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Soviet Polonophobia and the Formulation of Nationalities Policy in the Ukrainian SSR, 1927–1934

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The Soviet Union and the Polish Republic clashed almost at birth. The 1920 war fought between them produced a climate of hostility and suspicion that continued through the interwar period. For the Soviet Union, talk of a Polish attack on the border republic of Ukraine was to have a lasting impact on internal events. During this time Soviet rhetoric, if not real fear of such a confrontation, justified and motivated the gradual transformation of Soviet nationalities policy for Ukraine. This process culminated in a November 1933 resolution of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U, the Ukrainian branch of the Soviet Communist Party, which, for the first time, declared that “local Ukrainian nationalism, allied with imperialist interventionism, represents the chief danger in Ukraine.”¹ The Soviet Union’s own “Polonophobia” played a key role in the formulation of this new canon. Party leaders argued that “fascist” Poland was aiding nationalists within the Ukrainian republic in preparation for an imperialist attack on Soviet territory.

The Soviet encounter with Poland during these years helped to hasten an end to *ukrainizatsiia*, the liberal nationalities policy the party believed had allowed these nationalists to emerge, and paved the way for the development

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of a particular sort of Soviet patriotic identity. Although this Soviet patriotic identity, gradually infused with strains of Russian nationalism, did not coalesce until the late 1930s, its orientation was clear. The possibility of war meant that Soviet citizens had to demonstrate complete loyalty. Even the appearance of a variant national identity could not be permitted. Ukrainians, Russians, and other nationalities alike had to stand in defense of one heroic, proletarian homeland: the Soviet Union.

This essay will primarily utilize evidence from diplomatic correspondence and the Soviet press to demonstrate that through the 1920s the Soviet Union exhibited a persistent concern for the security of its Ukrainian republic. This concern provides an important yet understudied rationale for the shifts in Soviet nationalities policy well documented by other scholars. Fear of an attack by Poland motivated the regimentation of Ukrainian society around a supra-national Soviet patriotism first articulated during the Polish-Soviet war of 1920 and validated the party's struggle against Ukrainian national identification. This essay maintains that the war scare of 1926–27 supplied the Soviet government with a precedent for manipulating foreign policy concerns for domestic ends and furnished a logic for the party's transformation of nationalities policy. It then examines a series of less well-known crises in Polish-Soviet relations to demonstrate how a rhetoric of Polonophobia influenced the character of repression in Soviet Ukraine in three instances: the show trial of the so-called Union for the Liberation of Ukraine, the party censure of the Ukrainian Commissar of Education, Mykola Skrypnyk, and the eventual purge of the Ukrainian branch of the Communist Party.

Defending the Homeland: The Polish-Soviet War of 1920

Conflict between Poland and Soviet Russia was almost inevitable. The German army's withdrawal from its eastern front at the end of World War I created a political vacuum in a vast territory that both countries claimed as their own: present-day Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. Scholars have debated the sincerity and nature of Poland's much touted plans for federal ties with these "borderlands." More or less indisputable is that Poland's commander-in-chief, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, viewed Russian domination of these territories as an impermissible threat to Poland's long-term security.² Under his orders, Polish troops succeeded in expelling the Soviet Western Army from Wilno (Vilnius) in April 1919 and from Minsk in August. Piłsudski, however, worried that the Soviet government would eventually seek to retake these cities and expand its control over the large territory that constituted ethnic Ukraine once it had defeated its internal White enemies.³ In reality, the intentions of Soviet Russia were fluid and, consequently, less clear. There was considerable disagreement within the Communist movement about the wisdom of striking into the heart of Poland itself. Those who believed that the survival of the Russian Revolution depended on its spread across national lines into Europe's industrialized west,

saw an attack on Poland as inevitable. But this was not the dominant position in the Russian Bolshevik Party, and, for a time, the Soviet government engaged the Poles in a series of protracted but ultimately futile negotiations for a ceasefire.⁴

The Bolshevik government remained ever suspicious of its western neighbor. It gradually became convinced that Great Britain and France, having failed to defeat the Red Army through direct intervention in Russia, were seeking its overthrow by prodding the Poles toward war.⁵ The Soviets built up their forces on their western front but simultaneously instructed Polish Communists to launch a domestic peace campaign. Labor strikes, meant to bolster Communist propaganda against saber-rattling, only vexed the Polish government and gave rise to new fears of Soviet-sponsored revolt. The Red Army's victories over the White general Anton Denikin exacerbated Polish concerns. Piłsudski decided to undertake what he viewed as a preemptive strike against Soviet forces to protect the gains his army had made. Russia must be pushed back to its ethnic borders, he calculated, if Poland had any hope of permanently protecting its sovereignty.

