerly belonging to Romania, as well as some Finnish territory and all three Baltic States. In 1945, the Soviets annexed the northern part of East Prussia and slightly readjusted their border with the resurrected Polish state, giving Białystok to Communist Poland.

3 For the text of the pact and the secret protocols, see Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations, vol. 1 (London: Heinemann 1962), pp. 38-40. The spheres of influence were to become active “in the event of a
decision to seize eastern Poland aligned his military strategy and ideological goals. The pact delayed war between the USSR and Germany, giving Stalin time to arm for the inevitable clash with Nazism. It also gave him a say in the extent of Hitler’s eastward expansion.  

Ideologically, the conquest, as well as subsequent territorial seizures the next year, enabled the expansion of the Bolshevik revolution and promotion of class conflict.

Stalin wished enough time to elapse between the German and Soviet invasions for Hitler to receive most of the blame for violating Polish sovereignty and starting the Second World War. Thus, he waited over two weeks after Hitler invaded Poland to send in the Red Army, though logistics and grand strategy also played a role in the delay. He couched Soviet expansion in defensive language, thus deflecting much of the blame for this aggression onto Hitler. Stalin did not want to appear to be Hitler’s ally; he wanted a temporary arrangement with the Nazis to avoid fighting them while seizing the opportunity to expand Soviet borders. Stalin explained his motives for the pact in a private discussion with Comintern head Georgi Dimitrov in September 1939. According to Dimitrov, Stalin knew that the pact benefited Germany and proposed: “next time, we’ll

territorial and political transformation of the territories belonging to the Polish State.” On Sept. 3, German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop sent a message to the Soviets urging them to attack Poland as soon as possible. See Ibid., p. 42.

4 Soviet foreign minister Viacheslav Molotov, speaking in an interview almost forty years later, claimed: “If we hadn’t moved towards the Germans in 1939, they would have invaded all of Poland right up to our old border. That’s why we came to an arrangement with them.” He goes on to say that at the time Moscow believed “that part of Poland . . . indisputably belongs to the Soviet Union.” See Albert Resis, ed., Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), p. 9.

5 The Soviets signed a peace treaty with the Japanese, with whom they had been skirmishing in the Far East during the summer, on Sept. 15, 1939. This was only two days before the Red Army invaded Poland. Stalin obviously wanted to conclude military matters in the East before expanding in the West.

6 R.C. Raak, Stalin’s Drive to the West 1938-1945: The Origins of the Cold War (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1995), p. 38. In the response to the above-mentioned German request for Soviet assistance, Molotov on Sept. 5 offered the Soviet rejection. His official reply included the line: “it seems to us that through excessive haste we might injure our cause and promote unity among our opponents.” See Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations, vol. 1, p. 43.
urge on the other side.” This conversation contains perhaps the only record of Stalin admitting an expansionist motive for the pact when he says: “what would be the harm if as a result of the rout of Poland we were to extend the socialist system onto new territories and populations?”7 Stalin used the German aggression both as a pretext for Soviet actions and as distraction from them. While the English and French leadership lamented and criticized the Soviet attack, they still saw Hitler as the main culprit in the destruction of Poland and did not declare war on the USSR over the matter.8

Stalin annexed Poland’s eastern provinces to existing political entities, but they remained in a category unto themselves until after the war. Soviet western Belorussia and western Ukraine, as they became known, had in their states of flux more in common with one another than with the prewar regions of their respective parent republics.

Soviet policy in eastern Poland falls into two distinct, yet interrelated and concurrent phases. The first involved the preparation and maintenance of conditions suitable for the construction of Soviet socialism. This entailed the military conquest of Poland and dismantling its governing institutions. It also led to the physical repression of hundreds of thousands of people. The Soviets discarded unwanted human material such as military officers, ethnic nationalists, class enemies, and former public servants (with much overlap between the groups) through murder, imprisonment, and deportation. Somewhere from 400,000-500,000 former Polish citizens suffered some form of physical repression from 1939-1941.

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8 The world press was largely critical of the USSR for invading Poland. See Appendix 1 in Keith Sword ed., The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces 1939-41, pp. 291-294.
Those who avoided repression found themselves the subjects of the other side of Soviet policy: the political, social, and economic transformation of eastern Poland. Moscow attempted to mold its new subjects into proper citizens of the USSR, weaning them off religion, the market economy, and any forms of entertainment and culture not approved by the censors. This entailed the building of ideologically sound political, economic, and cultural structures to govern daily life. Some of these institutions had the veneer of local control, but most civic leaders not brought in from prewar Soviet territory usually answered to people who were. Soviet economics reduced local living standards and by 1941, economic life in western Ukraine and western Belorussia differed little from that in the rest of the Soviet Union. The Soviets also imposed their bland national culture, which emphasized class identities and permitted no social expressions at odds with the official worldview. The authorities attempted to give all of these policies an air of legitimacy through rigged elections. They trumpeted the predictably pro-Soviet results of these fraudulent exercises as proof of widespread grassroots support, a myth shattered by the favorable reaction of much of the population to the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941.

The seizure of eastern Poland added to the population of the USSR about 13 million people sharply divided along national, linguistic, and religious lines.\(^9\) During the

\(^9\) According to extrapolations of 1931 Polish census data, among the 13 million people living in eastern Poland in 1939, there were about 5.25 million Poles, 4.5 million Ukrainians, 1.1 million Belorussians, 1.1 million Jews, and the remainder comprised of nationally ambiguous “locals,” Germans, Russians, Czechs, Lithuanians, and others. These data may be inaccurate, as some historians believe the Poles inflated their own numbers at the expense of the other groups. See Keith Sword, “Introduction,” in *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces*, p. xviii. Other sources claim Ukrainians were the most numerous group in eastern Poland and that there were over 5 million of them living there in 1939. See Marian M. Drozdowski, “National Minorities in Poland, 1918-1939,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 22 (1970), p. 236
interwar period, diversity served as the touchstone of this region’s identity and proved a significant barrier to the Polish government’s own efforts to assimilate this territory.

The Soviet leadership saw this population through the prism of class conflict, but their policies had to take into account its ethnic diversity. Different groups reacted to Soviet rule in different ways, necessitating a variegated approach. No group was immune to repression and anyone was a potential target, regardless of ethnic background. Poles were the most likely to endure repression, but Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Jewish victims all numbered in the many thousands.

Soviet cultural, political, and economic policies aimed to redress the inequalities of Polish rule. They demonstrated concerted Soviet attempts to win the favor with the minorities and use ethnic solidarity between the Soviets and their Ukrainian and Belorussian “blood brothers” as a means of eroding Polish culture.\(^\text{10}\)

In eastern Poland, the Soviets were able to gain near-total control of the population and freely impose their way of life. Yet, both the repressions and importation of Soviet institutions alienated the diverse local population instead of earning its loyalty. Soviet behavior squandered goodwill among people inclined to support them and further enraged people who already opposed them. The transformation of eastern Poland into western Ukraine and western Belorussia demonstrated the application of Communist ideology on a diverse subject population, as well as Soviet reliance on coercion as the only effective means to make it work.

\(^{10}\) The Soviets deemed the invasion of Poland necessary in order to “extend the hand of assistance” to their Ukrainian and Belorussian “blood brothers” who had been had been “utterly abandoned to their fate” with the collapse of the Polish government in the wake of the German invasion of Sept. 1, 1939. See *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. 1, p. 48.
Chapter 1: Invasion and Repression

Repression was the centerpiece of the Soviet enterprise in eastern Poland. It targeted all groups the Communist elite saw as a threat the establishment of their power. Moscow weighted each potential threat and evaluated each ethnic, social, and economic group’s usefulness to the Soviet mission. Above all else, the Soviets sought to destroy the Polish state and erase its concomitant power structures. Thus, they targeted Poles, who dominated Poland’s political and social systems, more than any other ethnic group.

Some scholars have argued that the Soviets based their repression in eastern Poland solely on class ideology and targeted Poles only for this reason.11 Class was an important factor in the repressions, but only one of many. The repressions were also about establishing and maintaining Soviet control; although class enemies were prime targets, they were not the only threats to Soviet power. The NKVD arrested and deported Polish civil servants, for example, because these people would be the nucleus of any attempt to revive the Polish state. Some poor Poles felt kinship with the middle and upper classes that transcended the restrictive ideological prism through which the Soviets viewed the world, and they too suffered at the hands of the police.12

Hundreds of thousands of non-Poles also suffered repression. The Soviets found some minority groups more acceptable than the Poles on class bases, but many of the minorities vehemently opposed Soviet rule for nationalist or religious reasons and thus

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12 Dr. Steven Miner argues that the Soviets never understood that many members of the lower rungs of society in the western borderlands felt a kinship with their social and economic superiors and often had dreams “of someday joining their ranks,” and that this connection often trumped class loyalty. See Steven Merritt Miner, Stalin’s Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2003), p. 39.
Soviet repression targeted them on these grounds. The Soviets at first sought the cooperation of minority groups against the Polish national center but later turned on them, fearing that some of their elements opposed Soviet interests.

In all, roughly 440,000 people from eastern Poland, about 3 percent of the population, endured some form of repression in the twenty-one months of Soviet rule before Operation Barbarossa, not including the thousands more conscripted against their will into the Red Army. From 1939-41, the Soviet western borderlands, and eastern Poland in particular, truly became the “center of gravity of Soviet repression.” But before the repressions could begin, the Soviets first had to seize control of Poland’s eastern provinces by force of arms.

The Red Army invaded eastern Poland early in the morning of Sept. 17, 1939, sixteen days after the Wehrmacht invaded Poland from the West. The attack constituted a breach of at least five international treaties to which the USSR was a party, including two bilateral nonaggression agreements with Poland. Soviet military planners committed an invasion force comprised of two full-strength front commands featuring twelve tank brigades and between 750,000 and 1 million combat soldiers and support

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13 Ukrainians and Belorussians tended to be much poorer than Poles.
14 Victor Zaslavsky, “The Katyn Massacre: Class Cleansing as Totalitarian Praxis,” Telos 114 (Winter, 1999), p. 12. The author gives a figure of 430,000-440,000 victims of repression from 1939-1941. I estimate from a variety of sources (all figures are rough) that the Soviets deported 315,000 people, arrested 107,000, and murdered at least 22,000, bringing the total to 439,000 victims, although some murder victims possibly are represented among the arrested. Until the opening of the Soviet archives, Polish estimates of the victims of Soviet repression during this period ran into the millions. These high estimates date from the 1940s and were generally accepted until the 1990s.
Only about 20,000 Polish border guards faced this considerable Red Army force. These lightly armed defenders were not regular army men but rather elements of the Polish border defense forces, the Korpus Ochrony Pogranizca (KOP), and had neither tanks nor aircraft at their disposal.18

The Polish high command depleted the KOP somewhat before the Soviet invasion by transferring elements west to fight the Germans, but the sorry state of Poland’s eastern defenses was a result of its prewar military posture. In the 1920s, the Poles directed their defensive military planning against the Soviets but after the rise of Hitler, they saw Germany as the most dangerous threat to their security.19 By the outbreak of the Second World War Poland had concentrated most of its defensive capability against the Nazis and thus the Red Army had little trouble penetrating Polish defenses.20

After the Soviet attack, confusion spread rapidly among KOP units guarding the border. General Orlik Rückemann, head of the KOP, received no instructions from the Polish high command on how to engage the Red Army.21 While fierce resistance did occur in some places, the surprised and outnumbered KOP men usually retreated in the face of the Soviet advance. Many Polish units fought their way through the countryside

18 Ibid., pp. 16-17. KOP translates in English to “Frontier Defense Corps” or “Border Protection Corps.”
21 Erickson, p. 18.
towards the Romanian and Hungarian borders. In the confusion, some Red Army and Wehrmacht units mistakenly fired upon each other. Fewer than three weeks after the Soviet invasion, the last Polish units surrendered.

Soviet foreign minister Viacheslav Molotov claimed in an Oct. 31, 1939 speech before the Supreme Soviet that the Red Army sustained 737 dead and 1862 wounded in the Polish campaign. One should look at these numbers with skepticism, but Polish figures of over 10,000 Red Army dead and wounded are suspect as well. Polish losses in the East included not only those who fell fighting the Red Army but also casualties inflicted by local anti-Polish minority militias who took advantage of the chaos to attack Polish soldiers. Polish sources estimate combat casualties in action against the Red Army at 3,000-7,000 dead and roughly 20,000 wounded, with another 1,000-2,500 dead from engagements with locals. Molotov claimed that the Red Army took 230,000 Polish prisoners, but the Soviets released most Polish Army POWs shortly after the campaign. Soviet documents show 39,600 Polish POWs in custody as of Nov. 19, 1939. The

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22 Ibid., pp. 18-19; See also Gross, Revolution from Abroad, pp. 18-21.
25 Szawlowski, p. 42. The author estimates that the Soviets lost 2,500-3,000 dead and 8,000-10,000 wounded as well as upwards of 100 tanks and armored vehicles fighting in Poland. He provides no citation for these figures and claims they come from “a fairly detailed review of the major pertinent combats.”
28 TsKhIDK, f.1/p op.1e d.2 l.223. Reproduced in R.G. Pikhoia, et al., eds., Katyn: Plenniki Neobiavlennoi Voiny (Moscow: Mezhdunarodni Fond Demokratii 1997), pp. 208-210. The Soviets handed over 43,000 prisoners to the Germans, mostly men born in the German-occupied zone of Poland. The Germans in turn gave the Soviets about 14,000 Polish POWs hailing from the eastern territories; See also Zaslavsky, p. 7.
Soviets capitalized on the quick disintegration of the Polish forces and within a matter of days ceased to consider the Polish army an organized force, reducing it “to the status of guerilla bands led by hostile ‘officers.’”

The Polish campaign was not particularly difficult but it did highlight poor Soviet military leadership at the tactical level. Red Army combat performance in Poland was adequate but not impressive. In the words of military historian David Glantz: “Soviet forces only muddled through the operation.”

Poor leadership was an important factor in the lackluster Red Army performance. The effects of the recent purges combined with the massive expansion of the Red Army in the 1930s to create an acute shortage of qualified officers by 1939. Many of the officers who fell during the purges were the best and brightest in the Soviet military. Purge survivors often were inexperienced, unimaginative, and lacked critical skills such as the ability to think on their feet and act decisively during battle. A Soviet commander who served in Poland later recounted the poor performance of Soviet units during the campaign:

A Lt. Anatolii Matveev . . . noted that despite minimal resistance from hostile Polish forces, Soviet soldiers were poorly prepared, Soviet officers failed to coordinate operation, orders from above frequently changed, and both soldiers and officers engaged in extensive looting. Matveev claims

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29 Erickson, p. 1.
32 Glantz cites Soviet figures that tally 54,714 Red Army men shot or removed from their commands from 1937-41. See Glantz, pp. 26-33.
that troops were often forced to move ahead without directions in unknown territory, that many officers could not read a map, and, consequently, units frequently lost their way.33

Despite their uninspired performance in the Polish campaign, neither the Red Army nor the highest levels of the Soviet leadership put its lessons to good use. Red Army officers repeated many of the same mistakes later with much greater loss of life.

