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## The Rise of Evil. Fighting and Suffering.

Speech by Dr Karol Nawrocki, Director of the Second World War Museum in Gdańsk, Poland  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It may seem surprising to look for the roots of a 20<sup>th</sup> century war in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The horrifying and complex nature of WW2 itself – its causes, and its effects – often leaves little or no time to discuss its true origins. Yet, to discuss those origins can be rather inspirations, as it shows how little space is left in between evil, criminal ideas and their emergence as real life concepts. It is of no importance here whether creators of these concepts intend to put them to work or not.

In 1891 Pope Leon XIII published his *Encyclical Rerum Novarum* in which he warned worldwide public against the dangers behind communist ideology and anti-Christian social movements. The then social unrest – as discussed by Pope Leon XIII – had arisen as a result of ideologies which, within a few decades of their evolution, led to the greatest catastrophe in the history of human civilisation, the Second World War.

In their *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, and later in various pamphlets (i.e. *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*), Karl Marks and Frederich Engels openly call for an obligatory revolutionary terror, which should become a tool for altering the world order and, by reaching this objective, would lead to the highest level of civilisation development – the communism. In this scenario, the clash between wealth holders and their manufacturers would eventually lead to a victory of the proletariat – a climax in the development of civilisation.

Consequently, more or less radical dogmas, thoroughly put forward and explicated, began to flourish upon foundations of such an ideology [Sergiey Nikczayew – *The Revolutionary's Catechism*, pt. 15]. With time, ideologists' thoughts, caused the emergence of real-life state policies. The system where God was replaced with Karl Marks, and Jesus Christ with Lenin, materialised in the Soviet Union, from where it quickly spread to take over the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century world.

Around the same time, in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Frederich Nietzsche writes in *Gay Science* that "God is dead". If that is the case, it is us who are supposed to become gods – to decide on life and death, on one's social suitability or the lack of it. Nietzsche openly makes a clear distinction between master race and slaves, the predators and the pray, while defying the Judeo-Christian tradition for advocating moral values among the slaves. He longs for war which would cause the "great purge" and select those that are fit and those that are unfit for society. From the fires of war, says Nietzsche, *Overman* will be born. It is therefore not by chance that Nietzsche's words, often purposefully

misinterpreted, and his very figure were objects of cult among the founding fathers of the German Nazism. Nazis also revered Nietzsche's sister, an heir to his philosophy.

Various ideas circulating around Europe, calling for a great war on the one hand and for a global Bolshevik revolution on the other, and above all for an abolition of the post-Versailles world order, found their outlet in the creation of the two states – Soviet Union and the Third Reich. In both those states social strata deemed “unwanted” were ousted, prejudiced, and even exterminated. Both state systems bear several important similarities, a feat often overlooked today. This is aptly illustrated in *The Soviet Story* documentary by Edvins Snore.

In order to point out just a few such similarities please note the following examples:

- in the first Nazi party program announced by Adolf Hitler, Gottfried Feder, and Anton Drexler in 1920, 14 out of 25 points make reference to socialist and communist ideas;
- in NY Times 1925 issue Joseph Goebbels compares Hitler to Lenin;
- on May 1, 1927, Hitler rants “We are socialists, we are enemies of today's capitalist system”.

Naturally, both Hitler and Stalin were pragmatic to the bone; ideological concepts and philosophical ideas served them as tools to achieve political objectives. However, in being a political pragmatist, Adolf Hitler was not at all that original; he was syncretic rather, leaning on stereotypes that has existed in German or Prussian public life for centuries. As such, he was a mere successor, imitator, and as Prof. Borejsza wrote “the Third Reich could have been born and continued without Adolf Hitler [...], Hitler, I wish to stress, did not come to being as a result of some sort of accident, neither was he an exception, or a fluke in German history”.

Ladies and Gentleman,

This slow but steady growth of the German Nazism can be further substantiated by the fact that towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Prussians were leading the world in eugenic research. In 1895 Adolf Jost wrote a book that was a milestone, *The Right to Die*, while at around the same time as many as twenty three Eugenics professors were lecturing at Prussian universities. One more example is a concept of *Lebensraum*, the living space that the Germans were supposed to conquer for themselves. It was a fiercely chauvinist and racist doctrine that originated long before Hitler came to power. Frederick Ratzel and Carl Haushofer – the latter dubbed Hitler's godfather – had worked on this idea since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other dogmas of similar nature, advocated by the Nazis, including racist and anti-Semitic ideas propagated by Paul Le Garde who died in 1891, can also be tracked back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Philosophical rhetoric coupled with fondness for war and terror, murderous disdain for selected social classes, nations, and social strata all came together as a real-life concept. The collaboration between communists and the Nazis took form on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1939. On that day Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed. In the 300 words of the main body of its text and in the 4 paragraphs of the Pact's secret protocol the Middle-Eastern European order was crushed and the road to WW2 was finally open. Both totalitarian regimes – Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia – invaded and partitioned six independent countries. The attack on Poland on September 1, 1939 marks the beginning of the global conflict.