Piłsudski hastily concluded an alliance with Symon Petliura, leader of the Ukrainian People's Republic. Denikin had pushed Petliura's forces out of Right Bank Ukraine in the fall of 1919, and Petliura had little option but to seek refuge in Poland. By agreeing to join forces with Poland, Petliura gave up Ukrainian claims to the Polish-occupied province of Eastern Galicia and alienated the Galician contingent of his steadily shrinking army.⁶ Whether Petliura brought any military benefit to the alliance is a subject of debate.⁷ The agreement, however, was of critical symbolic importance because it demonstrated Polish support for Ukrainian nationalism and offered a precedent for future Soviet suspicions of Polish intrigue in Ukraine. Polish and Ukrainian troops did succeed in capturing Kiev in May 1920, but the Red Army's counterattack was swift and Poland itself only narrowly escaped Soviet occupation.

It was during the Polish-Soviet War of 1920 that the Bolsheviks began to employ a hybridized version of Soviet patriotism. In an April 29 proclamation, the party's Central Committee appealed not just to the workers of the Soviet Union but to all "honorable citizens of *Rossia*," warning that they could not allow "the bayonets of the Polish lords to determine the will of the Great Russian nation."⁸ The party's invocation of Russian nationalism was tempered by the KP(b)U's recognition that the Polish invasion immediately threatened a Ukrainian "homeland."⁹ Union publications, however, continued to rally the country to the defense of Russian lands, subordinating Ukraine to this larger territorial understanding. David Brandenberger stresses that in the 1920s Soviet sloganeering avoided appeals to a homeland: "It was, rather, internationalist, proletarian solidarity forming the essence of Soviet social identity and not national borders or blood."¹⁰ This, in fact, was not always the case. The 1920 Polish invasion compelled the party to make a momentary appeal to national blood. More important, it introduced a lasting notion of an expansive "home-

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land,” defined by the borders of Russia’s imperial past and constructed in opposition to the hostile forces surrounding it. It was a proletarian homeland first and foremost, devoid at times of national categories but, when necessary, encompassing them in a supranational package. The Red Army’s attempt to expand this territory westward in 1920 was permissible. It could not, however, allow the homeland to contract.

The 1926–27 War Scare and Shumskyism

The events culminating in the 1926–27 war scare are well known.¹¹ In May 1926, Piłsudski staged a coup d’état in Poland. The Soviet press maintained that Piłsudski had seized power in order to launch yet another new attack on Soviet territory. At this time Soviet relations with Britain also took a turn for the worse. In May, the British government broke relations with the country to protest the Soviet Trade Union Council’s public support for striking British coal miners. Soon afterward, in Poland, a White Russian émigré succeeded in assassinating the Soviet ambassador, Petr Voikov. In China the Soviet-supported Kuomintang turned on their former Communist allies, putting an end to hopes for a socialist anticolonial revolution in the Far East. From the Soviet perspective, the world was turning increasingly hostile.

Concern about Joseph Stalin’s management of foreign relations and general leadership of the Soviet Union mounted. An opposition bloc within the party, led by Leon Trotsky, argued that Stalin’s earlier policy of accommodation with reformist foreign governments had placed the country in a precarious position.¹² Stalin, in turn, denounced the opposition’s divisive tactics, arguing in favor of unequivocal party unity. Although Stalin’s faction ultimately triumphed and he moved quickly to suppress any further dissent, Soviet leaders continued to worry about threats from abroad.

Soviet diplomats spoke in particular about the creation of a new anti-Soviet coalition headed by Britain and Poland. A report by the British Foreign Office told of efforts that the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Georgii Chicherin, had made to persuade governments abroad that Britain was guiding Poland and other Eastern European states against the Soviet Union.¹³ According to Gustav Stresemann, the German foreign minister, Chicherin, was convinced that, “encouraged by the rupture of diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Russia, Piłsudski would . . . engineer some frontier incident and make it an excuse for war, the object of which would be to annex Lithuania, and Little and White Russia [Ukraine and Belarus].”¹⁴

The Soviet government thus considered Poland to be at the forefront of a conspiracy directed at the Soviet Union, more specifically at Ukraine and other border areas. Maksim Litvinov, Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs at the time, warned in a note to the Polish minister in Moscow that the Soviet government “is compelled to regard the murder of its representative in Warsaw not as the act of a madman but as one manifestation of the systematic and

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organized struggle against the USSR.”¹⁵ Although he did not directly implicate the Polish government, he suggested that Warsaw had facilitated Voikov’s assassination by harboring anti-Soviet groups.

Soviet relations with Poland had been far from amicable ever since the Polish-Soviet war. However, in 1927, these relations fell to a new low. Alfred Meyer writes that the war scare was “essentially a phony issue, manipulated by politicians in the course of a factional struggle in the ruling Communist party.”¹⁶ Although Piłsudski had made no secret of his long held ideas on the incorporation of Ukraine and Belarus into a Polish federation, Poland was not militarily prepared for a new war against the Soviet Union nor was Britain actively interested in one. As Meyer points out, panic over the likelihood of war disappeared more quickly than it arose.