The bedraggled appearance of the Red Army troops in Poland made quite an impression on the local population. While Soviet military hardware seemed modern enough, the soldiers themselves did not cut an impressive figure. Locals described them as dirty, disheveled, malnourished, smelly, and unfamiliar with some of the basic accoutrements of modern life.34 The Red Army’s appearance contrasted with that of the orderly, clean cut Wehrmacht. Many locals who witnessed both the German and Soviet armies on the march noticed their glaring differences and this contributed to the common belief in the summer and fall of 1941 that Germany would decisively defeat the USSR.

Many Red Army men were awestruck by the quality and choice of consumer goods in the shops of eastern Poland. They had little accurate knowledge of the outside world or the market economy, having lived most or all of their lives under a government that censored and distorted outside information. Few of these conscripts, many of whom came from eastern Ukraine, had ever been abroad. Soviet propaganda taught them that the USSR was a worker’s paradise and the Capitalist world was full of misery and deprivation. Their obvious wonder at the bounty of eastern Poland worried many

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34 Gross, Revolution from Abroad, pp. 45-50.
Communist party officials and contrasted with the official worldview, which promoted “Soviet patriotism that was buttressed by comparisons with a fictional outside world.”

Red Army men in Poland used what little money they had to buy whatever they could. Of particular interest were items hard to find or unavailable in the USSR. These included fresh foods, particularly meats, as well as quality consumer goods, especially clothing and watches. The Red Army shopping spree worried Moscow, but it was too brief to have a significant impact on the soldiers’ political reliability. They soon spent all of their money and shopkeepers ran out of goods to sell. The establishment of Soviet authority meant the end of capitalism in eastern Poland and the Red Army’s purchases were its last gasp.

Moscow was well aware of the importance of the behavior and appearance of the Red Army in projecting a positive image of the USSR to the occupied population. The Soviets took measures to ensure that Red Army soldiers conducted themselves properly in the Polish campaign. Lev Mekhlis, Commissar of the Red Army, wrote a report in which he highlighted a few instances of looting by Red Army men and explained their significance: “These facts are dishonoring us in the eyes of the local population, and enemies can use them [to discredit] our great work [here].” Mekhlis recommended stern punishments for any Red Army men caught taking advantage of the local population. He also ordered the punishment of officers who failed to reign in such activity.

35 Von Hagen, p. 199.
36 Communist officials had issued Soviet soldiers Polish money before the invasion. Jan Gross speculates that the Party elite knew Red Army soldiers would be unable to resist the material temptations in Poland and preferred that they buy goods rather than engage in looting, which they feared would lead to a breakdown in discipline. See Gross, Revolution from Abroad, pp. 46-48.
37 TsGASA, f.9 o.40 d.63 l.62-64. Photocopy in HJA, Alexander Moiseevich Nekrich papers, 1940-1996, b.14 f.5. This and all other translations quoted from Russian language sources are my own.
contrast is great with Moscow’s attitude towards Red Army behavior at the end of the Second World War, when Soviet soldiers raped, looted, and killed almost at will and were rarely punished for these acts.

The Soviet invasion immediately and fundamentally altered the ways in which Poland’s ethnic groups interacted with and viewed one another. The upheaval of war and the collapse of Polish authority led to a brief but bitter period of anarchy during which violence between the Poles and minority groups accompanied and followed the Red Army advance. For a few weeks, the Soviets did not discourage this bloodshed and in some cases actively encouraged it.\textsuperscript{38} Soviet propaganda urged the local population to attack landowners, military officers, and other symbols of Polish wealth and authority.\textsuperscript{39}

The Soviets began marginalizing and eliminating class enemies as soon as the Red Army entered Poland. They sought to use the minorities’ anti-Polish sentiment against wealthy and powerful Poles. Soviet culpability for this ethnic bloodletting is substantial but not total. Much blame indeed belongs to elements of the minority populations who actually perpetrated the violence. Poles also share blame for their prewar repression of minorities and their commission of atrocities against non-Polish civilians in the wake of the Soviet invasion.

Armed minority groups attacked Polish military units, many of whom were retreating from the Germans, the Soviets, or both. Polish units, sometimes accompanied by Polish civilians, attacked minority villages and killed people not only out of a desire to avenge the attacks against themselves, but also because of the impression, not altogether

\textsuperscript{38} Gross, \textit{Revolution from Abroad}, pp. 35-36.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 36.
false, that the minorities were welcoming the Soviet troops. The Poles cast this battle as a struggle against treasonous elements, seeing themselves as legitimate representatives of the Polish state serving summary justice to traitors who were giving aid and comfort to a foreign enemy.\textsuperscript{40} An atmosphere of hatred and distrust pervaded, especially in the primarily Ukrainian southeastern provinces. Dmitri Shalikashvili, a Georgian serving in the Polish Army, described the hostility his unit felt in territory with a Ukrainian majority:

\begin{quote}
From now on we had to be extremely careful in everything, as being on territory with [an] Ukrainian population was almost as dangerous as being on enemy territory. Cases of sabotage kept being reported. Later on, after the final catastrophe of the Polish Army, the hostility of the Ukrainians took even more open and drastic forms. The Ukrainians became extremely aggressive and collaborated with the Russians. They were looking for groups of Polish soldiers who were hiding in the woods and kept delivering them to the Russians. They were also burning Polish estates and killing their owners.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

The violence subsided as the Soviets established their authority; they stopped it as soon as it had outlived its usefulness. They only encouraged the violence as a means of assisting their initial wave of repressions and they did not wish for the lawlessness and anarchy to continue any longer than was necessary. The Soviets, as usual, preferred to handle the repressions themselves.

The Soviet culture of arrest and denunciation found fertile ground in eastern Poland. Soviet police made 107,140 arrests there from 1939-41.\textsuperscript{42} This represented

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., pp. 18-21.
\textsuperscript{41} Dmitri Shalikashvili, trans. Maria Shalikashvili, “World War Two: Polish Campaign of September 1939,” HIA, Dmitri Shalikashvili Writings, 1920-1960, b.3 f.3, p. 9. The author goes on to admit that while Ukrainian behavior was deplorable, Polish arrogance and repression before the war had contributed to the atmosphere of hate.
\textsuperscript{42} O.A. Gor’ianov and A.B. Roginskii, “Ob arestakh v zapadnykh oblastakh Belorussii i Ukrainy v 1939-1941 gg.,” in Repressii protiv poliakov i pol’skikh grazhdan (Moscow: Zven’ia 1997), p. 89.
about 52 percent of all arrests in the entire USSR during this period.\textsuperscript{43} Analysis of the ethnic origins of 92,500 of those arrested up until February 1941 shows the following ethnic breakdown: Poles – 44.4 percent, Jews – 24.9 percent, Ukrainians – 22.6 percent, Belorussians – 8.2 percent. When compared to population figures, Poles and Jews stand out as having the highest arrests per capita.\textsuperscript{44} Poles suffered arrest more than any other group because they held most of the positions of power and authority in the Polish state, but the reasons for the overrepresentation of Jews are less clear. Jews in eastern Poland had preserved many traditional institutions and were not as assimilated as were their counterparts in Western Europe and in the New World. Zionist and leftist political organizations boasted many Jewish members in eastern Poland, and the Soviets viewed these groups as competitors for the political loyalty of the Jewish community. Anti-Semitism, though officially proscribed, continued to linger beneath the surface.

The Soviets used arrests as a means of segregating troublesome or potentially troublesome elements from the rest of society. The arrests were also part of a larger culture of intimidation and denunciation prevalent in the rest of the USSR and aimed at deterrence of anti-Soviet activity through fear, particularly fear of interrogation and prison conditions. Soviet soldiers and administrators were fond of repeating a popular saying to people in eastern Poland: “In the Soviet Union there are only three categories of people – those who were in prison, those who are in prison, and those who will be in

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 88.
\textsuperscript{44} About 300,000 Jews fled German-occupied Poland to the Soviet Union from 1939-41. See Dov Levin, \textit{The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry Under Soviet Rule, 1939-1941} (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society 1995), p. 180. Some of the Jewish refugees were among the arrested but were not part of the prewar population data. Nevertheless, if one adjusts the data, Jews still have a higher rate of arrest than Ukrainians or Belorussians.
prison.”45 While the maxim was hyperbole, it exposed an important aspect of the Soviet psyche, an acceptance of the ubiquity of repression. Totalitarian regimes often pit citizens against one another in order to maintain loyalty through the threat of denunciation. This suspicion of one’s neighbors, which the NKVD used to great effect in the rest of the USSR, came to eastern Poland as well. Locals learned not to trust one another. One young Jewish girl with a bourgeois background recognized the value of anonymity: “We tried to keep a low profile, avoiding contacts with people who might have known us form before the war. One had to be very careful when meeting or talking to people. Denunciations were the rule.”46

The arrests began as soon as the Red Army entered Polish territory and continued until they left. The first targets were community leaders, particularly state employees. NKVD chief Lavrentii Beria issued an order two days before the invasion for his men to “arrest the most reactionary representatives of the [Polish] governmental administration.” These included the leaders and immediate subordinates of the local police, gendarmes, and border security as well as higher-ups in the military and political establishments. The NKVD also targeted for repression leaders of “counterrevolutionary groups,” which could mean any organization not co-opted by the Soviet Communist party. They also arrested in this first wave of repression landowners, business and factory owners, judges, and other groups suspect on class bases or for their leadership roles.47

45 Gross, Revolution from Abroad, p. 144.
46 Memories of Anna Tempelsman, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (Henceforth: USHMMMA), RG-02.199, p. 7.
Beria instructed the NKVD troops to seize key communications installations, such as post offices and radio stations, and to make sure they ended up in the hands of “reliable people.” He also ordered the immediate seizure of state archives, particularly those of the gendarmerie, general staff, and intelligence organizations, in order to more precisely and quickly determine exactly whom to arrest.48 The NKVD seized many personnel files in the early days of the occupation, and made good use of them when interrogating suspects. Locals were often surprised at the extent of NKVD knowledge of their backgrounds. Interrogators would often bring up matters from the 1920s and earlier.49

In a September 28, 1939 post-action report, NKVD official V.N. Merkulov listed some of the people his men had arrested in western Ukraine. In ten days, one operational group under his command arrested 923 people, over half of whom were Polish police. The rest were Polish Army officers, gendarmes, landowners, “prominent bourgeoisie” and leaders of non-Bolshevik Ukrainian political groups, including prominent members of some Socialist organizations as well as members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).50

The initial spate of arrests targeted people whom the Soviets saw as the most dangerous to their rule. Over time, Soviet interpretations of the threat levels of various groups and individuals changed. As the NKVD rolled back Polish underground nationalist groups and arrested or deported class enemies, the Soviets viewed minority

48 Ibid., p. 80.
49 Gross, Revolution from Abroad, p. 148.
50 Merkulov, “Iz soobshcheniia zametitelia NKVD SSSR” to NKVD SSSR, Sept. 28, 1939, OGB vol. 1 book 1, p. 96.
groups with increasing suspicion, and the focus of the repressions shifted to them towards the end of the occupation. For all of the chaos and repression surrounding the entry of the NKVD into Poland in 1939, arrests actually peaked in mid-1940. The Soviets knew that by keeping up the pressure and continuing to make arrests on a regular basis, they could more effectively use fear to keep the population under control.

Membership in any sort of political or economic organization before the war, including even the Communist Party, raised suspicion under Soviet rule. Polish trade unions and Socialist organizations suffered heavily. Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, leaders of the Jewish Socialist Bund, were two of the most famous men the Soviets arrested in eastern Poland. The police took them into custody in September 1939 and they received death sentences in August 1941. They were released the next month, however, at the request of the Polish Exile Government in London. Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, explained in February 1943 the fate of Ehrlich and Alter after their release:

However, after they were set free, at the time of the most desperate battles of the Soviet troops against the advancing Hitler army, they resumed their hostile activities including appeals to the Soviet troops to stop the bloodshed and immediately to conclude a peace with Germany. For this they were rearrested and, in December 1942, sentenced once more to capital punishment by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Soviet. The sentence has been carried out in regard to both of them.

The NKVD arrested leaders of ethnic nationalist groups as soon as the Red Army entered Polish territory, but temporarily softened their attitude towards non-Polish

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51 Gor’ianov and Roginskii, p. 88.
52 Stalin had excommunicated the Polish Communist Party, as well as the Communist Parties of western Ukraine and western Belorussia (operating in Poland) before the war.
nationalists after the initial wave of arrests, hoping to take advantage of these groups’ anti-Polish attitudes. The campaign against ethnic nationalism revived in 1940 and hit a fever pitch in the months preceding the German invasion of the USSR. The timing was not coincidental. The Soviets believed that many ethnic nationalist groups were preparing to assist Germany in the event of an invasion. Sometimes, as in the case of the OUN, whose members did collaborate with Germany before and after Barbarossa, their fears were justified. In other cases, they were not. A May 31, 1941 report accuses the “Union of Armed Struggle” (UAS), the Polish nationalist group that later became the Home Army, of collaborating with the Germans: “They have prepared an armed rebellion, timed and waiting for the moment of the German invasion of the USSR.”54 In reality, these Poles were just as anti-German as they were anti-Soviet, if not more so.

Nevertheless, Polish underground nationalists worried the Soviet authorities. While the Soviets, like the Germans, were able to destroy the power structures of the Polish state with alacrity, they did not crush the national will of the Poles. Despite its desire to resist, the Polish underground was less active in Soviet Poland than it was in German-occupied Poland. This was partly because more Poles lived under the Germans and the territory under German control had a more Polish character, but was also due in part to the ability of the NKVD to infiltrate the movement and effectively ferret out underground cells. From 1940, they had a highly placed mole within the UAS.55

55 Gross, Revolution from Abroad, p. 148.
An act of nationalist resistance in late 1939 highlighted Soviet stereotypes about the Poles. Late at night on Dec. 3, 1939, Polish nationalists tossed two hand grenades into the window of the home of the chairman of the pro-Soviet local governing committee, seriously injuring him and his wife. The NKVD described the three perpetrators, all from the same family, as former police and members of fascist organizations.56 The Soviets saw them as terrorists unwilling to accept the death of the Polish state and committed to resisting Soviet power.

Ukrainian nationalists were the most organized, violent, and numerous non-Polish nationalists in eastern Poland. They had cut their teeth in the interwar period committing terrorist acts against Polish authority. An NKVD official described Ukrainian nationalists in Lwów as “active, influential, and very strong” and pointed out that they “enjoyed significant support from the local population.”57

While the NKVD did arrest some Ukrainian leaders in 1939, the first nine or so months of Soviet occupation were relatively easy on the Ukrainian population. The Soviets promoted the Ukrainian language and distributed some land to Ukrainian peasants. However, by mid-1940, the Soviets were apparently not satisfied with the level of Ukrainian cooperation and began cracking down on Ukrainian nationalism.58 Around this same time, in August 1940, the OUN split into two factions. The more militant, youthful, and numerous OUN-B, headed by Stepan Bandera, gained the upper hand over their rivals, the OUN-M, headed by Andrei Mel’nyk. Both groups were hostile to the

56 Krasnov, “Soobshchenie UNKVD po l’vovskoi oblasti” to NKVD SSSR, Dec. 5, 1939, OGB vol. 1 book 1, p. 131
Soviet Union, and the NKVD carried out a show trial of OUN members in 1940, sentencing forty-two of fifty-nine defendants to death.\textsuperscript{59}

The Soviets again ramped up their campaign against Ukrainian nationalists in 1941. Their heavy-handed tactics drove many peasants to support the OUN.\textsuperscript{60} A Soviet report claimed that the OUN was terrorizing villagers to such an extent that pro-Soviet elements were afraid to betray them to the authorities. In the same document there is a description of an incident in which OUN “bandits” murdered a village chairman “in the presence of six neighbors. These neighbors not only didn’t oppose the murder, but wouldn’t even identify the bandits.”\textsuperscript{61} The document recommends deportation for the family members of all OUN underground fighters, and on May 22, 1941, the police sent over 11,000 family members of OUN men and women into exile in the Soviet interior.\textsuperscript{62}

Belorussian nationalists also endured NKVD persecution, though militant nationalism in Belorussia was not widespread. Belorussians had the least developed national consciousness among the major groups in eastern Poland and enjoyed close linguistic and cultural ties with Great Russians. Nevertheless, there was a small nationalist movement, and in 1940, the Soviets arrested some of its more prominent leaders. Towards the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941, the purge spread from the

\textsuperscript{59} Gross, Revolution from Abroad, p. 176. The Soviets commuted the death sentences of twenty-one of the defendants.

