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War and memory in Belarus: The annexation of the western borderlands and the myth of the Brest Fortress, 1939-41

Introduction

In June 2001, Belarusian president Alyaksandr Lukashenka hosted the late Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Aleksey II, at the Brest Hero-Fortress. The Russian Patriarch consecrated St. Nikolay's Church at the complex on 24 June¹. In the following summer, Lukashenka, together with former Russian president Boris Yeltsin, marked the 61st anniversary of the German invasion of the Soviet Union at the same venue. On 22 June 2008, Lukashenka and new Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, also met at the complex, which was considered to be a suitable location for both leaders, a symbol of the cooperation of the two states originally united in the Soviet Union and now embarked on elaborating the constitution of the Russia-Belarus Union State. In the spring of 2009, filming began on a joint-Russian-Belarusian movie about the defense of the Brest Fortress with a budget of \$8 million, which is to be released for the 65th anniversary of the end of the German-Soviet war in 2010.

According to one of its producers, Igor Ulgonikov, the movie will depict how different nationality groups of the Soviet Union stood together in defense of their motherland before the onslaught of Fascism. The film, he added would adhere strictly to historical accuracy and avoid any sort of ritualistic portrayals of deranged Germans. The film is the first to be sponsored by the state since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.² Work on it will continue despite the impact of the economic recession on the two countries—the Russian ruble has lost about one-third of its value against the US dollar since the fall of 2008, and its Belarusian counterpart just under 30%—and if completed it would represent the most significant project to date of the Russia-Belarus Union, which in other spheres cannot claim to have been very successful. The project demonstrates that the Brest Hero-Fortress occupies a special place in the wartime mythology of both countries.

How did the Brest Hero-Fortress reach such an elevated status? Is it logically a national symbol of Belarus or of a Union State? How did it evolve from its original takeover by Red Army troops in September 1939, through

¹ D.R. Marples expresses his thanks to Alla Sushko for assistance in attaining materials during his visit to Brest in December 2008.

² *Moscow News*, 19 February 2009; and Nick Holdsworth, „Kremlin Greenlights Patriotic Epic,” *Variety*, 23 December 2008.

the German siege, to the status it occupies today? Can one separate fact from myth in the stories of the heroism of its defenders? And what were they defending? Was it a symbol of Soviet rule or merely a recent acquisition through conquest? The related question is whether these heroes represented a united country under Soviet rule? Thus the features of the recent Soviet annexation of Western Belarus are of key relevance to this study. Was it truly an act of liberation or did it represent the imposition of a Stalinist system on this region? If the latter, then it could be argued that Brest was simply occupied by foreign invaders of various stripes following the collapse of the Polish state and its fourth partition at this time.

These questions are at the forefront of this paper. Though familiar to scholars and even the general public, few of the events described above can be accepted as historically accurate. The Lukashenka regime, which came to power in the summer of 1994, saw itself initially as a supporter of close ties with its Soviet neighbor Russia and indeed even as an advocate of the restoration of the Soviet Union. Since the early 21st century that position has changed. The government now poses as the protector of Belarus, its culture and history, and perceives its history as distinct from that of Russia. Even so it still requires its national myths and legends, and Lukashenka has identified the past for the most part with the history of the 20th century and Belarus' role in the Great Patriotic War. Commemorations take place regularly on important wartime anniversaries. War monuments and museum complexes take precedence in defining historical memory, often with little regard for accuracy. In this respect the Khatyn Memorial some 50 kms from Minsk and the Liniya Stalina outdoor park represent the best examples: both are regularly visited by thousands of people and neither site is very convincing in its depiction of events in the vicinity during the war years.³

In this respect there is no significant difference between Belarus today and the Soviet Union of the past. The „Great Patriotic War” became part of the Soviet myth at the end of the war in spring 1945, when Stalin designated hero cities that had exhibited particular fortitude in overcoming the Germans. However, it was in the 1960s and 1970s under Brezhnev that the war took on its special ascendancy—from which it has never fallen in Russia—as the epochal event of the 20th century and for the next three decades as the defining experience of the Soviet Union. Contemporary Russia under Presi-

³ See, for example, David R. Marples and Uladzimir Padhol, „Creating New National History from Old: The Role of Historical Memory and World War II in Contemporary Belarus,” in Andrej Dynko, ed., *The Generation Gap, or Belarusian Differences in Goals, Values and Strategy* (Warsaw: Lazarsky Institute, 2008), pp. 162-163; and Alexandra Goujon, „Partisans, Genocide, and Belarusian Identities,” paper presented at the symposium „United Europe—Divided Memory,” Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna, 21 September 2008.

dent Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has scarcely varied from the same path. Putin in particular continues to expand the honorary title of „City of Military Glory” to include several smaller and hitherto obscure settlements.⁴ Yet given the sheer scale of suffering during the war, Belarus can lay claim to a special place. Its losses amounted to about one-third of its prewar population. It was the home of the Partisan movement, which created further legends, several of which have never been closely scrutinized. It was also the location of a significant portion of Soviet Jews, targeted in the Holocaust and only belatedly receiving due attention.⁵