If the war scare was manufactured, its consequences were unanticipated. Brandenberger maintains that the rumors of war in 1927 failed to mobilize the Soviet population to the party’s side: “Instead of promoting an upswing of popular support for the regime, the war scare gave rise to defeatist rumors that swept across the entire country.”¹⁷ Antagonistic attitudes were apparently so widespread that the party ordered an end to talk of war. But Stalin and his supporters in the party learned from the campaign: a state threatened with war could ill afford a diversity of expression; its preservation depended on the solidarity of its leadership and citizens in the struggle ahead. Ukrainian talk of a distinct path to socialism, even when carefully framed, smacked of the very sort of disloyalty that the Soviet secret police was reporting as endemic. Rhetoric of fear of foreign intervention could be used for the transformation of nationalities policy in Ukraine with less worry. The party could identify and separate the nationalist “enemy” unambiguously from the general population. Arguments stressing the necessity of Soviet unity, under the banner of a supranational Soviet patriotism, justified the homogenization of culture and politics eventually approved by the party by the end of 1933. Soviet patriotism would not acquire a Russocentric character until later, but in 1927 the party moved quickly to minimize other competing national categories.

The fight against Oleksandr Shumskyi and “Shumskyism” prefigured much of what was to come. As Commissar of Education for Soviet Ukraine, Shumskyi had defended proponents of the expansion of *ukrainizatsiia*. This policy mandated the expanded use of Ukrainian in the Ukrainian SSR and the promotion of ethnic Ukrainians in the party, government, and labor unions. Some Ukrainian intellectuals sought to direct this policy, designed to further the Sovietization of Ukrainian society, toward the development of a socialist, but distinctly Ukrainian, culture. This vision was fundamentally antithetical to the emerging notion of Soviet patriotism. Although the party in the 1920s saw the development of a Ukrainian national culture as integral to the construction of socialism in the republic, this culture could never assume preeminence over the supranational, Soviet identity. Furthermore, even at this time, any

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move away from Ukraine's historical ties with Russia was impermissible. A move toward Poland, real or alleged, was anathema.

In the summer of 1926, the KP(b)U Central Committee criticized Shumskyi for defending Ukrainian intellectuals who had argued for the distancing of Ukrainian culture from Russian influence. After a series of such criticisms, in March 1927 a plenum of the Central Committee forced Shumskyi to step down from his post as commissar and recommended transferring him outside Ukraine. Karlo Maksymovych, the Western Ukrainian Communist Party (KPZU) delegate to the plenum, spoke against Shumskyi's demotion and argued that these measures only harmed the standing of the Communist Party among Ukrainians in Poland and benefited Ukrainian nationalists and Polish "fascists."¹⁸ Maksymovych's defense of Shumskyi led to a split within the KPZU when Maksymovych and his majority faction unsuccessfully protested to the Comintern regarding the KP(b)U's treatment of Shumskyi.

It seems likely that the 1927 war scare contributed partly to the actions and rhetoric that surrounded this incident, just as later war threats would influence the future approach of the KP(b)U to *ukrainizatsiia* within Soviet Ukraine. Immediately after Maksymovych's defense of Shumskyi, the Polish Communist Party issued a declaration denouncing Maksymovych's stance and warning that it aided Piłsudski's policy in Western Ukraine, a policy "which is dictated in full force against the USSR and which covers up the preparation for war against the Soviet Union under the flag of a real 'independent' Ukraine."¹⁹ On June 7, the KP(b)U's Central Committee adopted a resolution accusing the KPZU of reaching a compromise with the Polish ruling classes and working against the interests of the workers and peasants.²⁰ After initial attempts to resolve the dispute, the Comintern effectively ostracized the KPZU pro-Shumskyi majority.

New Tensions with Poland and the Show Trial of the "Union for the Liberation of Ukraine"

In the years that followed, the Soviet government continued to worry about possible Polish designs on Soviet territory and support of anti-Soviet, Ukrainian nationalist activities. In May 1928, another attempt was made on the life of a Soviet representative in Poland, A. S. Lizarev. In a note of protest to the Polish ambassador in Moscow, Chicherin maintained that "Poland has thus become the scene of a terrorist struggle directed against the Soviet Union by émigré organizations which are getting assistance and financial support from obscure sources."²¹ Chicherin called upon the Polish government to take immediate action against such groups.

Soviet diplomats also expressed repeated concern regarding the activities of the Ukrainian nationalists on Polish territory. In May 1929, the Soviet ambassador in Poland protested to the Polish government regarding the pres-

ence of Polish officials at a requiem for the vilified enemy of the Soviet state, Symon Petliura.²² The ambassador maintained that the requiem was organized by Ukrainian nationalists as a demonstration of their determination to recapture Soviet Ukraine and that, in particular, the presence of the head of Poland's Eastern Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs could be seen as "a hostile act regarding relations with the Soviet Union." He further argued that the attendance of Polish officials "testifies to the full sympathy of the Polish government with objectives pursued by the Ukrainian émigrés."

Clearly the Soviet Union was growing more apprehensive about Polish intentions toward Soviet Ukraine. On November 4, 1929, the Soviet newspaper *Izvestiia* spoke of attempts by Polish "fascists" to incite the country into war with the Soviet Union: "The orientation toward war with the USSR has always been an integral part of the Piłsudski group's program. In this way, Polish fascism strives for the realization of its old plan."²³ Fear of a conflict with Poland was again to influence domestic events in Soviet Ukraine.