\textsuperscript{60} Miner, pp. 41-42.

\textsuperscript{61} Meshik, “Dokladnaiia zapiska NKG USSR” to Khrushchev, no earlier than April 15, 1941, OGB vol. 1 book 2, pp. 99-100.

\textsuperscript{62} Merkulov, “Iz dokladnai zapiski NKVD SSSR” to TsK VKP (b) and SNK SSSR, May 23, 1941, OGB vol. 1 book 2, pp. 154-155.
town to the villages, and anyone active in political life before the war or in the nationalist movement was a target.63

Jewish nationalists were probably the least anti-Soviet ethnic nationalist group in eastern Poland. Most of them correctly viewed the Nazis as the greater threat. Unlike other groups, they had no land dispute with the USSR; they focused their territorial aspirations on British Palestine. Their aims were threefold: to facilitate the departure of local Jews to the Holy Land, to cultivate communal continuity in order to withstand Soviet propaganda, and to funnel assistance to Jews living under Nazi occupation.64 In general, Jewish nationalists did not employ violence against the Soviet regime and chose not to join forces with the more violent Polish and Ukrainian underground groups, who in any case were often anti-Semitic.65 The Soviets did not accuse the Jewish underground of being pro-German, as they did other groups, but they did accuse them of “carrying out pro-English and pro-American agitation.”66

The large number of arrests in western Ukraine and western Belorussia led to overcrowding in Soviet prisons, causing nightmarish conditions. As prisons filled up, the authorities hastily constructed new ones, nicknamed “pigsties” by the inmates.67 Food, medical care, and sanitary conditions were abysmal in all of these facilities, particularly in the newer ones, and interrogation often involved torture.68

64 Levin, p. 255.
67 Gross, Revolution from Abroad, p. 152.
68 Ibid., pp. 144-186.
In the summer of 1941, as the German Army tore through western Ukraine and western Belorussia, the Soviets were unwilling to let their prisoners fall into German hands. They took great care to either evacuate or kill virtually all of the prisoners in the path of the German advance. Soviet sources show 8,789 prisoners executed in the entire Ukrainian SSR in evacuation operations, and many of these deaths occurred in the border areas where the NKVD had little time to move the prisoners east.\textsuperscript{69} The authorities knew that many prisoners from the western borderlands were anti-Soviet to begin with, and the harsh treatment they endured in captivity had only hardened their attitude. They were afraid that if these people fell into the hands of the Germans, they would collaborate with them.

Despite the high number of arrests, the most sweeping means of repression the Soviets employed in eastern Poland was deportation. Between February 1940 and June 1941, the Soviets carried out four separate waves of mass deportations in which the NKVD exiled about 300,000 people to hundreds of settlements across the USSR.\textsuperscript{70} Some of the deported were second-tier threats, less dangerous in Soviet eyes than people whom the NKVD imprisoned or murdered. Economic motives also influenced the deportations.


\textsuperscript{70} Previous estimates put the number deportees from eastern Poland as high as 1-2 million. Analysis of Soviet archival documents has led to a reduction in the accepted range of deportees. The true number is probably somewhere between 292,000 and 325,000. See N.L. Pobol’, P.M. Polian eds., \textit{Stalinskie Deportatsii: 1928-1953} (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnii Fond Demokratii 2005), p. 106 (Henceforth: \textit{Stalinskie Deportatsii}); Snyder, \textit{Sketches from a Secret War}, p. 317; Pavel Polian, \textit{Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR} (Budapest: Central European University Press 2004), p. 118.
Evicting agrarian military settlers, for example, freed up land for distribution among peasants and state institutions and there was always demand for more slave labor.\textsuperscript{71}

The first mass deportation took place in the winter of 1940 and targeted special military settlers, forest workers, and the families of both groups. The settlers, called \textit{osadniki}, were mostly ethnic Poles and veterans of the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1919-1921. They had received land grants from the state as a reward for their service and as part of an effort to colonize the East, where Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Jews together outnumbered Poles. Beria described them as “military-political agents of the Polish state” and a “base for counterrevolutionary actions.”\textsuperscript{72} Forest workers and their families were a less obvious choice for deportation, but the ever-suspicious Soviets worried that they might play a role in anti-Soviet partisan activity in the forests where they worked, especially since these same forests had been refuges for Poles in anti-Russian uprisings during the Tsarist period and during the Polish-Bolshevik War.\textsuperscript{73}

The deportation of \textit{osadniki} and forest workers began before dawn on Feb. 10, 1940. Within 24 hours, the NKVD deported 27,655 families totaling 139,167 individuals to over one hundred settlements in twenty-one separate regions of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{74} Soviet data often classify the two groups under one heading, but a breakdown of the two

\textsuperscript{71} Alexander Statiev, “Motivations and Goals of Soviet Deportations in the Western Borderlands” \textit{The Journal of Strategic Studies} 28, No. 6, (December, 2005), p. 979.

\textsuperscript{72} TsA FSB RF, f.12 oc. op.1 d.2 l.73. Reproduced in \textit{Stalinskie Deportatsii}, pp. 108-09.

\textsuperscript{73} Martin Dean, \textit{Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44} (New York: St. Martin’s Press 2000), pp. 4-5; See also Z.S. Siemaszko “The Mass Deportations of the Polish Population to the USSR, 1940-41,” in \textit{The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces}, pp. 219-221.

groups in L’vov oblast shows less than 10 percent of the deportees were foresters and their families.\textsuperscript{75}

The NKVD compiled lists of deportees ahead of time and sent three-man squads to move families from their homes to assembly and embarkation points.\textsuperscript{76} Families were heavily restricted in what they could bring with them and had little time to collect their possessions. The NKVD confiscated all real estate, livestock, and heavy farm implements. The Soviets later redistributed these items for use by various state institutions including collective farms, schools, and hospitals.\textsuperscript{77} Permitted baggage was limited to small household items and personal effects not exceeding 500 kilograms per family. NKVD guards failed to provide adequate nourishment during the long journey east and families prescient enough to bring food with them often cited this fact as a critical means of staving off death during the train ride into exile. Protocol called for each deportee to receive 800 grams of bread and hot food every day, but deportees usually received little sustenance in transit.\textsuperscript{78} The NKVD was also supposed to provide the deportees with fresh drinking water, but deportee accounts often describe having to melt snow and ice from the train’s windows to avoid dehydration.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{75} Arkhiv informatsionnogo biuro UVD L’vovskoi oblasti, f.110 op.1 d.104 l.1-9. Reproduced in Stalinskie Deportatsii, pp. 116-119.
\textsuperscript{76} Lebedeva, 34.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{78} GARF, f.P-9479 op.1 d.52 l.8-10. Reproduced in Stalinskie Deportatsii, pp. 111-112; For personal accounts of the deportees in English see Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross, eds., War Through Children’s Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939-1941 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press 1981), and Tadeusz Piotrowski, ed., The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollections of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World (Jefferson: McFarland 2004). These volumes contain hundreds of personal recollections of the deportees and most describe desperate hunger during the journey east. Janusz Bardach, a Jew conscripted into the Red Army before the war, published a powerful memoir in English detailing his years in the GULAG. See Janusz Bardach and Kathleen Gleeson, Man is Wolf to Man: Surviving the GULAG (Berkeley: University of California Press 1998).
\textsuperscript{79} Piotrowski, The Polish Deportees of World War II, pp. 18-19.
Plans also existed to provide the deportees with adequate health care. The Council of People’s Ministers (SNK) of the USSR ordered “the People’s Commissariat for Health to ensure the resettled *osadniki* [meaning all of the February deportees] medical personnel, essential medicines and medical supplies along the route.”80 There is little evidence that the Soviet guards provided the deportees with adequate medical care or even basic sanitary facilities. Latrines were usually simple uncovered holes in the floorboards and sometimes the deportees themselves had to create them.81

While most of the February deportees went without a fight, some of them resisted. In Tarnopol oblast in Ukraine, about eighty peasants protested the deportations and requested that the local NKVD boss not carry them out. A few deportees also resisted with non-firing weapons, probably sharp household items or farming equipment, and one deportee even resisted using his teeth.82 In Belostok oblast in Belorussia, one Leon Vysotskii offered armed resistance but the NKVD troops shot him dead before he could wound or kill any Soviets.83

In western Ukraine, several large groups protested the deportations. In the village of Kovenichi, a crowd of bystanders shouted, “let them be” at NKVD men carrying out an operation. A reserve Red Army detachment soon arrived and dispersed the crowd. In Sredne-Mala, a crowd of about sixty prevented the deportation of two foresters and their families and again the NKVD needed help to stabilize the situation. A similar incident occurred in the village of Raskhozhe until about twenty-five border guards arrived to

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82 TsA FSB RF, f.3 op.7 d.112 l.29-30. Reproduced in *Stalinskie Deportatsii*, pp. 122-123.
83 TsA FSB RF, f.3 op.7 d.112 l.65-66. Reproduced in Ibid., p. 123.
disperse the resisters. In the latter two cases, the deportees had close relationships with
the Soviet-appointed village leader. They were probably clinging to the hope their
connections might save them from deportation.84

While the NKVD troops were able to overcome all resistance, other aspects of the
operation did not proceed according to plan. The NKVD intended to deport each family
intact with all of their essential personal items. That was often not how things worked out. A post-action report from March 1940 from GULAG official M.V. Konradov lists
quite a few problems associated with the arriving deportees. He noted that many families
did not have enough time to collect their belongings and “arrived without clothes, shoes,
or bedding.” Much baggage was also lost along the way. Konradov also complained of
too many deportees arriving without proper documentation or arriving separate from their
families, often because certain members were not at home when the NKVD evicted their
relatives. He was also at a loss regarding what to do with elderly and handicapped
deportees unable to perform physical labor.85

Soviet planners sent most of the February deportees to work in the timber
industry. The next largest groups worked for the transportation bureau and the
commissariat of precious metals. Some also worked for the commissariats of armaments
and heavy industry, building, and building materials.86 Soviet authorities viewed the
February deportees as a reservoir of forced labor and used them as such.87 At the time,
timber and gold production were well below target levels and the rail system was in the

84 Arkhiv informatsionnogo biuro UVD L’vovskoi oblasti, f.110 op.1 d.102 l.131-137. Reproduced in
Ibid., pp. 125-126.
85 GARF, f.P-9479 op.1 d.61 l.50-54. Reproduced in Ibid., pp. 128-130.
86 GARF, f.P-9479 op.1 d.61 l.34-39. Reproduced in Ibid., pp.131-134; See also Lebedeva, p. 34.
87 Lebedeva, p. 32.
middle of an expansion program. The GULAG apparatus needed more workers to make up for these shortfalls and the Soviets directed many of the February deportees to industries where the labor shortage was acute. This was not the case with the next batch of deportees, who were mostly women and children. The NKVD sent most of them to the arid steppe of Central Asia where there was little opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the Soviet economy.

The NKVD carried out the second mass deportation in April 1940. This time it deported the families of people arrested in previous operations. These included the relatives of military officers, police, landowners, teachers, business owners, lawyers, civil servants, ethnic nationalists, ex-Communists and many others. The NKVD also deported prostitutes, who went east on April 9, several days ahead of the families of previously repressed individuals, who left on April 13. About 61,000 people were deported in these operations.

The eviction process was largely the same as in the February deportations. As before, the Soviets confiscated all property left behind, including real estate. NKVD troops had orders to search for contraband, particularly “weapons, counterrevolutionary literature, and foreign currency.” Soviet sources show less resistance and problems in the April operations than in the February deportations. Beria ordered the NKVD to “use the

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90 Siemaszko, p. 222.
92 Ibid., p. 106.
accumulated experience [from] the osadniks [operation]” and warned against “repetition of mistakes.”93

Whereas the February deportations scattered people all over the Soviet interior, most of the April deportees ended up in northern Kazakhstan, sentenced to remain there for a ten-year term. Many of these people were under a sort of house arrest, confined to a single raion, a neighborhood-sized Soviet district. Moscow viewed them as less threatening than other deportees and allowed them a measure and freedom and some interaction with the local population, who often viewed the new arrivals with disdain.94 They generally worked on collective and state-owned farms where they were assigned the most difficult tasks and received the lowest pay and the least food. Living conditions were unsanitary and led to the spread of disease.95

The next mass deportation took place in June 1940 and targeted refugees from western and central Poland who had fled to east to escape the Nazis. Many of these roughly 79,000 deportees were Jews.96 The Soviets were suspicious of the refugees and believed some of them were working for Polish intelligence. An NKVD report described “spying-diversionist cadres of the former Polish intelligence service and members of anti-Soviet political groups” among the refugees. The document also claims that they were spreading “slander and rumor” about Soviet life and praising the standard of living in the former Polish state as well as in Germany.97

93 TsA FSB RF, f.3 op.7 d.1 l.2-8. Reproduced in Ibid., pp. 141-143. This is surprising since by 1940 the Soviets had been carrying out mass deportations for years.
94 For descriptions of the hostility of local Kazakhs to the deportees from the deportee perspective, see Grudzińska-Gross and Gross, eds. War Through Children’s Eyes.
95 Khlevniuk, 282-286.
96 Stalinskie Deportatsii, p. 106.
97 AGIB, f.15 o.1 d.9 l.248-263. Reproduced in Ibid., pp. 154-156.
The Soviets encountered great difficulty integrating the refugees into their work camp system. Administrators saw them as bourgeois and described them as unwilling or unable to do their fair share of work. A November 1940 report assessing the work performance of the deportees contrasts the high marks of the hardy *osadniki* and foresters with the poor performance of the refugees. “Many of them [the refugees] have never done physical labor before. Among them are many merchants, factory owners, restaurant managers, traveling salesmen, and other undetermined [but presumably non-physical] professions.” Some of them were highly skilled and scientists in particular were singled out as least suited for hard labor. Some of the refugees brought large amounts of cash with them hoping to bribe their way to better conditions. The authorities caught one man with 70,000 rubles and another gave the head of his camp two hundred rubles a month in exchange for better living conditions and exemptions from hard labor for himself, his wife, and their fifteen year-old son.98

The fourth and final mass deportation took place in several waves during May and June 1941 and continued until the German invasion of the USSR on June 22. These operations affected people in all of the territories that the USSR annexed in 1939-40, including eastern Poland as well the Baltic States, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. In western Ukraine on May 22, the Soviets deported over 11,000 family members of already-arrested or at-large members of “counterrevolutionary organizations.” The operation was part of an ongoing campaign against anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalists.99

The NKVD also deported between 20,000-24,000 people from western Belorussia in

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99 See note 62.
June 1941. Most of these deportees were from groups that had been targets since 1939, including landowners, civil servants, former police officers and others.\textsuperscript{100}

Many children were among the deportees and the Soviet ministry of education had orders to ensure that all school-age deportees received a proper education, in Russian of course, as well as access to summer camp. The Soviet education plan for the deportees also involved the “liquidation of illiteracy and near-illiteracy among the adult population of the deportees.”\textsuperscript{101} However, these grandiose plans far exceeded their results. A November 1940 report on educating the deportees assessed achievement to that point as unsatisfactory. A sampling of 38,495 children revealed that only 23,956 (62.2 percent) had received any education since their arrival in exile.\textsuperscript{102}

The failure to educate deportee children was indicative of the gap between words and deeds in the Soviet bureaucracy, similar to the Soviet unwillingness provide the deportees with adequate food, medical care, or shelter, despite promises to the contrary. The wretched conditions of Soviet deportation and exile led to much paperwork and dialogue between various agencies, but usually few tangible results.\textsuperscript{103} They also led to the deaths of roughly 3 percent of the deportees while in transit and perhaps another 6 percent during their first year in the camps.\textsuperscript{104} In 1941, the USSR amnestied most former Polish citizens it had arrested or deported from 1939-41 as part of their official

\textsuperscript{100} A.E. Gor’ianov “Mashtaby deportatsii naseleniia v glub’ SSSR v Mae-June 1941 g.,” \textit{Repressii protiv poliakov i pol’skih grazhdan}, 156-158.
\textsuperscript{102} See note 98.
\textsuperscript{103} Khlevniuk, 282.
\textsuperscript{104} Snyder, \textit{Sketches from a Secret War}, 176.
rapprochement with the Polish Government in Exile, but for the deportees the news was at best bittersweet. Much suffering and years of war still lay ahead.