Yet another war theatre was slowly but inevitably forming as a result of Japanese imperialism spreading across the whole of the Pacific.

Ladies and Gentleman,

A trace of memory to which I devote my speech today, touches upon one of the greatest national traumas in the history of my country – Poland. The global conflict caused by the collusion between the two totalitarian systems – Soviet Communism and German Nazism – claimed tens of millions of victims all over the world. We know that more civilians than soldiers were among those victims. After the Second World War, cemeteries were populated not only with strong and young men, as in the Great War of 1914-1918, but also with women, the elderly, and children.

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

The total number of Polish victims of the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 is roughly estimated at around 250 thousand. And although it is difficult to tell the history of world conflicts by means of bare numbers, these numbers show how tragic September 1939 was for Poland and for the whole of the world. However, this death toll of thousands was just a prologue to the horrifying extermination acts that unravelled in the territory of Poland. Suffice to say that World War 2 for Poland meant the death of one in five pre-war citizens. Among victims were 37.5% of people with higher education. In Poland, only about 30,000 people with higher education and 100,000 people with secondary education survived the war. The extermination of Polish intelligentsia resulted directly from the words of Adolf Hitler recorded by Martin Bormann in October 1940:

“For Poles, there should be one master only and it should be a German [...], so all representatives of the Polish intelligentsia must be killed. That sounds harsh, but it must be the principle of life this time” (Borejsza, pp. 116, 117 et seq.).

Naturally, not only the intelligentsia suffered during the Second World War. During the German occupation, one in five Catholic priests was killed, every 15<sup>th</sup> Polish teacher, 200 thousand “racially legitimate” children were deported from Poland and germanised, and 2.5 million people deported to Germany for forced labour. Finally, it is estimated that 43% of the Polish cultural assets (books, works of art, etc.) was irretrievably lost. It is unsurprising then that in one of his famous books, the American historian Richard Lucas used the term the *Forgotten Holocaust* to describe the Polish experience of WW2.

The destruction of Poland, despite Poles' fierce resistance, was complete on September 17, 1939 when Hitler's ally, the Soviets, invaded the whole length of Poland's eastern borders. Red Army, in a similar *modus operandi* to that of the Germans', was followed by terror-inspiring NKVD secret police units. What often escapes public opinion is the fact that, at that time, the Soviets occupied 53% of the territory of the Republic of Poland populated by 13 million people. Without delay, the Soviets resorted to the reign of terror and sovietisation.

Ladies and Gentleman,

In 1942, Marek Żuławski, a Polish painter, a graphic artist, a critic and an essayist, designed one of the most recognisable war posters, *Poland First to Fight*, to emphasise that Poland was the first to engage in a battle against the Third Reich, and that despite terrible losses, the Polish Banner still stands. The poster's strength lay in its clear message that although the Polish State was subdued, Poles were able to rise and continue to fight.

Therefore, the exhibition you are about to see makes a clear reference to two emotions, two attitudes expressed as distinct symbols. These emotions are *struggle* and *suffering*. Westerplatte,

where about 200 Polish soldiers defended a small piece of land against four thousand German attackers, the battleship Schleswig-Holstein, and Luftwaffe dive bombers is an archetype of Polish attitudes focused around the notion of *resistance*. In axiological terms, Westerplatte means as much as the readiness to fight in the name of core values, even in the face of the prevailing enemy. Poles fought since September 1<sup>st</sup>, but they also suffered at the same time. The city of Wieluń is the symbol of such suffering, the harbinger of a type of war to come – total war. The bombing of the city on September 1<sup>st</sup>, an act that was not preceded by a declaration of war, was simply a terrorist attack. The city bore no strategic significance whatsoever. In the bombing, patients of a city hospital were killed along innocent children like Wanda Saganowska. Just after Wanda's father, overcome with happiness, was rescuing his daughter from a burning house, the girl was fatally wounded by a shrapnel from yet another bomb.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Surely, we have all gone through moments of suffering and distress. But suffering should not be compared, whether it relates to personal experience or the histories of entire nations.