In May 1929, the Ukrainian secret police (Gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie, or GPU) had already begun rounding up members of a fictional "Union for the Liberation of Ukraine" (or SVU, *Spilka vyzvolennia Ukrainy*). Rumors of foreign support for the supposed nationalist organization spread. In late February 1930, the Polish ambassador in Moscow expressed concern to the Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs about a report that prosecutors had accused Serhii Iefremov, the alleged leader of the SVU and a member of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, of maintaining connections with the Polish and German consulates in Kiev.²⁴ The evidence presented at the SVU trial further implicated Poland for allegedly supporting the Ukrainian nationalists. The Polish ambassador objected particularly to the testimony of Andrii Nikovskyyi, a Ukrainian writer and former member of the Petliura government, who spoke of Polish cooperation in a planned assault on Soviet Ukraine.²⁵

Soviet prosecutors utilized forced confessions and largely fabricated evidence in order to discredit the accused and establish their relationship with anti-Soviet governments.²⁶ They charged SVU leaders with planning to coordinate an armed uprising in Ukraine with a Polish-led intervention. At different points in the trial, the prosecution claimed that the SVU was plotting everything from the establishment of a bourgeois Ukrainian republic to a merger with "fascist" Poland to a Polish-German partition of Ukraine.²⁷ The SVU supposedly maintained dozens of local cells throughout Ukraine in order to prepare for a 1931 anti-Soviet revolt.

The SVU show trial was essentially aimed at the Ukrainian national intelligentsia, the most vocal advocates of *ukrainizatsiia* and possible front of opposition to the process of collectivization then under way in Ukraine.²⁸ However, according to historian Hiroaki Kuromiya, the threat from Poland provided an essential rationale for their suppression: "the trial was developed in order to discredit 'Ukrainian nationalists' and to present them as hirelings of the Polish capitalists and szlachta."²⁹ The Soviet press had repeatedly presented the Pol-

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ish danger to the public and now the government sought to use Polonophobic language to justify its maturing hard-line nationalities policy in Ukraine. Co-operation with Poland represented the basest act of disloyalty a Ukrainian Soviet citizen could perform. By tainting Ukrainian national expression with the brush of pro-Polish collusion, Soviet authorities further solidified the notion of a Soviet patriotism devoid of national emphasis.

It is also possible that the Soviet authorities in Moscow genuinely feared war with Poland and thus sought to regiment Soviet Ukraine for the coming fight. While the trial against Iefremov and the other alleged members of the SVU was under way, Litvinov, who had succeeded Chicherin as Commissar for Foreign Affairs, reported to the Polish ambassador in Moscow that three Polish planes had been spotted deep over Ukrainian territory in March 1930.³⁰ He argued that an ongoing anti-Soviet press campaign in Poland gave the Soviet Union real cause for suspicion. According to Litvinov, the Polish papers were replete with rumors of a possible preventive war against the Soviet Union. An *Izvestiia* article of March 18 warned of the provocation of the Polish press and underscored Piłsudski's willingness to lead a "crusade" against the Soviet Union.³¹ Fear of war reached such heights that the Polish foreign minister, August Zaleski, was eventually forced to publicly deny any Polish preparations for such an operation.³²

Matters took a turn for the worse when a bomb was discovered in the Soviet Embassy in Poland. This incident led to a series of conversations between the representatives of the Soviet and Polish governments.³³ The Soviets insisted that the Poles were not taking strict enough measures to find those responsible and that their delay encouraged the growth of anti-Soviet terrorist groups seeking to provoke war. An *Izvestiia* article of May 1 described Poland as "the most important point for the application of forces acting against the USSR."³⁴

On June 13, Stamoniakov, an officer at the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, reported that an editorial in *Gazeta Polska*, described by him as a semi-official organ of the Polish government, had argued for the creation of a buffer Ukrainian state as a launching point for the eventual invasion of the Soviet Union.³⁵ Stamoniakov claimed that those responsible for the terrorist attempt on the Soviet Embassy had influence over the Polish government and might succeed in inciting a rupture in Polish-Soviet relations. The crisis eventually passed, although in August of that year the head of the Press Section of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs still spoke of the possibility of war with a "madman like Piłsudski" in control of Poland.³⁶

While Poland and the Soviet Union were arguing over the likelihood of armed conflict between them, Poland was preoccupied with terrorist activities of Ukrainian nationalists in Galicia. In the spring and summer of 1930 the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) began a new campaign of sabotage and "expropriations" directed against Polish governmental institutions. It also unleashed a wave of terror against the "enemies of Ukraine," a

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category that included both Polish and Soviet officials, as well as Ukrainian collaborators. An OUN assassination attempt on the Soviet consul in Lwów (Lviv) in April 1930 failed owing to the intervention of the Polish police.³⁷ Numerous incidents of vandalism occurred on the estates of Polish landlords in Galicia.³⁸ The Polish government responded with a “pacification” campaign in areas where OUN attacks had occurred.³⁹