One of the most controversial events in the history of Soviet-Polish relations was the April 1940 Soviet execution of over 4,400 Polish military officers and their mass burial in the Katyn forest outside of Smolensk. The Katyn massacre represented only about one-fifth of the victims of a Soviet purge in the spring of 1940 that took place over roughly one month in several different POW camps and prisons. In a 1959 letter to Nikita Khrushchev, Alexander Shelepin, at the time the head of the KGB, claimed that the NKVD shot 21,857 people in these operations.105

Beria issued a report to Stalin on March 5, 1940, which the premier and three members of his inner circle signed.106 The document singles out roughly 25,700 former Polish citizens held in POW camps and prisons as unrepentant anti-Soviet agitators and clear threats to the security of the USSR. Among them were the usual suspects from eastern Poland: military officers, gendarmes, police, intelligence operatives, factory owners, osadniki, landowners, and “members of various other counterrevolutionary spying-diversionist groups.” Beria claimed that the military and police officers in particular are “continuing their counterrevolutionary work and are leading anti-Soviet activity. Every one of them is only waiting for their release, in order for the opportunity to actively enter into the struggle against Soviet power.” Beria wrote that the NKVD

106 The other signers were Molotov, Mikoyan, and Voroshilov.
recommended trying these people before special tribunals and “applying to them the highest penalty – shooting.”\textsuperscript{107}

The Soviets saw these men as the worst sort of Poles, completely committed to undermining the USSR and beyond reform. The victims included 14,700 prisoners, held in three different camps, which the NKVD killed almost to a man. More than half of the men in this group were military officers and 97 percent of all of the purge victims were Poles.\textsuperscript{108} The military officers had the black mark of association with Polish nationalism, but many of them were also suspect on class bases. A good number of the prisoners in two of the camps were reservists and thus had civilian careers. Many were university-educated and there were doctors, lawyers, journalists, and professors among them. As members of the intelligentsia who had held positions of leadership and prestige in prewar Poland, they were prime targets for the NKVD.\textsuperscript{109}

NKVD agents interrogated every one of these prisoners and they were most interested in their socio-economic status, political beliefs, ties with the West, and foreign language skills.\textsuperscript{110} Attempts to turn them into informants or to convince them to work for the Soviet regime met with limited success. Only twenty-four officers turned to the Soviet side despite relentless propaganda, threats, and physical violence.\textsuperscript{111} That the Soviets were able to compromise so few of the officers speaks to the Polish officer corps’ deeply ingrained distrust of the USSR.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Sanford, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{110} Zaslavsky, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 9.
Soviet POW camps and prisons were expensive places to confine people and economic concerns may have contributed to the decision to shoot the purge victims. However, had Soviet concerns over these prisoners been purely economic, Stalin could have just sent them to the GULAG. The addition of 22,000 more inmates to the work camp system, with its population of millions, would not have been a significant drain on Soviet resources.\textsuperscript{112} In the Soviet mind, however, such hardened opponents of the USSR were unfit even for the GULAG, where they might continue their efforts to undermine Soviet authority and spread counterrevolutionary ideas to other inmates.

The international political situation at the time was also an important factor in Stalin’s decision to opt for murder. The spring of 1940 was a short-lived high point for the USSR. Finland was finally subdued after a bloody campaign and the Baltic States were ripe for annexation. Even better, the three largest Capitalist states in Europe were fighting a war in which the USSR was not an active participant. Stalin, like many others, had every reason to believe this conflict would be long, bloody, and would keep Hitler from turning his might east, giving the USSR critical time to build its military for the coming confrontation with Nazism. A Capitalist West weakened by war also increased the possibility that the USSR could spread its ideology and its military-political influence further into Central Europe. Soviet hopes proved illusory; by the summer of 1940, Hitler had defeated France and pushed the British Army off the continent. He was now free to begin preparations for the showdown in the East, but the Soviet decision to carry out the purge came out of the very different strategic environment of just a few months prior.

\textsuperscript{112} Sanford, p. 53.
The NKVD carried out the murders with Nazi-like efficiency and dispassionate intimacy. The victims died one at a time as NKVD guards led each victim into a room, told him to stand against a wall, and unceremoniously shot each one in the back of the head or in the neck. Author Simon Sebag Montefiore describes how roughly one-third of the killings took place:

The massacre was a chunk of “black work” for the NKVD who were accustomed to the Vishka of a few victims at a time, but there was a man for the task: [V.M.] Blokhin traveled down to the Osachokov camp where he and two other Chekists outfitted a hut with padded, soundproofed walls and decided on a Stakhanovite quota of 250 shootings a night. He brought a butcher’s leather apron and a cap which he put on when he began one of the most prolific acts of mass murder by one individual, killing 7,000 in precisely twenty-eight nights, using a German Walther pistol to prevent future exposure. The bodies were buried in various places – but the 4,500 in the Kozelsk camp were interred in the Katyn Forest.\(^\text{113}\)

On July 30, 1941, Stalin established relations with the Polish Exile Government in the wake of the German invasion of the USSR and the Poles immediately started asking about the whereabouts of their missing officers. The Soviets parried these inquiries with flimsy excuses and lies, but the truth finally came out twenty months later.\(^\text{114}\) On April 13, 1943, Radio Berlin announced the German discovery of the bodies of over 4,000 murdered Polish officers in the Katyn forest and Hitler tried to squeeze every ounce of propaganda value that he could from the event in the hopes that the news might cause a rift in the Grand Alliance. British and American leaders privately pondered the veracity of the accusations, but did not waver in their public front of unity and showed solidarity


\(^{114}\) On Nov. 14, 1941, Stalin met with Stanislaw Kot, the Polish Exile Government’s ambassador to the USSR. Faced with pointed questions about the missing officers, Stalin executed a childish ruse in which he pretended to call the NKVD and ask about the officers and then immediately changed the subject. For a transcript of the meeting, see Stanislaw Kot, *Conversations with the Kremlin and Dispatches from Russia* (London: Oxford University Press 1963), pp.106-116; See also Sanford, p. 125.
with the USSR over the matter. The Allied war effort continued unabated and Hitler
ultimately gained little from publicizing Katyn. The Soviets denied all responsibility and
in turn blamed the murders on the Germans. They held to this claim until the Gorbachev
era. Polish leaders in London expressed skepticism of the Soviet denials and insisted on
a full investigation by the Red Cross.

Still, Stalin managed to spin the Katyn affair. He used the Polish insistence on an
investigation to accuse the Exile Government of collaborating with Germany and broke
off relations with the London Poles less than two weeks after the German announcement.
This occurred over two months after Stalingrad, as Soviet confidence in a complete
victory was growing daily. Stalin knew the Red Army would eventually re-occupy the
Soviet share of Poland and maybe even take control of German Poland as well. He did
not wish to deal with the anti-Soviet Exile Government, preferring his own handpicked,
pliant cadre of Polish Communists. Katyn was a convenient excuse to suspend relations.

That the Soviet Union was a repressive place is certainly not a new statement.
Critics across the political spectrum blasted the USSR’s human rights abuses from its
inception until its collapse. In 1939, 1940, and again in 1944-45, Soviet repression
expanded to places that had never known Soviet rule. At home, the authorities dealt with
a population acclimated to the Soviet way of life, but abroad it was different. New
citizens had to learn about the Soviet system by experiencing its worst aspects. The dark
side of Soviet rule was necessary in order to achieve the Socialist paradise envisioned by
the party leadership, if not by the common man. To transform eastern Poland into
western Ukraine and western Belorussia, people had to die, go to prison, and endure deportation to the Soviet interior.

Like all Communists, the Soviets had to govern from “a national center,” and in eastern Poland, the national center was Polish.¹¹５ Yet, much of the local population lived on the fringes, often with great resentment towards the Poles who monopolized political and economic power. Soviet rule rearranged this milieu and generally favored Belorussians and Ukrainians over Jews and Poles. Nevertheless, the worst aspects of Soviet rule affected every ethnic and religious group in eastern Poland. While Poles may have born the brunt, they were in the end, just victims like everybody else.

Chapter 2: Transforming Society

Repression, while ubiquitous in eastern Poland from 1939-1941, was not in and of itself the goal of the occupiers. Rather, it was one of many tools they used to integrate the newly annexed territories. The secret police prepared the population for Soviet life by excising undesirable elements and cowing the rest of the population into compliance. In the grand scheme for constructing a new socialist edifice in eastern Poland, repression represented only its initial groundbreaking and subsequent maintenance. The actual construction involved replacing Polish political, economic, and cultural structures with institutions built from the ground up or imported from the USSR.

The Soviets were not just annexing territory; they were exporting a revolution. Communist ideology figured prominently in the new order in the western borderlands, but manifested itself in varying degrees of intensity in Soviet policy. Military power ensured near-total Soviet control over eastern Poland, but there was not grassroots support for the USSR among large sections of the population. Just as Lenin had been careful not to implement too many revolutionary ideas at once the early years of the Soviet state, Stalin chose to implement Bolshevik policies piecemeal in eastern Poland. Various ethnic, economic, and social groups benefited or suffered based on their class status but also based on their usefulness to the occupiers. The Soviets encouraged national and linguistic expression for the minorities but undermined the Polish identity. Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy fared better than Ukrainian Greek Catholicism and Judaism, despite Marxist antipathy to all religions.
Stalin attempted to harness latent anti-Polish, pro-Russian, and pro-Soviet sentiments among the population of eastern Poland and use them to help integrate the territory into the Soviet body politic. Through their miscalculations and mismanagement, the Soviets squandered sympathizer goodwill. Notwithstanding the repressions, which did much to turn whole sections of the population against them, sympathetic citizens of all national groups became disillusioned with a system that seemed far fairer and more benevolent from afar than up close. Local collaborators were often fringe elements who inspired little confidence among their neighbors. Bland Soviet culture and atheism also turned off many people. The new, unpopular economic policies, particularly collectivization, caused living standards to drop, mirroring conditions in the rest of the USSR and souring the attitudes of ordinary people to the occupation.

Eastern Poland’s non-Polish groups, comprising more than half the population, mostly welcomed the Red Army invasion in September 1939. Poles generally received the Soviets coldly; the exceptions were mostly dedicated Communists and common criminals. The divergence of opinions about the Soviet invasion often broke down along ethnic and linguistic lines, highlighting the failure of interwar governments to create a pluralistic national consciousness. Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who ruled Poland from 1926-35, advocated an inclusive vision for the Polish state, but he and his successors failed to inspire much loyalty among the minorities, mostly because their policies tended to favor ethnic Poles. Many Poles also rejected Piłsudski’s views.

116 “Anti-Polish” in this context means minority frustration with Polish authority and policies in interwar Poland.
The most enthusiastic greeters of the Nazis in Poland were ethnic Germans, along with some nationalist Ukrainians. But for those living in the path of the Soviet advance, cultural identification, political affinity, and anti-Polish sentiments fused to motivate a joyous welcome for the Soviet troops for most of the minority groups. Unlike the Nazi boosters, pro-Soviet sentiment was not limited to those who shared close ethnic ties with the invaders, although some certainly looked forward to Soviet rule on those grounds.

Some of the minority enthusiasm was simple deference to power. Most people understand the value of acting gracious towards large groups of armed men. Minority groups in Poland also hoped their welcome would ensure them a place at the table when the Soviets redistributed political and economic authority.

Jews, Ukrainians, and Belorussians all had unique and shared reasons for welcoming the Soviets. Many among them harbored disillusionment with Polish rule and resented interwar Polish discrimination against minorities. For Ukrainians and Belorussians, cultural and linguistic ties with the Great Russians contributed to their camaraderie with the invaders. Some Jews felt kinship with Jewish Red Army soldiers and Jewish Soviet administrators, but many Jewish supporters of the invasion based their welcome both on joy at the collapse of Polish authority and on relief that they would not have to live under Nazi rule.