Above all, however, the Brest Fortress myth occupies a special place for a number of reasons. It did not conform to the typical view because the period of conflict did not result in a famous Soviet victory; it ended in the defeat and capture or death of the defenders. It took place in isolation from other events of the conflict, and could even be described as peripheral to the course and outcome of the war. The historical background is unusual in that it occurred in a location that had only become part of the USSR 20 months earlier. Under German rule it became part of Reichskommissariat Ukraine, and besides German, the official languages of this administration were Russian and Ukrainian, not Belarusian. The town itself as well as the fortress had recently been captured by the Germans, who relinquished both voluntarily to permit the Red Army to move in according to the agreements of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939. Most residents of Brest could remember vividly the joint-Red Army-Wehrmacht parade through their city a month later (see below). In brief the town had a recent history quite alien to that of the Soviet Union and Russia. All these factors make the story of the Fortress a suitable topic for discussion and in particular on two grounds: first as part of contemporary national myth; but second, as an example of an unexpected legend, one that ran completely against the grain of wartime rhetoric and discourse and yet for a number of reasons is particularly appropriate for the present rulers of the state of Belarus.

⁴ There are thirteen „hero cities”: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Volgograd, Novorossisk, Tula, Murmansk, Smolensk, Kyiv, Kursk, Sevastopol, and Odesa, in addition to the two in Belarus, Minsk (awarded in 1974) and the Brest Hero-Fortress. In May 2007, Belgorod, Kursk, and Orel received the title of „cities of military glory.” The following year President Vladimir Putin bestowed the same accolade on Voronezh, Luga, Polyarny, Rostov-on-Don, and Tuapse. See <http://www.kremlin.ru>, 7 May 2007 and 8 May 2008 (accessed on 4 April 2009).

⁵ See, for example Leonid Smilovitskiy, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii, 1941-1944* (Tel Aviv: Biblioteka Motveya Chernogo, 2000) and Barbara Lesley Epstein, *The Minsk Ghetto, 1941-1943: Jewish Resistance and Soviet Internationalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

The Outbreak of World War II and Soviet Takeover

The Brest Fortress was a Western outpost of the Russian Empire, commissioned in 1830 and completed in 1842 at the meeting of the Mukhavets and Western Bug Rivers.⁶ Its citadel could accommodate some 12,000 troops. The fortress had changed hands more than once during the First World War and it is generally acknowledged that as a military structure it quickly became obsolete with the development of siege technology. Nevertheless, its cellars and underground passageways rendered it particularly difficult for any invader to root out every defender. In March 1918, at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (held in the White Palace of the Fortress), the Russians pulled out of the First World War ceding Brest and much of their European territory to the Central Powers: Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Turkey. The final settlement of the Treaty of Riga, which concluded a subsequent Russian-Polish War, left Brest in the hands of the reemerged Polish state. When war broke out again on 1 September 1939, the Fortress once more stood in the path of an invader. Two weeks later it was tank commander General Heinz Guderian who arrived on the Western Bug to remove the Polish garrison under General Konstanty Plisowski.

On 15 September, according to one account, the Poles, who hitherto had had little success in this conflict, repelled seven German attacks. Though Plisowski and other officers were wounded, the 82nd Infantry Regiment fought on for two more days.⁷ Almost simultaneously with the fortress' fall, and following the arrangements made at the meeting between German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop with I. V. Stalin and V. M. Molotov in Moscow, the Soviet army crossed the eastern border of Poland, and the 26th Tank Brigade under Major General S. M. Krivoshein reached Brest. The German troops then withdrew from the Fortress, despite having spent forces and energy capturing it. Soviet possession therefore was facilitated and rendered possible by the military exertions of Hitler's army. Brest and its fortress thus came under Soviet rule at the behest of the two totalitarian regimes fulfilling the mandates of the secret protocols of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. In turn, the modern state of Belarus derives its present borders from the same agreement, thus tying the story of the Brest Fortress to the present.

⁶ For the background history of the Brest Fortress, see S. V. Martselev et al, *Svod pamyatnikov istorii i kul'tury narodov SSSR: Brestskaya Oblast'* (Minsk: Belaruskaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, 1990), pp. 46-50. A recent and objective study of the Fortress is Rostislav Aliev, „Brestskaya Krepost': Vzgl'yad s nemetskoi storony,” *Frontovaya illiustratsiya: Periodicheskoe illiustrirovannoe izdanie*, No. 5, 2008 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo „Strategiia KM”, 2008): 1-74.

⁷ A. M. Suvorov, ed. *Brestskaya krepost': svidetel'stva vremen* (Brest: SEZ, 2008), p. 9.