Soviet authorities viewed this OUN terrorism with considerable apprehension. Their actions against the Ukrainian intelligentsia reflected in part their determination to prevent the development of a similarly virulent nationalist movement on Soviet soil. In order to popularize the Soviet cause in Galicia, the Soviet government sought to denounce the Polish “pacification” campaigns while simultaneously discrediting the western Ukrainian nationalists. In a bit of wordplay, it argued that the Poles were repressing the true socialist aspirations of the western Ukrainian people and labeled the OUN a lackey of the Polish “fascists.” The same *Izvestiia* article of March 18 that spoke of the Polish press’s agitation for an anti-Soviet war also talked of an alliance between the OUN and “fascist Piłsudski followers.”⁴⁰ The article further contended that the Ukrainian nationalists were falsely trying to represent themselves as “fighters for the liberation of the Ukrainian people” by denouncing the Soviet proceedings against the SVU. In western Ukraine, concern about the appeal of the OUN’s call for the “reunification” of Ukraine forced the Communist Party there to drop all references to a merger of Galicia with Soviet Ukraine.⁴¹

Another Danger Identified and Skrypnyk’s Fall

Relations between Poland and the Soviet Union stabilized to a manageable level of tension by the end of 1931. Talks began between Poland and the Soviet Union on a bilateral nonaggression pact. The Poles had repeatedly resisted Soviet offers for such a pact, but they had grown more apprehensive about revisionist tendencies in Germany and France’s apparent retreat from its commitment to Polish security.⁴² Lengthy negotiations led Poland to sign an agreement in November 1932 renouncing any territorial designs on the Soviet Union. Relations between Poland and the Soviet Union thereafter significantly improved. The Polish foreign minister, Józef Beck, reported to the British ambassador in Warsaw on the almost complete disappearance of anti-Polish propaganda in the Soviet press.⁴³ Litvinov informed French reporters that the pact represented a “great blow” to the plans of foreign interventionists.⁴⁴ For a time Soviet fears of Poland seemed to have significantly abated.

Nevertheless, the Soviet Union still had reason to worry about its security and, in particular, the security of its Ukrainian republic. Nazi electoral victories in Germany in March 1932 and Hindenburg’s agreement to appoint Hitler chancellor in January 1933 provided fresh concerns. Almost immediately after the Nazi Party’s assumption of power, Litvinov called attention to

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the party's anticommunist activities and the close association of its specialist on foreign affairs, Alfred Rosenberg, with Ukrainian émigrés "who were agitating for the detachment of Ukraine from the Soviet Union."⁴⁵ In March, *Pravda* published an editorial that reported on Rosenberg's plans to annex Soviet Ukraine and create a "federative Lithuanian-Belorussian-Ukrainian state."⁴⁶ Four days later, the newspaper wrote of Hermann Göring's request to the French ambassador for aid in annexing Ukraine and exchanging it with the Poles for the Polish corridor.⁴⁷

In spite of Hitler's public assurances that Germany was still committed to friendly relations with the Soviet Union, the Soviet government remained suspicious. The prospect of a German-Polish rapprochement was a particular concern, especially after the Polish ambassador and Hitler met in May and pledged their commitment to peace between them. In May, Karl Radek, a leading party commentator on foreign affairs, argued in *Pravda* that imperialist revisionism of the Versailles system would ultimately lead to war in Europe and an attack on the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ A letter from the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, the Soviet ambassador in Poland, urged him to report on the "aspiration of adventurous Pilsudski circles to make use of a possible war between Japan and us and of [their] support for Hitler's Germany."⁴⁹ Rumors regarding Nazi plans for the annexation of Ukraine and a possible German-Polish alliance likely quickened the pace of repression in Ukraine. Arrests of members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia continued unabated. Germany's aggressive rhetoric and a persistent fear of Polish expansion influenced the language of this new campaign against so-called local nationalism and justified the repressive measures taken by the party and secret police. Now Moscow moved to discredit proponents of *ukrainizatsiia* within the Ukrainian branch of the Communist Party itself.

Moscow's initial target was Mykola Skrypnyk, the Ukrainian Commissar of Education who had earlier led the campaign against Shumskyi but remained an active supporter of the expanded use of the Ukrainian language. In December 1932, the union Central Committee ordered a purge of all party branches. In Ukraine the purge led to the demotion or expulsion of many of Skrypnyk's supporters within the party. In June 1933, KP(b)U Second Secretary Pavel Postyshev denounced Skrypnyk at a plenum of the Ukrainian Central Committee. He argued that, under Skrypnyk's leadership, "*ukrainizatsiia* gradually came into the hands of assorted Petliura riff-raff" and that these people were working with Ukrainian nationalist organizations abroad to sell Ukraine to "the German fascists and Polish *pany*."⁵⁰ *Pravda* warned that Petliura followers, foreign agents, and counterrevolutionaries had infiltrated all spheres of Ukrainian cultural life. The party admonished Soviet patriots to be on guard against Ukrainian nationalists supported by the long hand of Poland.