Ukrainian nationalists were the most anti-Polish of all of the minority groups. Many of them had been working in the interwar period towards establishing Ukrainian

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117 For the purposes of this discussion, I will consider the various groups who shunned group identification and labeled themselves “locals” as Belorussians.
118 It is important to remember that until the Red Army appeared on Sept. 17, Jews in eastern Poland had every reason to believe that a Polish defeat in the war against Germany would result in their living under the Nazis.
independence and uniting all Ukrainians under one flag. They sought a Ukrainian state independent from both Russian and Polish control. While the Soviets encouraged Ukrainian cooperation against Polish authority, they remained wary of Ukrainian nationalists and arrested several of their leaders early in the occupation.119 Ironically Stalin, far from a Ukrainian booster, facilitated the development of anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism by uniting eastern and western Ukrainian lands.120

Belorussians generally welcomed the Soviet troops, but it is not entirely correct to speak of Belorussians in Poland as an independent ethnic group. The Poles and Soviets described some people as “Belorussian,” even though many of them did not see themselves as members of any specific national community. These Polesian peasants often referred to themselves as “locals,” but others considered them Belorussian because their language was a hybrid dialect closer to Belorussian than to any other language spoken in the region. The “locals” and Belorussians alike living in Poland and in the Soviet Union did not have an especially well developed national identity. Stalin’s henchmen had brutally suppressed Belorussian nationalism in the interwar years. By 1939, the Soviets had more or less destroyed the Belorussian ethnic identity in Soviet Belorussia by ruthlessly purging anyone capable of holding a leadership role in the national movement.121

Jewish-Polish relations deteriorated rapidly after Piłsudski’s death in 1935. He had opposed anti-Semitic excesses and had tried to protect the Jews from public and

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119 Armstrong, pp. 44-45.
private persecution. Nonetheless, anti-Semitism was a part of Poland’s cultural fabric. This was particularly evident in higher education, where quotas aimed to prevent Jews from enrolling in universities at higher rates than their percentage of the population.\(^\text{122}\)

That many Polish Jews celebrated the Red Army invasion in 1939 is an established fact, but historians today still vigorously debate the extent and motivation of the Jewish welcome. Most agree that both fear of the Nazis and antipathy towards the Poles drove the welcome, but it is difficult to determine which was of primary importance.\(^\text{123}\) Most likely fear of the Nazis was the most important factor. Many Polish Jews also felt solidarity with Jews in the Red Army and were particularly happy to see Soviet Jews in leadership positions. One delighted man in Grodno claimed that meeting Jewish Red Army men made him feel “ten feet tall.”\(^\text{124}\)

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\(^\text{122}\) Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005), p. 310; Anti-Semitism in interwar Poland, as in Nazi Germany, was red-hot in the universities. William Good, a Polish Jew, describes in his memoirs meeting a veterinary student who told him about violent anti-Semitism in Polish veterinary school: “At the end of every lecture we had to descend a staircase leading from the hall. The Polish students would line up on each side of the staircase immediately after a lecture would end and we had to go down the stairs which meant being kicked in your ass and punched in your belly all the way from up to down.” See William Z. Good, “‘Jerushalayim D’Litva’ and Back (Wilno, ‘Jerusalem of Lithuania”),’ USHMM, RG-02.046, p. 8. Janusz Bardach recounts a rebuff by Polish officers when he and his friends tried to enlist in the Polish Army. The recruitment officers laughed, saying that the situation was not so bad that the Polish Army needed help from Jews. See Bardach and Gleeson, p. 11.

\(^\text{123}\) Jewish authors often stress the Nazi threat while Polish authors emphasize Jewish hostility towards the Second Republic. Most historians agree that both factors contributed to the welcome, but they disagree on which was more important. Historian Ben-Cion Pinchuk claims fear of the Nazis was “the most important single factor that determined Jewish attitudes towards the Red Army.” See Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews Under Soviet Rule: Eastern Poland on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990), p. 25. For a different interpretation, see Peter D. Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History of the Second Republic* (London: Routledge 2004), p. 131. Stachura argues that while Jews were indeed afraid of “falling into the hands of the anti-Semitic Germans” this fact “was not the most important reason for their welcoming response” and they “took the utmost pleasure” in the collapse of the Polish state.

News of Nazi atrocities in Poland made its way to the eastern provinces. Some Wehrmacht units had pursued the Polish military into the Soviet sphere of Poland in September 1939. Jews here, including in the Białystok and Lwów regions, briefly experienced Nazi occupation. They were some of the most enthusiastic greeters of the Red Army, and for good reason. Even for anti-Communist Jews, the replacement of the Wehrmacht with the Red Army was “a cause for celebration.” The Nazis imposed curfews, shot people in the street, and otherwise harassed the Jewish community. Feitche Schuster, a Jewish woman from a small town near Białystok, described the relief Jews felt when Soviet troops replaced the Nazi occupiers: “Children climb up on the tanks. People who yesterday were so frightened, afraid to show their faces in the windows, are now riding all over town with the Red Army soldiers like heroes.”

Fear of the Nazis undoubtedly was the primary concern for those who had already experienced Nazi occupation, but many eastern Polish Jews did not witness Nazi terror firsthand. The Polish campaign took place before the systematic mass murder of Jews at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen and in the death camps. It is easy for images of the Holocaust to cloud interpretations of Jewish perceptions of the Nazis in 1939. The memories of eastern Polish Jews who experienced Tsarist rule and the First World War also clashed with the realities of the late 1930s. Some associated Russians with anti-Semitic violence and the German military with orderliness and discipline. By 1939, this was no longer the reality.

There existed a popular perception in Poland and around that world that Jews were disproportionately sympathetic to communism and that they controlled individual Communist parties and the international movement at large. Jews did not dominate international communism, nor were they much more attracted to it than other ethnic groups in eastern Poland. They did dominate some local parties, particularly in urban areas where Poles were also concentrated. Many Polish Jews were well disposed to other groups on the political left, but this did not result in better treatment by the Soviets. They viewed all non-Communist leftists as competitors for popular loyalty and targets for repression.

Many Poles viewed Jews as beneficiaries of the Soviet invasion. The Soviets were aware of the bad relationship between Jews and Poles and they did not want local anti-Semitism to taint popular perceptions of their mission. They distributed much propaganda touting the allegedly friendly reception the Red Army received from the population as a whole, but intentionally downplayed the positive reactions of Jews, even in the Soviet Yiddish-language press. Some Jews were willing to collaborate with the new regime, but the Soviets usually preferred to invest power in people who had been

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127 In Luck in 1933, for example, 100 percent of the local Communist party members were Jewish, but the party was not dominant in local politics. See Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War*, p. 67. Jefferey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg argue that only seven percent of Jews cast their ballots for the Communists in the Polish elections of 1928. See Jefferey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, “Who Voted Communist? Reconsidering the Social Bases of Radicalism in Interwar Poland” *Slavic Review* 62, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), p. 105.

128 Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews Under Soviet Rule*, p. 23. The Soviets’ alliance with Nazi Germany also contributed to their reluctance to emphasize the pro-Soviet attitude of many Polish Jews. When referring to anti-Semitism during this period Soviet media and propaganda outlets usually omitted any references to the Nazis and focused instead on Polish anti-Semitism.
Soviet citizens before the war, whom they trusted more.\textsuperscript{129} Out of the fifty-five delegates from eastern Poland sent to the Supreme Soviet in 1940, none was Jewish.\textsuperscript{130}

Not all Jews welcomed Soviet communism. Middle and upper class Jews joined their gentile counterparts in their fear of Soviet rule. Some Jewish anxiety stemmed from political affiliations. People knew that activity in prewar political organizations or bourgeois class status was cause for suspicion. Many Jews were active in the Bund, an internationalist Socialist group, while others preferred Zionist and Jewish nationalist groups that encouraged the cultivation of Jewish identity and migration to Palestine.

While the Soviets hoped peasants would rise up against the landowners, some peasants actually helped landowners escape the Soviets. One Jewish landowner’s daughter described the gratitude Ukrainian peasants showed her father. “Many peasants, realizing father’s dire circumstance, came with their hats in their hands, pleading with father to remain with the family. They were willing to take the risk and hide us all in a ditch near their huts.”\textsuperscript{131}

Poles generally greeted the arrival of the Red Army with negative attitudes ranging from solemnity to outright contempt. Poles stood united and confident in the wake of German aggression, but the Soviet invasion a little over two weeks later hammered home the reality that Polish independence would not survive the opening round of the Second World War. There was some initial confusion regarding the mission


\textsuperscript{130} Levin, p. 53. In Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, all annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, the situation was much the same. No Jews represented these areas in the Union Council and one lone Jew represented Lithuania in the Council of Nationalities. This man, Itzik Meskup, was not coincidentally the Second Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party.

of Red Army troops on Polish soil. Some Poles even thought the Soviets were marching west to confront the Germans.\textsuperscript{132} For the most part, Poles saw the Soviet invasion for what it was: an aggressive attack on their sovereign nation in collusion with Nazi Germany with the aim of extinguishing the independence of the Polish state. While most Poles stood firm against Soviet rule, the relatively small number of Polish Communists had mixed feelings.

In the late 1930s, Stalin purged the three major Communist parties in Poland and then had the Comintern disband them. These were the Polish Communist Party (KPP), the Communist Party of Western Belorussia (KPZB), and the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU). Each party was dominated by its eponymous national group. Polish Communists, in particular those living in the USSR before the war, suffered severe repression during the Great Terror. Stalin took the Piłsudski government’s January 1934 nonaggression treaty with Germany as a sign of anti-Soviet collusion between the two states, despite the Polish renewal of a similar deal with the USSR three months later. From this point forward, Stalin was no longer concerned with winning over the Poles as allies. He felt he had a green light to repress Poles within Soviet borders and target Polish Communists abroad without fear of losing political capital.\textsuperscript{133}

Thus began a brutal chapter of the Great Terror, culminating in the “Polish Operation” of 1937-1938, in which Soviets convicted 139,835 of their own citizens of anti-Soviet activity on the behalf of Poland. Many of these people were Poles who were

\textsuperscript{132} Gross, Revolution from Abroad, pp. 21-25. Some Soviet soldiers probably believed this as well.
\textsuperscript{133} Snyder, Sketches from a Secret War, p. 117.
stranded on the Soviet side of the Polish-Soviet border after the Treaty of Riga in 1921. The Soviets sentenced 111,091 of them to death by shooting, an astonishingly high 79.4 percent of the total number of people arrested. These deaths represented roughly 16 percent of all of the victims shot during the Great Terror. The Soviets accused most of the victims of membership in the “Polish Military Organization” (POW). The group was real—Piłsudski created it in 1914 as a covert espionage and sabotage force to promote Polish independence and undermine Tsarist Russia, the Hapsburg Empire, and the German Kaiserriech. However, Soviet accusations of the infiltration of the POW into the KPP and its far-reaching anti-Soviet activity were dubious.

Julian Lenski, who headed the Central Committee of the KPP from 1929 until his arrest in 1937, “confessed” while in Soviet custody to being a POW member and laid out the POW’s alleged goals. According to a set of notes taken by Georgi Dimitrov, Lenski admitted that the POW had fully infiltrated the KPP and elaborated on their aims:

The POW worked to: a) Paralyze the activities of the CPP [Polish Communist Party] as the vanguard of the Polish revolutionary workers’ movement and thus to hamper or bring to naught the entire mass revolutionary movement in Poland. b) Use the Polish Communist Party in the interest of piłsudchiks in a future war against the USSR, similar to the way the Polish Communist Party was used by the piłsudchiks during the so-called coup of May 1926. c) Use the Polish Communist Party and the Polish Section of the ECCI [Executive Committee of the Communist International] as channels for the massive transfer of POW members and agents of the official institutions of Polish intelligence, disguised as political émigrés, to the USSR to conduct sabotage and intelligence work.

134 Not all of those convicted of working for the Polish state were ethnic Poles.  
135 N.V. Petrov and A.B. Roginskii, “Pol’skaia Operatsia’ NKVD 1937-1938 gg.” Repressii Protiv Poliakov i Pol’skih Grazhdan, p. 33; See also Snyder, Sketches from a Secret War, pp. 120-121.  
The brutal Soviet repression of Polish Communists was still a fresh set of memories in 1939. Many remaining Communists only survived the purges because they were sitting in Polish jails when Soviet officials summoned their comrades to Moscow and executed them. While many Polish Communists still greeted the Soviet invasion with enthusiasm, in the wake of the continuous repressions some former members of the KPP decided to try their luck in German-occupied Poland.137

The KPZU was the most independent of the three major Ukrainian political organizations in interwar Poland. The other two, the Ukrainian National Democratic Union (UNDO) and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), were beholden to Poland and Germany respectively.138 The KPZU’s independent streak brought it under suspicion. The Shum’sky affair in the 1920s, when the KPZU bucked Stalin’s wishes and denounced his close confidant Lazar Kaganovich as hostile to Ukrainian interests, established its pariah status and contributed to the belief that it put the interests of Ukraine ahead of those of Moscow and the world movement.139 Stalin ordered the party disbanded and reconstructed with new leadership in 1928. By the late 1930s, it had ceased to exist.

The KPZB faced a similar fate. Despite its pro-Soviet leanings, Stalin never trusted the Belorussian Communists in Poland. He failed to distinguish them from the

138 Marples, pp. 237-238.
pariah KPP members. Facing declining membership and a lack of support from the USSR, the Comintern disbanded the KPZB, along with the KPP and KPZU, in 1938.\textsuperscript{140}

Everyone on the left had good reasons to be disappointed in Soviet communism. People realized that the realities of Soviet life contrasted with their perceptions of Socialist ideals. The first taste of this came with the behavior and appearance of the Red Army itself. The troops robotically mouthed statements advertising Soviet bounty but simultaneously bought everything they could from local shops. Likewise, the Red Army’s rigid hierarchy and its strict separation of officers and men offended the egalitarian sensibilities of many who might have otherwise been sympathetic.\textsuperscript{141} Given Moscow’s prewar mistrust of most Communists in eastern Poland, there was no ideological base for large-scale cooperation with invaders. Moscow had to find other ways of earning public trust and encouraging people to work for the state. They did this in part by reordering wealth and overturning social conventions so that previously marginalized groups gained at the expense of class enemies.

When the Soviet secret police swept into eastern Poland, they arrested or removed from power most civic leaders and authority figures. They then constructed new leadership bodies staffed with reliable people. The Soviets organized umbrella governing bodies called “provisional administrations” (vremennie upravlenia) to administrate the occupied territory. The provisional administrations included “peasant committees” that oversaw life in the countryside. From the beginning, these organizations did not have the

\textsuperscript{140} Piotrowski, \textit{Poland’s Holocaust}, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{141} Liza Ettinger, “From the Lida Ghetto to the Bielski Partisans,” USHMM, RG-02.133, p. 3. Upon witnessing the reprimand of an enlisted man for deigning to dine with his superiors, Ettinger claimed: “In no way could I explain that in terms of my socialist ideals.”
air of temporary occupation authorities but of permanent governing structures—it was clear the Soviets were there to stay. NKVD men, Red Army political officers, and other Soviet state representatives held most of the power in these organizations, but there was still the need for local collaborators to staff them. In the case of the peasant committees, the authorities often chose prominent members of the community to act as rubber-stamp mouthpieces. The Soviets dealt harshly with those who refused this “honor.”

Since Poles, particularly adult males, mostly opposed the Soviet presence, the Soviet authorities appointed few of them to positions of power. Rather, the occupiers turned pre-existing power structures on their heads. They thrust elements at the margins of prewar public life such as women, criminals, youth, and minorities, into positions of authority. Michael Goldberg, a young Jewish Communist from Pinsk, was a typical example of someone whose cooperation the Soviets desired. Because he was ideologically reliable and not compromised by loyalty to the Polish state, the occupiers elevated him to a high office early on. They appointed him manager of a tailoring cooperative and soon he found himself in a position of authority over his own father. Goldberg used his newfound connections to secure work for his siblings and to make life better for himself and his family.

Communists like Goldberg found that the realities of Soviet life fell short of Marxist ideals. While attending a conference in Minsk, Goldberg contrasted the easy lives of the party elite with those of the workers whom he supervised:

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143 Ibid., p. 32.
When I arrived in Minsk, I was placed in the best hotel in the city, in a suite which I shared with a party secretary from Bialystok. After the hardships of life in Pinsk, I saw the luxurious conditions which the party elite took advantage of. We were served three meals a day, an unheard of luxury in those times. I had a chance to visit the factories and saw the cafeterias in which the workers ate. I saw the meager meals they were served, and in my conversations with them I started to find out about the real sad conditions of their lives.  