We all remember brave New Zealander and your country's great involvement in World War 2. On 3 September 1939, New Zealand's Prime Minister Michael Savage (a staunch opponent of Britain's appeasement policy), following Great Britain's declaration, declared war on Germany. New Zealand called up a total of around 140 thousand soldiers, out of whom, 11,928 were killed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> New Zealand Expedition Corps under the command of the legendary Bernard Freyberg fought in Greece, Crete, North Africa (Tobruk, El Alamein), Italy, and Yugoslavia. The New Zealanders fought arm in arm with the Poles in the battle to free Europe, and their joint operation in the Battle of Monte Cassino has gone down in the history of the greatest battles.

This exhibition is by no means a contest in quantifying pain or evidence that Poland suffered and fought more bravely than other countries, but a bitter reminder of the fact that the Second World War on the European continent began in Poland, and that its consequences could be felt not up to 1945 but at least until 1989.

Ladies and Gentleman,

The universal definition of a free state must include a reference to independence of that state from other states in the spheres of internal affairs and external relations. Freedom is therefore, in this sense, a synonym for sovereignty and independence, allowing any government to make decisions freely in the name and for the benefit of a sovereign nation, irrespective of where a country is on a map.

The ancestors of the communist system, for whom freedom was only a conscious obligation, put forward their own definition, utterly different from the one above. For communists, the approval of the lower, subordinate strata of society towards living conditions resulting from a communist revolution was meant to create understanding of world's fundamentals, which would then directly lead to, as they claimed, unlimited freedom. In other words, freedom was supposed to mean full acceptance to embrace communism, even if imposed by force. We obviously understand that this definition is of enslavement, not freedom.

The conclusion presents itself: only those who are free can give freedom. Communists, who understood enslavement as freedom, before expanding any further enslaved and murdered their own folk on a massive scale. When they defeated the Third Reich, contrary to other Allies in 1945, they did not bring freedom to Central and Eastern Europe (including Poland), but forced another

period of enslavement that lasted almost 50 years. A foreign values system, generated and managed centrally from Moscow, was imposed on the whole of Central and Eastern Europe.

In reality, for Poland, the advance of the Red Army in the years 1944-1945 meant the loss of all the eastern pre-war provinces of the Republic of Poland and the emergence of the Soviet republics in their place. Poland lost almost half its territory. This loss was hardly compensated for by the accession of the so-called western and northern Recovered Territories. The new statehood was based on manipulated referenda and rigged elections (1947), which resulted in the presence of nearly fifty NKVD agents and over 140 members and supporters of the anti-Polish Communist Party of Poland in the new parliament. The economy, agriculture, industry and all brutal repressions modelled on the similar policies implemented in the Soviet Union. In this way, Poland was entirely sovietised.

The revolt against the Soviet system was undertaken by the soldiers of the independence underground. Today in Poland we call them the Cursed Soldiers. Wide social resistance, in which over 200,000 people took part, including 20,000 armed members, lasted until the beginning of 1947. That is why, as Marcin Zaręba writes in his book *Great fear. Poland 1944-1947*, "one can venture a statement that the Poles' collective memory of the initial post-war period is not much different from the general memory of war years".

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

Experts from the Ministry of Interior of the Government of the Republic of Poland in Exile drafted a detailed report, called the *Report on the Situation in the Country (1944-1949)*. This government was fully representative of all Polish parties. The said report offered a broad and in-depth analysis of the situation in Poland in the initial post-war period. For instance, we find in it a very interesting statistics that in 1947 the sympathizers of the communist rule in Poland constituted a mere 3 to 5% of the society.

In a reality where communists enjoyed minimal social support, institution of the Soviet order was possible only by means of terror. Polish war-time patriots started to populate prisons and cemeteries. The total number of victims of communist military courts is estimated at about 3 thousand. Apart from the wrongly detained and executed, there are still victims of the security apparatus martyred in prisons, murdered by the NKVD, or killed in the fighting with new occupants. As Tomasz Łabuszewski writes:

"Given such a background, we cannot rule out the possibility that the final number of victims of the communist crimes of 1944-1954 may total 50,000 dead and murdered – this number being almost equal to the losses suffered by the Home Army under German occupation until March 1944".

When on top of this we add thousands of political prisoners, deportees to the USSR, and those persecuted on account of belonging to an undesired social group (Catholic Church believers, farmers, private entrepreneurs and others), we begin to comprehend how repressive the whole system was, which many people welcomed as liberation from the German Nazism.

To Poland, and to the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, freedom came much later than to Western Europe and other parts of the world. The real beginning of the road to freedom was the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, a Pole, and then the emergence of NSZZ "Solidarity" social worker's movement in Gdańsk. But this is a completely different story.