At a party meeting a few days later, Postyshev renewed his attack: "The enemy is hiding behind the back of Comrade Skrypnyk."⁵¹ Andrii Khvyliia, head of the party's propaganda section, then rose to denounce Skrypnyk's 1928

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orthography for Ukrainian, claiming that “Comrade Skrypnyk could not have failed to know that he had entered upon the path of isolating the Ukrainian language from Russian and bringing it closer to Polish.”⁵² Given what Poland still represented to Soviet authorities, such a move was the height of treason. The party called upon Skrypnyk to admit his errors. He committed suicide on July 7, rather than recant.

It seems probable that Moscow viewed Skrypnyk and his supporters as a possible “fifth column” in the event of war with Poland or Germany. Whether Moscow actually believed that war might occur is a subject for further discussion. Regardless, the party had found a scapegoat for its campaign against what it viewed as a separatist Ukrainian national culture. It played upon fears of foreign intervention as expressed by the popular press and in this way justified its suppression of *ukrainizatsiia*.

The Road to the November Plenum

Moscow’s suspicions of foreign designs on Soviet Ukraine persisted during the course of these proceedings against Skrypnyk. In late July, the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw questioned his German counterpart regarding press reports of a “secret Polish-German agreement on joint conquest of the Soviet Ukraine.”⁵³ According to the German ambassador in Poland, the Soviet Union “was convinced that leading German personalities were preparing a ‘crusade’ against the Soviet Union.” He blamed the Poles for exploiting the Soviet “pathological fear of intervention” to turn the Soviet Union against Germany.

A new complication in Soviet-Polish relations arose when, on October 21, a Ukrainian student, Mykola Lemyk, attempted to assassinate the Soviet vice-consul in Lwów. He failed in his task, killing one consulate secretary and injuring another. However, Antonov-Ovseenko’s note to the Polish government alleged that “this attempt could have only arisen in the atmosphere created by the mentioned [anti-Soviet] campaign which is tolerated, in spite of its illegality, by some Polish authorities.”⁵⁴ Although Beck and Antonov-Ovseenko agreed to close the matter after Polish authorities made numerous arrests of Ukrainians allegedly connected to the plot, tensions remained beneath the surface. In early November, Antonov-Ovseenko again raised the issue of anti-Soviet activity in the Malopolsha territory.⁵⁵ He charged that this campaign was being led from above and had the active support of local Polish authorities.

In mid-November, the German and Polish governments issued a communiqué announcing that they had entered into negotiations regarding the settlement of issues long disputed between them. Moscow believed that this information confirmed its fear regarding German-Polish cooperation against the Soviet Union. In Warsaw Antonov-Ovseenko objected to Beck about the secret nature of these talks and accused Piłsudski of playing a “chess game” with Moscow.⁵⁶ His report to the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs on November 27

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cited Polish rumors that Hitler might have sounded the Polish negotiators out on the “possibility of an anti-Soviet agreement.”⁵⁷ Talk of a secret anti-Soviet war clause included in a possible Polish-German agreement eventually became so widespread that the German Foreign Ministry had to deny the existence of any such agreement to its own legation in Poland.⁵⁸ In spite of the German ambassador’s assurance that “there were no anti-Russian intentions of any kind” in the talks with Poland, Litvinov insisted that he “had enough material that proved that Germany had by no means given up Ukraine and plans for a crusade.”⁵⁹

Such talk helped bolster the campaign against *ukrainizatsiia*. In November 1933, a plenum of the KP(b)U’s Central Committee met to consider, among other items, the future direction of the nationalities policy. The plenum now condemned Skrypnyk as the head of a large network of “nationalist agents” in the service of foreign interventionist powers. Speakers made repeated reference to the danger represented by foreign countries, particularly Germany and Poland. Postyshev noted that Ukraine was “first in the appetite of the Polish *pany*, German imperialists, and English diehards.” A “block of imperialist interventionists, Ukrainian White émigrés, and domestic Ukrainian nationalist counterrevolutionaries” had coalesced to oppose collectivization and to separate Ukraine from the Soviet Union.⁶⁰

Similarly Stanislaw Kosior, First Secretary of the KP(b)U, reminded those gathered that, given its strategic location, “Ukraine occupies a forward position in relation to capitalist encirclement.” He accused Ukrainian nationalists abroad of utilizing *ukrainizatsiia* to prepare “for an uprising, under the direction of known Polish and German elements, in order to conceal a foreign military campaign against the Soviet Union.” Polish and German money, he argued, was funding nationalist organizations in Soviet Ukraine.⁶¹ Kosior claimed that prominent Ukrainian Communists were, in fact, heading a branch of the nationalist Ukrainian Military Organization in Soviet Ukraine. He then read the testimony of a number of prominent Soviet Ukrainians charged with “bourgeois nationalist” crimes. Nearly all confessed to agreements they had reached with foreign powers, particularly Poland, for help in their struggle. One such testimony read as follows:

Germany together with France, Poland, and other capitalist states is taking part in an attack on the Soviet Union. Poland is ceding its German territory and the Danzig corridor to Germany. As compensation, after conquering Ukraine, Poland will receive part of Lithuania’s territory and a sphere of influence over the Right Bank to the Black Sea. The Left Bank of Ukraine will come under the influence of Germany which could exploit the coal and iron wealth of the Donbas in order to create a strong industrial center.⁶²

This statement reproduces almost exactly some of the fears of Soviet diplomats regarding the intentions of Poland and Germany toward the Soviet Union. The charge of Ukrainian complicity in a Polish attack further motivated the

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party's course. Those charged with shifting the course of nationalities policy in Ukraine capably used these concerns to legitimize their task. The party directly expunged the notion of a singular Ukrainian national identity from its formula of Soviet patriotism and claimed Ukrainian territory for the proletarian "homeland."