The more Goldberg peddled the Soviet message, the less he believed in it. He sympathized with Finnish resistance in the Winter War and felt guilty for achieving success in the Soviet system: “But I was not satisfied with my life because I started to detect more injustice in the new regime than in the previous ones. I felt I belonged to a small minority which had improved their lives at the expense of the majority of other people.” Goldberg had plenty of reasons to be glad to be living under Soviet rule. He was not Polish, he was a Communist, and he succeeded under the new system. Yet, the difference between Soviet propaganda and reality drove him to disillusionment. There were other more enthusiastic collaborators, but many of them were unscrupulous criminals and gullible youth. They often supported the Soviets less for ideological reasons but rather out of pragmatism or naïveté.

The Soviets projected their own sense of criminal justice onto prewar Polish society. Stalin characterized interwar Poland as a “bourgeois fascist state” that oppressed ethnic minorities and the lower classes. If one accepted the notion that Capitalist states based their legitimacy and gained their means from exploiting the lower classes, then to have a criminal record in such a society meant simply that one resisted the domination of

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144 Michael Goldberg, “Memories of a Generation,” USHMM, RG-10.120, p. 20.
145 Ibid., p. 25.
146 Banac, p. 116.
the upper classes and therefore was a potential ally of the Soviet regime.147 Prisoners obviously had more than just class reasons to cooperate. Soviet rule meant that many of them would not have to serve out their sentences.

The Soviets released many prisoners and pressed them into militias that carried out the will of the new authorities. The placement of thieves and murderers in positions of power essentially meant that thievery and murder were officially sanctioned activities, at least when perpetrated by people working for the occupiers. This had a tremendously negative impact on the perception of Soviet rule among ordinary Poles. In rural areas especially, people knew each other’s business and villagers often scorned known criminals. The sight of these former outcasts working for the Soviets immediately and irrevocably soured many people’s perception of the Soviet mission.

Barely five weeks after Red Army troops set foot on Polish soil, the authorities organized the first in a hasty set of elections to select delegates from western Ukraine and western Belorussia to various Soviet national assemblies.148 Party authorities handpicked and vetted all of the candidates. A critical function of the elections, particularly the first, held on Oct. 22, 1939, was to legitimize the conquest of eastern Poland to the rest of the world. Like all Soviet elections, the organizers knew the outcome long before the voters cast their ballots.

Election committees oversaw the necessary preparations. The Soviets made little attempt to put even the veneer of local control on these bodies; they included high-ranking officials in the Soviet Ukrainian and Belorussian Communist Parties as well as

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147 Gross, Revolution from Abroad, p. 57.
148 For one of the best descriptions of this series of elections, see Ibid., pp. 71-113.
Red Army men. Only approved political bodies, such as peasant and town committees, could nominate candidates. Residency was not required and many candidates were not locals. Among them were Red Army Marshal Kliment Voroshilov and Viacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs. 149

Participation in the elections was mandatory for all adults and the authorities went to great lengths to ensure a large turnout, often banging on doors before dawn to demand that sleepy residents hurry to the polling stations. Coercion and trickery ensured that most people voted the way the Soviets wanted them to. Armed men were usually present, ballots were numbered, and the authorities monitored individual voters through every step of the process. 150 Confusion was ubiquitous, as few people understood who the candidates or what the issues were. 151

The Soviets held the first election on October 22, 1939, after announcing it only sixteen days earlier. A frenzied but short campaign preceded the elections. The authorities even imported “election bait” from the rest of the USSR. They brought in essential items in short supply in eastern Poland, notably matches, tobacco, and petroleum in an effort to ingratiate themselves with the electorate. Soon after the first election, these items were again scarce. 152

Voters in October selected delegates to represent western Ukraine and western Belorussia in Soviet national assemblies. About 91 percent of voters in both western

149 “Annexation of Eastern Poland by the USSR,” HIA, Poland. Konsultat Generalny (Dublin, Ireland) records, 1921-1957, b.2 f.21, pp. 20-21, 28.
150 Gross, Revolution from Abroad, pp. 91-101. Often those who failed to vote for the proper candidate soon found themselves arrested or deported.
151 Ibid., p. 86.
152 “Annexation of Eastern Poland by the USSR,” HIA, Poland. Konsultat Generalny (Dublin, Ireland) records, 1921-1957, b.2 f.21, p. 23.
Ukraine and western Belorussia voted for the officially sanctioned slate of candidates. In many regions “for” votes reached nearly 100 percent. The Lwów and Białystok regions (known for their ethnic Polish characters) registered the lowest support for the official candidates at 85 percent and 88 percent respectively. Nowogródek and Polesie in western Belorussia had the highest percentage of “for” votes. In both counties, nearly 99 percent of voters chose the Soviet slate.153

The Soviets put up candidates who did not accurately reflect the ethnic makeup of the areas they represented. They partly did this to reduce Polish influence, but there were also too few reliable Polish collaborators available. In western Belorussia, only 11.9 percent of candidates were Poles. In western Ukraine, Polish candidates numbered 27.1 percent. The Nowogródek and Stanisławów regions had the lowest percentage of Polish candidates, at 2.2 percent and 1.3 percent respectively.154

More elections, none of them free and fair, followed in March, July, and December 1940 and January 1941.155 The Soviets wanted the elections to give an air of legitimacy to their conquests, yet they were clearly fraudulent. Few could trust elections that produced near 100 percent support for the Moscow-backed candidates; the rest of the world was well aware of Soviet duplicity. Though crude, the elections served their purpose; they produced results Stalin used to argue that the USSR had broad popular support in western Belorussia and western Ukraine.156

154 Ibid., pp. 28-29.
155 The March 24, 1939 elections fell of Easter Sunday. The authorities probably scheduled them on this date to offend Polish Catholic sensibilities.
156 At the Teheran Conference in late 1943, Stalin referred to elections carried out in the borderlands “in accordance with the Soviet constitution” to be “the expression of the will of the people.” He was specifically referring to future elections to determine the fate of the Baltic States. President Roosevelt
The political ramifications of the Soviet invasion made themselves felt soon enough, but ordinary people across class lines immediately felt the effects of Soviet rule on their standard of living. Economic hardship and shortages of essential goods often accompany military occupations, but in the USSR, they were facts of everyday life. Janina Spinner Mehlberg, a Jewish woman living in Lwów, explained in her memoirs the precipitate drop in living standards accompanying the Soviet invasion. This phenomenon was crucial in turning much of the population against the Soviets:

Some of the stores were almost empty of merchandise. Their windows carried signs listing what was still available, the signs replacing those that listed what was out of stock since this was the shorter way. After a while almost nothing but salt was to be had. If there was some bread, one lined up through the whole night to get it. For the chance to buy a half pound of horsemeat, one waited twelve to fifteen hours on a line. Normal food supplies were cut off from L’vov by the absence of transportation, and when it got cold, there was no coal, as the areas it came from were under German occupation and nothing was shipped across the border.157

The outbreak of war in Poland caused the migration of many segments of the population. Hundreds of thousands crossed Soviet lines, fleeing Nazi occupation and terror. Within Soviet Poland, many people moved to the cities. Some came looking for work, others sought new identities, fearing their class status or political connections would be cause for persecution. The urban influx exacerbated the bad living conditions and created housing shortages.

Soviet rule impoverished many prosperous families. Anna Tempelsman was a middle class Jew from Lwów. Her family felt the negative economic impact of the


157 Janina Spinner Mehlberg Testimony, USHMMA, RG-02.053.
Soviet invasion almost immediately: “With the outbreak of war and the arrival of the Russians, father was required to pay out three months’ salary to all the employees. In addition, he was not permitted to sell any of his properties or businesses. As a result, we quickly found ourselves without money.”\textsuperscript{158}

The Soviets employed several strategies to deplete the wealth of class enemies in eastern Poland. The simplest was outright confiscation of property and goods, often accompanied by the arrest or deportation of the owner. Currency reform was another means to reduce wealth. Before the war, the Soviet ruble exchanged with the Polish złoty at as high as seven to one. The Soviets declared a parity of the two currencies shortly after the invasion. This instantly reduced Polish wealth and facilitated Soviet purchases in local shops, whose owners were ordered to accept both currencies. On Dec. 21, 1939, the Soviet authorities withdrew the złoty from circulation without warning. They offered 300 rubles for all confiscated bank accounts, regardless of the amount in the account. The cancellation of the złoty was especially hard on the middle class and the way it unfolded testifies to Soviet willingness to use currency reform as a weapon.\textsuperscript{159}

For many, living under the new regime often meant having to find a new line of work. Hardship drove some young people to work for the first time. Anna Tempelsman had wanted to go to medical school before the war. After the Soviet invasion, she found tedious but necessary work as a secretary in Lwów for the bureau of restaurants and coffee shops:

\textsuperscript{158} Memories of Anna Tempelsman, USHMM, RG.02.199, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{159} Keith Sword, “Soviet Economic Policy in the Annexed Areas,” in The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Province, pp. 87-88.
Very quickly I realized that all the writings were repetitious, dull, and full of clichés. The whole system was that of bureaucracy at its worst. One had to apply in writing for everything and sign for everything, even writing materials. Nobody wanted to be responsible for anything. Nobody did anything. That is the truth. Everybody was trying to make a living within the system, but to attain a certain level of security, it was necessary to steal and cheat. The authorities tried not to let the same group of people work together for any length of time to avoid them becoming friends. If they began to trust one another, they might start some kind of common venture to improve their situation.160

People worked harder and received less money under the Soviets. Workdays were longer and usually included Saturdays. Some employers required their workers to come in on Sundays and work without pay.161 Sometimes, this involved doing favors for the bosses and other demeaning tasks foisted upon the workers by their well-connected superiors.162 While the local population often complained about Soviet working conditions, any job was better than no job.

Despite the decline in living standards, workers had some advantages over other groups.163 They were entitled to the cheapest rents and access to sought-after goods from workers’-only cooperatives.164 Since the Soviet economy favored heavy industry and eastern Poland boasted few large-scale industrial enterprises, authorities recruited local people to work in the Soviet interior. They sent many of them to the dangerous coalmines and factories in the eastern Ukraine. Many of these workers found conditions

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160 Memories of Anna Tempelsman, USHMM, RG-02.199, p. 6.
161 Joseph Soski, “Memories of a Vanished World,” USHMM, RG-02.072, p. 35.
162 Ibid., p. 39.
163 The notable exceptions were of course military and party elites.
there so appalling that they deserted their jobs and went home. Sometimes this meant returning to Nazi-occupied Poland.\textsuperscript{165}

While the Soviets emphasized heavy industry within their prewar borders, the Polish East remained overwhelmingly agrarian. There was some scattered industry, notably the textile factories of Bia\l{}ystok and the oil fields and refineries in the southern provinces. Eastern Poland had existed in symbiosis before the war with the more industrial western and central regions. The East contained natural resources and produced agricultural products, receiving manufactured goods in return. Though poor and agrarian, the East was vital in the functioning of the Polish economy. The addition of the agricultural and natural resources of eastern Poland barely registered in the Soviet Union. It boasted most of them in abundance within its own prewar borders.

Soviet propaganda claimed Polish landowners exploited the peasants who worked their large holdings. In reality, by 1939 large farms were scarce in the eastern provinces. Land reforms in the postwar period had broken up many large estates. By 1931, large holdings represented only 16.5 percent of Polish farmland, and subsequent actions reduced this number to about 15 percent by 1939.\textsuperscript{166} Soviet land reform sought to convert these remaining large holdings into collective and state-owned farms, mirroring the agricultural system in the rest of the Soviet Union.

Stories of collectivization and its resultant famines made their way to Poland in the 1930s through diplomatic channels and through refugees fleeing the chaos and

\textsuperscript{165} There are cases of Jewish refugees so disgusted with Soviet working conditions that they returned to Nazi occupation. See Joseph Soski, “Memories of a Vanished World,” USHMMA, RG-02.072, p. 36.  
\textsuperscript{166} “The Economic Importance of Polish Eastern Territories,” HIA, Józef Frejlich collection, 1891-1968, b.15 f.4, p. 6.
starvation in Soviet Ukraine. The Soviets knew collectivization was unpopular and refrained from alluding to it in the first months of the occupation. In the beginning, they gave the impression that they would redistribute land to the predominantly Ukrainian rural poor and urged the peasants to drive out the landowners themselves, with violence if necessary. Nonetheless, the Soviets slowly introduced collectivization into western Ukraine and western Belorussia. As was the case in the early 1930s, it was very unpopular, but peasants lacked the power to stop it. Though the authorities established thousands of collective farms in Poland by 1941, the process was incomplete when the Nazis invaded. Nevertheless, collectivization still managed to damage Polish agricultural output. Despite the vastness and natural resources of the USSR, Soviet authorities never figured out how to marry communism with a productive agricultural policy. They had more success integrating ideology into the social realm.

The Soviets saw the youth of eastern Poland as high-value targets in their campaign to win converts to communism. They charmed youth by intertwining indoctrination with social activities and clubs. Adolescents were young enough to buy into the propaganda but old enough promote the cause with genuine zeal and concerted action. Both the Nazis and the Soviets placed great value on inculcating youth with their ideologies; young ears often receive totalitarian messages well.

Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, p. 35.
Michael Goldberg helped carry out collectivization in the Pinsk region and mentions facing “terrible resistance from the farmers” and narrowly escaping death when “shots were fired through the window of my room.” See Michael Goldberg, “Memories of a Generation,” USHMM, RG-10.120, p. 22.
Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had large youth organizations. In Germany there was the Hitler Youth, and in the Soviet Union the Pioneer organization for the younger kids and the Komsomol for
Communist Young Pioneer groups sprang up all over eastern Poland in 1939 and 1940. The Soviets wooed children with more than just group camaraderie. These groups often met in homes confiscated from bourgeois Poles and organizers treated the children to feasts and parties, no trifling matter given the poor living conditions in the region. The Soviets even published Communist periodicals geared towards children.

Not all of the youth of eastern Poland bought into the Soviet system. Those with a strong family background in non-Communist politics often rejected Soviet propaganda. The young Zionist William Good claimed: “we were so indoctrinated in Zionism and in Hebrew that we scorned the Communist propaganda—of course with reinforcement from home.” Polish children, like their parents, often opposed the Soviet presence. Some young people were members of Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian underground resistance groups. Militant Zionist youth groups had boasted thousands of members before the war. Both the OUN-M and OUN-B had youthful cadres, although Stepan Bandera’s OUN-B tended to attract more of the younger crowd. A spontaneous uprising against the Soviet occupiers occurred in January 1940 with the participation of many Polish high teenagers. Both Moscow and Berlin would turn to these organizations as a source of manpower for combat and other military duties during the Second World War.

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172 Janina Spinner Mehlberg Testimony, USHMM, RG-02.053.
175 For hundreds of Polish children’s testimonies, none of which portrays the Soviets in a positive light, see Grudzińska-Gross and Gross, War Through Children’s Eyes.
176 Musial, p. 376. The most active pre-war Zionist organization, according to the Soviet secret police, was the youth organization of the Union of Zionist-Revisionist Betar, which sported over 40,000 members in 1936.
177 Armstrong, pp. 36-44.
school students. Red Army troops quickly put it down, but it showed that some youth were willing to resist.\textsuperscript{178}

While the Soviets attempted to woo the youth of eastern Poland with state-sponsored clubs, they also courted the minorities with linguistic policy. They promoted Belorussian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish over Hebrew and Polish. They used language as a means of co-opting Belorussians and Ukrainians and discouraged Polish and Hebrew in order to decrease the influence of Poles and Zionist Jews, though Soviet hostility to Hebrew predated the Polish annexation.\textsuperscript{179} Some knowledge of Russian was often necessary for interacting with the occupier and participating in public life. While the Soviets produced propaganda in local languages, they also distributed some of it in Russian. Many people living in former Austrian Galicia had little knowledge of the Russian language and were at a disadvantage compared with those from the former Congress Kingdom.\textsuperscript{180}

Soviet discouragement of the Polish language was an overt example of ethnic discrimination. Soviet linguistic policy in the interwar years was a key to the rise and fall of the “affirmative action empire.”\textsuperscript{181} Until the 1930s, the Soviets encouraged linguistic diversity as a means of addressing national identity in a country containing thousands of distinct national and linguistic groups. Unable to stamp out these identities, they instead

\textsuperscript{178} Gross, \textit{Revolution from Abroad}, pp. 139-140.
\textsuperscript{181} See Martin, \textit{The Affirmative Action Empire}. The author uses the term “affirmative action” to refer to the Soviet policy of encouraging limited expression of national and cultural identities in the diverse Soviet state.
encouraged their development, hoping class divisions within individual groups would become more visible and easier to exploit as ethnic and linguistic identities coalesced. They hoped to quench the thirst for national expression while simultaneously retaining various ethnic groups within the Communist orbit. In the 1930s, Moscow took a less tolerant position on ethnic diversity, deciding that the encouragement of national identities was promoting militant ethnic nationalism.¹⁸²

The Soviets published newspapers in Ukrainian and Belorussian in eastern Poland and encouraged people to use both languages in public life. The Polish state had not been friendly to these languages in the interwar years. Polish authorities Latinized the Belorussian alphabet and switched the language of instruction in over 300 Belorussian schools to Polish.¹⁸³ In 1939, many Belorussians relished the ability to speak in their native tongue or in Russian with Red Army soldiers. Linguistic solidarity with the invaders was an important factor in their largely positive welcome of the Soviets.¹⁸⁴

Interwar Poland had also been hostile to Ukrainian. By 1938, there were 461 Ukrainian language schools in Poland, down from 2,500 after the First World War.¹⁸⁵ This number quickly jumped to around 6,000 after the Soviet annexation. Nevertheless, many of the administrators and Red Army soldiers who poured into eastern Poland from the USSR did not speak adequate Ukrainian or Belorussian and often conducted business in Russian.¹⁸⁶

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¹⁸² Ibid., pp. 1-27.
Education was central to the Soviet alteration of the linguistic landscape of eastern Poland. The discouragement of Polish and promotion of the minority languages demonstrated Soviet intent to undermine the Polish national identity. Polish language instruction did not entirely disappear, but the authorities severely curtailed it. They often limited Polish lessons to several hours a week. They also banished the few schools that remained Polish to low-quality buildings and forced them to meet at non-traditional hours. They probably hoped that Polish-speakers would gradually succumb to Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Russian.

The new authorities tried to keep prewar teachers in their positions, but forced them to adapt to the new environment, a daunting task for those without Ukrainian or Belorussian language skills. Often this meant teachers had to quickly bring their abilities in these languages up to speed or face losing their jobs.\textsuperscript{187} Linguistic change also affected higher education. The Soviets changed the name of the University of Lwów to “Ivan Franko University” and declared Ukrainian its official language of instruction.\textsuperscript{188}

Aside from linguistic changes, the Soviets also introduced classes on Marxist and Leninist philosophy, often taught by people imported from the prewar USSR. A day spent at school also entitled teachers and pupils to a meal; this fact alone became an incentive for good attendance for teachers and students alike.\textsuperscript{189}

When people were not at work or school, the Soviets tried to keep them entertained and distracted by sponsoring cultural events such as movies, plays, concerts,

\textsuperscript{187} Gross,\textit{ Revolution from Abroad}, pp. 126-130.
\textsuperscript{188} Paul R. Magocsi,\textit{ A History of Ukraine} (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1996), p. 619. Franko was a western Ukrainian writer and Socialist activist who had studied at the University of Lwów in the nineteenth century.
\textsuperscript{189} Janina Spinner Mehlberg Testimony, USHMMA, RG-02.053.
and operas. They offered tickets free or at egalitarian prices, though these were sometimes difficult to obtain due to high demand.\footnote{Memories of Anna Tempelsman, USHMM, RG-02.199, p. 8. Those with good connections of course had fewer problems getting tickets.} As with all Soviet entertainment, censors vetted everything and did not permit showings of anything with political content at odds with Soviet ideology. The authorities used films for both propaganda and entertainment purposes, sending projectors and some of the “best Soviet talking films,” including triumphalist fare such as \textit{Lenin in October}, \textit{Chapayev}, and \textit{The Sealed Frontier}.\footnote{“The Alleged Incorporation of the Polish Eastern Provinces in the Soviet Union, Conditions and Circumstances,” London, August-October 1943, HIA, Polish Research Centre (London), b.1, p. 37.}

The authorities also made written materials widely available, all of them adhering to rigid ideological standards. As in the rest of the USSR, most material intended for public consumption was blatant propaganda. The collected works of Lenin and Stalin suddenly became available, as did books with titles such as \textit{Western White-Ruthenia in the Grasp of Polish Landlords}.\footnote{Ibid., p. 38.}

Before the war, Polish writers and other cultural figures had clustered in and around Warsaw. Many of them fled east ahead of the German army in September 1939 or later from German-occupied Poland. The Soviets trumpeted this exodus as a mass migration to Soviet communism, but very few Polish writers genuinely desired to live in the USSR for political reasons.\footnote{Czaykowski, pp. 104-105.} Like many Jews, they viewed the Soviet Union as the lesser of two evils and were targets for Nazi genocide as members of the Polish cultural elite. The NKVD did not immediately crack down on Polish literati, but it was clear they...
would not be able to work unfettered. Moscow sought to harness the popularity and skills of Polish writers for their own ends. Since Soviet repression came down hard on the intelligentsia, there was a need for good writers to staff Polish-language newspapers.194

Under Soviet rule, Lwów cemented its status as the cultural capital of eastern Poland. The Soviets encouraged Polish cultural figures to settle there and arrested relatively few of them during the initial waves of NKVD repression.195 This easy treatment proved fleeting. By December 1939, the writers’ actions and work were under close scrutiny.196 In early 1940, a brawl erupted in a Lwów restaurant between writers and NKVD men. A Soviet agent claiming to be an art historian mingled with a party of writers and poets and instigated a fight. Soon NKVD men appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, and joined the fray. When it was over, four prominent Polish writers were under arrest.197 Soviet authorities also encouraged close connections between the Polish and Ukrainian literary communities. The Soviets used their own Ukrainian writers’ groups to subsume Polish literary culture into the Soviet Ukrainian literary culture, thus more closely aligning Polish culture at large with that of the rest of the USSR.198

Soviet literary censorship relaxed in the second half of 1940. The authorities now allowed discussion of the Polish past, including the military tradition. Stalin pondered possible military uses for the Poles in the wake of the fall of France and retreat of

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194 Piotrowski, *Poland’s Holocaust*, p. 78.
195 Czaykowski, p. 106.
196 Ibid., p. 109.
198 Czaykowski, p. 119.
England from the continent. Even though he had already purged the Polish officer corps, he still kept open the possibility of raising an anti-German military force from among the Polish population of the USSR.\textsuperscript{199} The Germans noted the Soviet rehabilitation of Polish history with disapproval. Particularly rankling was the commemoration in 1940 of the eighty-fifth anniversary of the death of renowned Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. The Germans correctly interpreted the move as a means of fostering a feeling of Polish national unity with the intent of appealing to Poles living under German control.\textsuperscript{200} However, other cultural enterprises, especially religion, were also capable of appealing from the outside to the population of western Ukraine and western Belorussia.

Religious and national identities intertwined in eastern Poland. With some exceptions, Poles were Catholic, Ukrainians were Greek Catholic or Orthodox, and Belorussians were mostly Orthodox. The Soviets repressed religion in the borderlands from 1939-1941, but they did so in indirect ways intended to reduce the risk of offending believers abroad. The outbreak of the Second World War and the threat from Nazi Germany precipitated a shift in Soviet religious policy. Stalin knew that violent repression against religious groups in eastern Poland, two of which (the Roman Catholics and the Ukrainian Greek Catholics) were loyal to Rome, would further damage the USSR’s reputation in the West. With the danger from Hitler looming, he calculated that it was inexpedient for the USSR to squander too much political capital over religion.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., p. 121.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., pp. 123-124. This was not the first time the Soviets had used identity politics to attempt to destabilize a neighbor. During the 1920-30s, they adopted the “Piedmont Principle”, using their own Ukrainian republic as a base to destabilize Polish Ukraine. See Martin, \textit{The Affirmative Action Empire}, pp. 8-9, 225-227. While the Soviets permitted a very limited Polish cultural life in their share of Poland, as evidenced by the Mickiewicz celebration, the Nazis were busy stamping out most signs of Polish culture in the areas under their control. In this context of Nazi cultural genocide, it is easy to see why Soviet encouragement of Polish culture would make the Germans uneasy.
Therefore, Stalin took a subtler approach to repressing religion. He eschewed large-scale, open repression in favor of indirect persecution. The Soviets imposed excessive taxes on church property and sometimes confiscated it under the guise of state need. In Stanisławow in November 1939, the authorities evicted the monastic leadership of a children’s home, instructing them “to take away your things and move to other accommodations.” The event sparked a spontaneous protest involving several thousand (mostly young) people who used the local church as a rallying point. The protest ended without violence.\(^\text{201}\)

Simple propaganda encouraging atheism replaced the excessive carnivals of blasphemy that had shocked so many during the Soviet anti-religious campaign in the 1920s. Much propaganda targeted youth, whom the Soviets saw as vulnerable for conversion to atheism. Religious instruction, Christian imagery, and iconography disappeared from secondary schools and universities: “In all the schools they broke the crosses and smashed the portraits, founded clubs, closed churches. They said you shouldn’t pray because there is no God, for us Stalin is God,” wrote a young boy from Wołyń.\(^\text{202}\)

The Soviets attacked the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church more than the Roman Catholic or Orthodox Churches. They based this policy on cold, hard power politics. The Soviets felt they had the most at stake in their relationship with the Greek Catholics,

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\(^{201}\) TsGASA, f.25880 op.4 d.34 l.297. Photocopy in HIA, Alexander Moieseевич Nekrich papers, 1940-1996, b.14 f.5.

who claimed about 3.2 million faithful in eastern Poland.\textsuperscript{203} The Greek Catholic Church boasted predominantly Ukrainian clergy and parishioners, as well as connections with Rome and with anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalists. Unlike Polish Catholicism, Ukrainian Greek Catholicism had potentially wide appeal in the rest of the USSR. The Ukrainian unification brought about by the Soviet invasion enabled the possibility of western Ukrainian religion spreading to prewar Soviet Ukraine, a long time goal of the Galician Greek Catholics. Metropolitan Sheptys’ki, the beloved octogenarian leader of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, began planning missionary work in the eastern Ukraine soon after the Soviet invasion.\textsuperscript{204} Many eastern Ukrainians came to western Ukraine as administrators and as Red Army soldiers and the Greek Catholics used them as test cases in their proselytizing drive. The favorable reception of many of these people to Greek Catholicism increased hopes that missionary work further east could be successful, if given a chance.\textsuperscript{205}

The Soviets made life difficult for Greek Catholic clergy, but at first did not prevent the church from carrying out most of its basic tasks. As time passed, however, the repression grew. They closed down many church properties aside from buildings housing actual services. These included schools, monasteries, orphanages, shelters, and most facilities for training clergy. They nationalized most church land and imposed heavy property taxes. Increasingly, “priests found themselves dependent on the

\textsuperscript{204} Bohdan Bociurkiw, \textit{The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State, 1939-1950} (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press 1996), p. 45.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., pp. 47-48.
generosity of the faithful,” due to the campaign to strip the church of its resources.206 In the fall of 1940, the Soviets closed the only Greek Catholic seminary in western Ukraine, but allowed the Roman Catholic seminary to continue operating with restrictions.207 Violence against the Greek Catholics spiked on the eve of the German invasion. According to Metropolitan Sheptys’ki, the Soviets killed thousands of believers and arrested dozens of priests in the final days of Soviet rule in eastern Poland.208

The Roman Catholic Church boasted more followers than any other religious group in eastern Poland, about 6.5 million, not all of whom were Poles.209 The Catholic Church in the rest of the USSR was almost completely destroyed; in 1941, only two churches remained open out of the 1,195 operating in 1917.210 The Vatican was anti-Communist as well as anti-Nazi, but Pope Pius XII viewed communism, at least under Stalin, as a bigger threat than fascism.211 He privately commented to the Lithuanian ambassador to the Vatican that the Soviet invasion of Poland was an encroachment of the “enemies of God.”212

The Soviets tolerated the Roman Catholic Church in eastern Poland because of its international connections and the piety of its faithful. The authorities wielded little power and influence among its clergy, aside from what they could accomplish through brute

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206 Ibid., pp. 34-37.
207 Dunn, p. 68.
208 Ibid., pp. 74-75.
209 Ibid., p. 51.
211 Dunn, pp. 57-58. The Vatican deplored the Nazi-Soviet Pact and repeatedly attempted to avert war between the Western powers. In December 1939, the Pope urged Hitler to halt the war, fearing that its continuation would expose Europe to Communist incursions.
force or coercion. They had a far more complex relationship with the Orthodox Church. Moscow used it to promote allegiance to the Soviet Union by cultivating the cultural links between Orthodox believers in eastern Poland and in the rest of the USSR.

The addition of millions of new Orthodox believers through the Polish annexation persuaded Stalin to halt the ongoing persecution of the Orthodox Church, a respite that lasted until the 1960s. Aside from a fundamental change in the Bolshevik worldview, the Polish annexation was perhaps the best thing that could have happened to the Orthodox Church. Moscow used it as another tool of authority, subordinating the local religious hierarchy to the Soviet-sanctioned (and probably compromised) ecclesiastical leadership.\(^{213}\) Soviet tolerance and use of the Orthodox Church in eastern Poland was yet another sign of Stalin’s willingness to prioritize ideological battles.

The Soviets took a dim view of Judaism. While Jews were some of the most enthusiastic greeters of the Red Army in September 1939, the ensuing occupation was not kind to their traditional institutions. Jews had their own form of communal organization, the *kehilla*, and often lived in their own communities, called shtetls. Soviet rule eliminated the *kehilla* and transformed the shtetls from centers of Jewish life to drab villages virtually indistinguishable from gentile communities. Eastern Polish Jews were well aware that Stalin had already repressed the Jewish way of life in the USSR during the 1920s and 1930s. When the Red Army arrived, “the Soviet authorities did not have to decree the dissolution of the *kehilla*” as Jewish elites did this for them, preferring to

eliminate the institution themselves. The overall Soviet goal was to “reduce as far as possible all expressions of Judaism” in order to rapidly integrate Polish Jews into the Soviet fold. They shut down synagogues, eliminated Polish Jewish newspapers, and banned the use of Hebrew in public. Yiddish theater was one of the few Jewish cultural institutions spared from large-scale repression. It continued to thrive from 1939-41.