The end result of this purge was the party's identification of "local nationalism" as the chief danger to Soviet power in Ukraine. The party rated this danger greater than Great Russian chauvinism because of the alleged connection between Ukrainian nationalism and foreign powers. If Soviet patriotism was not yet strongly identified with Russian patriotism, the party decisively rejected the inclusion of a political Ukrainian identity. Two months later, the Twelfth Congress of the KP(b)U met and confirmed this formulation.

Further Questions

This essay has identified a number of high points of Soviet concern for the security of Ukraine. During 1933 that concern became acute owing to rumors of a more defined plan of conquest formulated by leaders in Germany and supported by the Polish government and Ukrainian nationalist organizations abroad. The party transposed fear of a possible foreign threat to Ukraine into a script for a campaign against Ukrainian national culture and for the consolidation of a supranational Soviet identity. It explicitly connected the actions of those charged with "national deviation" to plans for foreign intervention and the reestablishment of a bourgeois national state, cut out of the proletarian "homeland."

Did the Soviet government really believe in the possibility of an attack on the Soviet Union? Even before the final signing of the German-Polish non-aggression pact in January 1934 the Soviet government attempted to provide for its increased security against a German-Polish threat. In December 1933 negotiations began between Poland and the Soviet Union on a joint declaration guaranteeing the sovereignty of the Baltic states. Soviet diplomats repeatedly expressed concern that Germany might conquer these states in order to establish outposts for a future invasion of the Soviet Union. When Poland withdrew from these talks because of German and Finnish objections, the Soviet Union then extended the same offer to Germany. When Germany declined, the Soviet Union had to content itself with a series of bilateral agreements with the Baltic states and a renewal of its nonaggression pact with Poland. The threat of foreign intervention, then, was genuine enough for the Soviet government to labor for measures to counter it. The war scare of 1933, if one may call it that, was much more grounded in reality than the scare of 1926-27.

The alleged danger from Poland itself originated from two sources: the OUN and Poles who supported Piłsudski's policy of federation with Ukraine, Belorussia, and Lithuania. For propaganda reasons, the Soviet press and the

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party tended to conflate the two, although they were in fact hostile to each other. Soviet officials regularly monitored the anti-Soviet statements of the Polish government or press. However, in many ways, the threat embodied by the OUN to Soviet Ukraine was more real. Notwithstanding its own sense of military might, Poland's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1920 had nearly ended in failure, and Poland was not likely to try again without a major provocation. The OUN, on the other hand, was a product of a Ukrainian cultural and political movement. It is possible that Ukrainians would in time come to identify with the nationalist organization, in spite of its rightist political orientation. The KP(b)U made a great effort to show that the OUN was not in fact striving for Ukrainian independence but rather for the restoration of a foreign-controlled vassal state.

Lastly, it is not clear how the KP(b)U understood and discussed threats of war in closed party sessions. I have had access to published collections of documents related to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, but these represent only a tiny fraction of those written. Given the selective nature of these documents, it is difficult to appreciate how exactly Soviet diplomats viewed the Polish, German, and Ukrainian nationalist threats, to say nothing of the perspective of Ukrainian party officials. While the Soviet press frequently publicized these concerns, the details of talks with foreign governments remain unknown.

What can be said more or less conclusively is that Soviet diplomats and the Soviet press repeatedly warned of threats to Ukraine. Furthermore, Communist Party leaders in Ukraine utilized the fear of a Polish-led attack to shape their struggle against an emergent Ukrainian national culture that early Soviet nationalities policy had in part stimulated but that now threatened the party's conception of a supranational patriotism. By the mid-1930s, the party would co-opt Russian national imagery even more in its consolidation of a Soviet identity. Although a Ukrainian national awareness was not expunged entirely, it was rendered politically impotent and tied to very un-Polish Russia.

NOTES

1. *Pravda*, November 27, 1933.

2. For an account of Piłsudski's ideas on federalism and his preference for accommodation with the borderland populations, see M. K. Dziewanowski, *Joseph Piłsudski: A European Federalist, 1918–1922* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1969), 26–42, 244–61; Andrzej Garlicki, *Józef Piłsudski, 1867–1935*, trans. John Coutouvidis (Hants, U.K.: Scolar, 1995), 91–105. Historians of Ukraine have tended to emphasize the opportunistic nature of Piłsudski's plans for the East. See Michael Palij, *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance, 1919–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1995), 59–79; John Reshetar, *The Ukrainian Revolution, 1917–1920* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), 263–316.

3. Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–20* (London: Macdonald, 1972), 65.

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4. Comintern secretary Karl Radek acted as the chief Soviet propagandist for peace, warning, however, that continued aggression against Soviet Russia would lead to revolution in Poland. See Thomas C. Fiddick, *Russia's Retreat from Poland, 1920: From Permanent Revolution to Peaceful Coexistence* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 53–69; Josef Korbel, *Poland between East and West: Soviet and German Diplomacy toward Poland, 1919–1933* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 26–33, 36.

5. Davies argues that Pilsudski, in fact, acted contrary to the wishes of the Entente, whose leaders sought to provide for Poland's defense but discouraged a Polish attack on the Soviet Union. See Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 92–95.

6. The Ukrainian Galicians had fought a losing battle with Polish forces for control of the province, where Ukrainians made up an overwhelming majority of the rural population although the bulk of the urban population was Polish. For many Ukrainian Galicians, Poland remained the principal enemy.

7. Davies maintains that the Ukrainian force was insignificant and that the alliance was an afterthought for Pilsudski (*White Eagle, Red Star*, 102). Palij disagrees, arguing that the Poles had considerable Ukrainian troops under their command but armed them poorly, blocked further recruitment, and disarmed Galician divisions that offered their services (*The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance*, 105–13).

8. Cited in Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 115.

9. *Ibid.*

10. David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 17.

11. See, for example, Alfred G. Meyer, "The War Scare of 1927," *Soviet Union/Union Sovietique* 5, no. 1 (1978): 1–25; Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Foreign Threat during the First Five-Year Plan," *Soviet Union/Union Sovietique* 5, no. 1 (1978): 26–38; and Raymond Sontag, "The War Scare of 1926–27," *Russian Review* 34, no. 1 (1975): 66–77.

12. Meyer, "The War Scare of 1927," 15.

13. Great Britain Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, ser. 1A, 62 vols. (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1946–1985), 3:45.

14. *Ibid.*, 359.

15. Jane Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 2:229.

16. Meyer, "The War Scare of 1927," 2.

17. Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 21.

18. James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918–1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 113.

19. Quoted in Basil Dmytryshyn, *Moscow and Ukraine, 1918–1953: A Study of Russian Bolshevik Nationality Policy* (New York: Bookman, 1956), 111.

20. Roman Solchanyk, "The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919–1938" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973), 252.

21. Degras, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, 2:316.

22. *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-polskikh otnoshenii*, 12 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963–1986), 5:390–92.

23. Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Robert M. Slusser, eds., *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1928–1934* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966), 220.

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24. *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, 21 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1957–77), 13:117.
25. *Ibid.*, 13:149.
26. Nevertheless, anti-Soviet attitudes cited from Iefremov's diary were accurate. See Hiroaki Kuromiya, "Stalinskii 'velikii perelom' i protses nad 'Soiuzom Osvobozhdeniia Ukrainy,'" *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 1 (1994): 195.
27. George O. Liber, *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR, 1923–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 162.
28. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation*, 276.
29. Kuromiya, "Stalinskii 'velikii perelom,'" 194.
30. *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, 13:156.
31. *Izvestiia*, March 18, 1930.
32. Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930–33: The Impact of the Depression* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 31.
33. *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, 13:241–42, 244–45, 247, 302–303, 345–51.
34. Eudin and Slusser, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 1:264.
35. *Ibid.*, 1:347.
36. Great Britain Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, ser. 2, vol. 7, 154.
37. Alexander Motyl, "Ukrainian Nationalist Political Violence in Inter-War Poland, 1921–1939," *East European Quarterly* 19 (1985): 48.
38. Solchanyk, "The Communist Party of Western Ukraine," 300.
39. Stephen Horak, *Poland and Her National Minorities* (New York: Indiana University Libraries, 1961), 162.
40. *Izvestiia*, 18 March 1930.
41. Solchanyk, "The Communist Party of Western Ukraine," 308.
42. Bohdan Burudowycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations, 1932–1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 9.
43. Great Britain Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, ser. 2, vol. 7, 284.
44. *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, 15:645.
45. Germany, Auswartiges Amt., *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949–1983), ser. C, 1:143.
46. *Pravda*, 13 March 1933.
47. *Ibid.*, 17 March 1933.
48. Eudin and Slusser, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 1:97.
49. *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, 16:355.
50. *Pravda*, 22 June 1933.
51. *Ibid.*, 3 July 1933.
52. Cited in Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation*, 279.
53. Germany, Auswartiges Amt., *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, ser. C, 1:695.
54. *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-polskikh otnoshenii*, 6:97.
55. *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, 16:661.
56. *Ibid.*, 16:672.
57. *Ibid.*, 16:691.

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58. Germany, Auswartiges Amt., *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, ser. C, 2:148.
59. *Ibid.*, 2:303.
60. *Pravda*, December 6, 1933.
61. *Ibid.*, December 2, 1933.
62. *Ibid.*