Soviet economic, political, and cultural policies, like the repressions, alienated vast sections of the populace while failing to win the loyalty of enough people to make up the difference. People not well disposed to the Soviets became less so as the occupiers favored other groups over them. For villagers and city-dwellers alike, rhetoric about Marx, Lenin, and class equality mattered far less than their standard of living. While some at the margins at first supported the Soviet invasion and annexation, by mid-1941, even many of these people had had enough. As bad as Soviet rule was, things were about to get much worse.

215 Ibid., p. 65.
216 Ibid., pp. 65-79.
217 Levin, pp. 143-50.
Conclusion

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 was the largest military operation of its time. Its opening blow fell on the entire length of the Soviet-German border, including the former Polish eastern provinces. The stunning German success in the opening phase of the campaign and the lack of hostility to the invaders among much of the local population exposed the moral and strategic bankruptcy of the Soviet enterprise in eastern Poland.

By 1941, Soviet authorities still had not effectively integrated the western borderlands into the USSR or reaped appreciable benefits from their annexation. The invasion interrupted an incomplete process of assimilation. Mass deportations were still in progress and collectivization had not yet reached all of the farms of western Ukraine and western Belorussia. Repression had removed many hostile elements from the population, but millions more disaffected people remained. Soviet policies had failed to win over those who were skeptical from the beginning; almost everyone who rejected the Soviets in 1939 was just as hostile, if not more so, by 1941. The authorities had also made few inroads among people inclined to support them. Very few locals had benefited from Soviet rule; the hardships and sacrifices of everyday life in the USSR disappointed many who initially welcomed the Red Army.

Dissatisfaction with Soviet rule manifested itself in anti-Semitic outbursts once the Germans arrived. Not coincidentally, the German invasion of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of large-scale Nazi massacres of Jews. Poles participated in these pogroms less frequently than Ukrainians, but their actions have gained much attention in
recent years, particularly after the 2000 publication of Jan T. Gross’ *Sąsiedzi* (*Neighbors*) in Polish and in subsequent English and German translations, in which the author blames ordinary Poles for the deaths of the Jews of the small town of Jedwabne, near Białystok.\(^\text{218}\) Most Polish killings of Jews occurred in this region, which had a strong Polish character in the countryside as well as in the cities.\(^\text{219}\) Many Poles all over western Ukraine and western Belorussia viewed Jews as beneficiaries of Soviet rule, but the more of a Polish character a region had, the more the Soviets had to rely on Jews as collaborators. Thus, it was in places like Jedwabne that Soviet rule particularly poisoned Polish-Jewish relations. Soviet unpopularity was less of a motivation in Ukrainian-led pogroms, which often stemmed from nationalist desire to build an ethnically pure Ukraine as well as from traditional anti-Semitism, which also of course motivated many Poles.

As had been the case when the Red Army entered Poland in 1939, some of the most enthusiastic greeters of the invaders in 1941 were individuals persecuted by the outgoing regime, particularly those sitting in jail. The German Army opened the prisons as they advanced eastward. The Nazi newspaper *Ostdeutscher Beobachter* reported that the Germans released 5,000 prisoners from a facility in Brześć alone.\(^\text{220}\) There was a riot in a Soviet prison in Łuck on the first day of the war after a German bomb hit one of the

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\(^\text{219}\) In many other eastern Polish provinces, Poles were concentrated in the cities and the countryside had a Belorussian or Ukrainian character. This was not so in the Białystok region, which was primarily Polish and Jewish.

main buildings. Even Jewish inmates participated in this revolt. The Soviets massacred most of the inmates two days later after tricking them into believing they would release them for military service.\textsuperscript{221}

Western Ukrainians have gained notoriety for their largely enthusiastic welcome of the Nazis in 1941. The arrival of the Germans was a precondition of the achievement of the goals of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, which had demonstrated its political dependence on outside aggressors twice in less than two years. Just as they needed the Red Army to break free of Polish domination, they needed the German Army to throw off the Communists. Hitler, with his theories of racial superiority, did not intend to provide the Ukrainians with independence or a better life. Many Ukrainian nationalists eventually found themselves just as anti-Nazi as they were anti-Soviet, but this took some time. In June 1941, they celebrated the German arrival. Photographers captured many scenes of western Ukrainians greeting the passing German columns with flowers, bread and salt, and signs of the cross. One observer in Lwów reported, probably with some exaggeration, that the Germans “were received as saviors by the entire Ukrainian population.”\textsuperscript{222}

Some of the same Ukrainians the Soviets had considered ideologically reliable worked for the Germans in the wake of Barbarossa. In Stanisławow, after the Wehrmacht passed through, “there remained only a small amount of Germans, so the Ukrainians were the real power in town . . . Many of them, who only a few days ago were in high positions with the Soviet regime and were considered active Communists, all of a

\textsuperscript{221} Berkhoff, pp. 14-15.
\textsuperscript{222} Memories of Anna Tempelsman, USHMM, RG-02.199, p. 15.
sudden became leaders in the new nationalist-fascist movements.”223 The Soviets had failed to see the duplicity of many western Ukrainians who accepted the Soviet invasion of Poland only as a means to the end of Ukrainian independence.

Whereas Ukrainian collaboration with the Nazis was relatively straightforward and easy to decipher, Polish collaboration was far more nuanced. For the most part, Poles were fiercely anti-Nazi. They never fielded an exclusively Polish SS division or a large-scale collaboration regime. No “Quisling” arose in Poland under Nazi rule.224 Although some 400,000 Poles served in the Wehrmacht, most did so under duress in the face of forced conscription. The bulk of the Polish population, as well as the Exile Government and émigré communities, remained dedicated to defeating Hitler throughout the war.

Yet, the beginning phase of Operation Barbarossa witnessed perhaps the only period in which a significant number of Poles expressed any sort of solidarity with the Nazi mission and this feeling directly stemmed from dissatisfaction with Soviet rule. Most Poles desired the restoration of the prewar Polish state, which required the military defeat of both Nazi Germany and the USSR. Yet many Poles, reeling from twenty-one months of Soviet repression, felt they had good reasons to welcome the Nazis. Historian Tomasz Strzembosz offers justification for the eastern Polish reception of the Wehrmacht:

Did the Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne and the surrounding villages enthusiastically welcome the Germans as saviors? Yes they did! If someone pulls me out of a blazing house in which I could burn into a crisp

224 Piotrowski, Poland’s Holocaust, pp. 88, 84.
Jedwabne is a small village near Białystok, which in 1941 was in the northwestern corner of the Soviet share of Poland. On July 10, 1941, eighteen days after the German Army passed through the area, many local Jews perished in a pogrom in which Poles participated. The exact numbers of victims and perpetrators, as well as the precise role of the Germans, continue to be subjects of controversy. Gross claims that about 1,600 Jews died in the massacre, though other historians have challenged these figures as too high.

Gross asserts that Poles alone perpetrated the Jedwabne pogrom. While he acknowledges the Germans were “the overall undisputed bosses over life and death in Jedwabne,” he claims their role in the massacre consisted mainly of “taking pictures.” Gross bases his argument on evidence from court records and interviews produced after the war in Communist Poland, circumstances that call into question their accuracy.

Some historians, many of them Polish, have taken umbrage to Gross’ interpretation of the Jedwabne massacre. While most accept that a pogrom occurred in Jedwabne and that Poles participated in it, some accuse Gross of exaggerating the scale of the massacre as well as the level of Polish involvement. An entire volume of essays in English challenges Gross’ assertions.

Even though Soviet repression affected Polish Jews almost as much as ethnic Poles, Jews’ sudden appearance as Soviet authority figures and collaborators from 1939-

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226 See Polonsky and Michilic, eds., The Neighbors Respond.
227 Gross, Neighbors, pp. 77-78.
228 See Polonsky and Michilic, eds., The Neighbors Respond.
1941 caused Poles to view them as beneficiaries of the occupation, as the presence of Jews in positions of authority in Poland was unprecedented.\textsuperscript{229} Popular perceptions held that most Jews were either Communists or sympathetic to Soviet communism. In \textit{Neighbors}, Gross recounts a story where desperate Jews turned to a local Catholic priest to save them from the impending pogrom. The priest allegedly responded: “it is well known that every Jew, from the youngest to those sixty years old, are Communists,” and refused to help them.\textsuperscript{230}

Problems with Gross’ work aside, his core reasoning for why such a pogrom broke out where it did is convincing. He makes his case towards the end of \textit{Neighbors}:

\begin{quote}
And thus by partaking in the persecution of Jews during the summer of 1941, an inhabitant of these territories could simultaneously endear himself to the new rulers, derive material benefits from his actions (it stands to reason that active pogrom participants had first pick in the division of leftover Jewish property), and go along with local peasants’ traditional animosity toward the Jews. If we add to this mix encouragement by the Nazis and an easily whipped-up sense that one was settling scores with the “Judeo-commune” for indignities suffered under the Soviet occupation – then who could resists such a potent, devilish mixture?\textsuperscript{231}
\end{quote}

Ukrainian collaboration in the Holocaust was much more common and widespread than Polish collaboration. Many Jewish memoirs contain accounts of Ukrainians seizing the opportunity of the German invasion to attack and rob Jews. There was pandemonium in the first days of the invasion as the Germans took no action to prevent Ukrainian-led pogroms and usually encouraged them, though they never permitted such anarchy for more than a few days.

\textsuperscript{230} Gross, \textit{Neighbors}, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., p. 162.
Almost all the [Jewish] men they [Ukrainians] could find were killed, and they did their best to find them. Their own neighbors. Their own friends they worked with. With so much pleasure and such satisfaction – and their brutality was beyond anything that had ever happened. The women they marched out from their houses while others looted everything from inside – even food. Small boys with big knives went around sticking them into the bellies of their schoolmates.232

Operation Barbarossa caused a haphazard evacuation of Soviet authorities from western Ukraine and western Belorussia. Locals noted the Soviets’ ungraceful and hasty exit. An eyewitness in Pinsk claimed: “the entire communist system of administration broke down from the first day and all leadership disappeared from public life.”233 Many Soviet citizens rushed to join the Red Army upon the outbreak of war, which in any case precipitated a call-up of men aged twenty-three to thirty-six. Most people in western Ukraine and western Belorussia who enlisted were actually administrators and other employees of the state imported from the rest of the USSR from 1939-1941.234 Locals usually had little zeal to fight under the Soviet banner.

The outbreak of the Soviet-German war led to a sudden, shaky, and temporary amends between the USSR and the Polish Exile Government in London. The two parties signed a cooperation agreement on July 30, 1941, papering-over serious questions regarding the future status of the Kresy.235 In the wake of Barbarossa, a beleaguered Stalin structured this temporary agreement with the Poles only in order to gain whatever assistance he could from them in the anti-German war effort. Even in this dangerous

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233 Michael Goldberg, “Memories of a Generation,” USHMMA, RG-10.120, p. 31.
235 Kresy is the Polish word for “borderlands,” and roughly denotes the eastern provinces annexed by the Soviet Union.
time for the USSR, Stalin still refused to yield too much ground to the Polish Exile Government. Ultimately, the divergent interests and mutual antagonism of the Poles and Soviets led to a collapse in their alliance less than two years after their rapprochement.

Soviet conduct in eastern Poland was instrumental in the inability of the Exile Government and the Soviet leadership to come to terms. Some of the most important outstanding issues between Poland and the USSR, notably future borders and repressed peoples, received cursory mention in the brief text of the July 30 agreement. Per the borders, the agreement read: “the Soviet-German treaties of 1939 relative to territorial changes in Poland have lost their validity.” But the bulk of the important territorial provisions in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact were hidden in the secret protocols, still secret at the time of the Soviet-Polish agreement and thus not included in the Soviet interpretations of agreements no longer valid.

Another provision of the agreement was the “amnesty” of most, but not all, Polish citizens repressed by the Soviets from 1939-1941. The full text of the protocol read:

As soon as diplomatic relations are re-established the Government of The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics will grant amnesty to all Polish citizens who are at present deprived of their freedom on the territory of the USSR either as prisoners of war or on other adequate grounds.

Very few of the people in question were POWs. The vast majority were civilians imprisoned or deported by the NKVD during the various waves of repression in eastern Poland from 1939-1941. The term “amnesty” is not entirely fair; most of those freed had committed no crime, though many had been formally accused of violating specific Soviet laws. Absent from the agreement was any mention of the thousands of missing Polish

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236 Documents on Soviet-Polish Relations, vol. 1, p. 141.
237 Ibid., p. 142.
officers, whose fates became a constant topic of Polish inquiry as soon as the two powers established diplomatic contacts. Everyone who knew about the murders was aware that as long as the bodies remained in German-occupied territory the truth could come out. When it did, Stalin kept to his previous policy of denying any Soviet wrongdoing or even of having any knowledge of the missing officers.

In 1943, Beria claimed the Soviet Union set free 389,041 Polish citizens, a little over half of them ethnic Poles, in the amnesty of July 1941.²³⁸ While the deportees, mostly women and children, were harmless enough, the Soviets still feared the more hostile elements, particularly imprisoned men, might work against Soviet interests. The freed people were glad to hear the news but for most, it did not lead to immediate improvement in their living conditions. They were still stuck in the Soviet interior, often malnourished and ill, with the USSR itself reeling from the Nazi offensive and thus even less inclined than before to devote time or resources to the Polish exiles.

The Nazis committed heinous crimes in eastern Poland during and after Barbarossa, but they were not the only perpetrators of ethnic cleansing in this region during the war. From 1943-1944, eastern Poland witnessed a brutal underground war between Ukrainians and Poles that began in Wołyń and later spread south. This genocide has no special title. It has never received the attention it should; the Soviet-German war and the Holocaust both took place nearby and overshadowed it in scale and brutality. The conflict began in 1942 and intensified in 1943-44 as nationalist Ukrainian militias took to ethnically cleansing the Wołyń region, aiming to kill or disperse the local Polish population and make the region entirely Ukrainian (by this time most local Jews were

already dead). A brutal ethnic conflict resulted, rich in atrocities on both sides, though Polish civilians comprised a majority of the victims.\(^{239}\) This conflict embodied the cruel emphasis on racial identity preceded, triggered, and intensified by the Second World War. It symbolized the ethnic conflict of the war years and foreshadowed the mass population transfers that came after.

The *Kresy* was a region in transition during the first half of the twentieth century. Force of arms decided who would rule it five times between 1914 and 1945. Today most of what was eastern Poland belongs to Ukraine and Belarus and its population no longer resembles the disparate milieu the Red Army encountered in 1939. Its trademark diversity is long gone, most of its Jews died during the holocaust and most Poles left during and after the Second World War. Yet, by studying its transformation during the war years, particularly from 1939-1941, scholars and the general public alike can get a snapshot of the effects of Soviet policies on a diverse population in the midst of a cataclysm from which it would not emerge in a recognizable form.

\(^{239}\) For Polish civilian accounts of this conflict see Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Genocide and Rescue in Wołyń: Recollections of the Ukrainian Nationalist Ethnic Cleansing Campaign Against the Poles During World War II* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company 2000); Polish resistance fighter Waldemar Lotnik published his wartime memoir in 1999, which details violent Polish reprisals against Ukrainian villages during this period. See Waldemar Lotnik, with Julian Preece, *Nine Lives: Ethnic Conflict in the Polish-Ukrainian Borderlands* (London: Serif 1999). The true number of victims of this conflict is unknown and estimates range from about 50,000-500,000, though the higher numbers include displaced people as well. Probably 30,000-40,000 Poles died at the hands of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in Wołyń alone.
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