Nevertheless, many residents of the region, both Jews and Western Belarusians, received the invading Red Army on 17 September as liberators.⁸ Triumphant arches were erected and the Soviet forces were greeted with cheering, and bread and salt. The Polish forces, on the other hand, suffered abuse from their own citizens as they retreated in disarray, as did Polish soldiers, policemen, government representatives, *osadnicy* colonizers, and refugees from the Western, German-occupied part of Poland. In the village of Skidel there was an uprising of Jews and Belarusians, which Polish forces managed to crush before their retreat. These attacks were particularly frequent in areas where the Communists were strong, and nowhere in Poland was their presence stronger than in Western Belarus.⁹ The poor and landless Orthodox peasants pinned great hopes on receiving land, the unemployed workers hoped for jobs, and the pro-Soviet intelligentsia sought a renaissance for the Belarusian language and culture.¹⁰ The Soviet forces were instructed by their commissars that they were liberating their brethren, which for so long had been enslaved by the Polish lords. The invading soldiers of the Red Army were bombarded with propaganda, which emphasized their historical and emancipating mission. Brochures printed in mass editions were distributed explaining the miserable conditions in Poland.¹¹ Yet, Soviet military and administrators who arrived in Western Belarus rushed to the stores and emptied them of goods that were in short supply back home. The ostensibly triumphant Soviet soldiers appeared as a rag-tag band, poorly dressed, hungry, often lacking both shoes and saddles for their horses, washing their stinking, tar-impregnated footwear in puddles and picking up papers off the street and rolled cigarettes.¹²

⁸ Bogdan Musiał, „Konterrevolutionäre Elemente sind zu erschießen”: Die Brutalisierung des deutsch-sowjetischen Krieges im Sommer 1941 (Berlin, Munich: Propyläen Verlag, 2000), p. 55. But see also the reviews by Dieter Pohl in *H-Soz-u-Kult Online*, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/REZENSIO/buecher/2001/Po-Di0401.htm> <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/REZENSIO/buecher/2001/Po-Di0401.htm> (Accessed 3 June 2005) and Per A. Rudling, „Bogdan Musiał and the Question of Jewish Responsibility for the Pogroms in Lviv in the Summer of 1941,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (June 2005): 69-89. For recent contrasting accounts of the background to and consequences of the Soviet invasion of Western Belarus, see, for example, Dmitry Migun, „17 Sentyabrya v istorii strany,” *Belaruskaya dumka*, No. 9 (September 2009): 28-32; and Alyaksandr Milinkevich, „Uz'yadnanne: u verasni 1939-ha stala bol'sh Savetskaha Sayuza, ale ne Belarusi,” *Svobodnye Novosti Plyus*, 23-30 September 2009, p. 10.

⁹ Musiał, p. 55; and Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: a Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 75.

¹⁰ Krushinsky, p. 68.

¹¹ *Komu my idem na pomoshch'* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izdatel'stvo Nar-koma Oborony Soyuzo SSR, 1939).

¹² Jan Tomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 45.

The sheer variety of material objects overwhelmed the newcomers. After the families of those assigned to administer the newly conquered provinces had arrived, it became proverbial how Soviet women wore nightgowns and slippers to the opera and various gala performances as if they were the most elegant dresses. A soldier was seen outside a hosiery shop wearing women's bras over his ears for earmuffs; another, standing in the middle of the street, tried to blow one up, looking it over with incredulity. They rushed all the stores, cutting ahead of people standing in line, and bought up everything — while at the same time denying that they lacked anything in their own country. „Do you have oranges?“ „We produce them in factories,“ a Soviet soldier would answer. „Do you have Amsterdam, or Greta Garbo?“ „We have plenty“ — *u nas vsio est* — was the standard reply.¹³

While Poles and Western Belarusians were shocked by the lack of refinement of the Soviet soldiers, the Soviet Belarusians were also surprised by much of what they saw in Western Belarus. During the two decades of separation, the two parts of Belarus had developed in very different ways, and drifted far apart in terms of attitudes and social norms. Soviet Belarusians were unaccustomed to the sharp national antagonism between the various ethnic groups that they witnessed in former Eastern Poland. In the BSSR, intermarriage between Belarusians and Jews had become a common phenomenon. In Western Belarus this was something almost unimaginable. Soviet functionaries were also surprised by the submissiveness of the Western Belarusians, particularly the peasants, to any figure of authority.¹⁴

Five days after the Soviet invasion of Poland on September 17, the Red Army and the German *Wehrmacht* met in Brest-Litovsk, this time both as victors. In celebrations the two sides toasted each other, exchanged banners and conducted the joint military parade.¹⁵ In a speech to the Supreme Soviet on October 31, 1939, Molotov boasted that Germany and the USSR had together destroyed their common enemy Poland.

The ruling circles of Poland boasted quite a lot about the „stability“ of their state and the „might“ of their army. However, one swift blow at Poland, first by the German army and then by the Red Army, and nothing was left of this ugly offspring of the Versailles Treaty, which had existed by oppressing the non-Polish nationalities.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., pp. 47–48.

¹⁴ S. Krushinsky, *Byelorussian Communism and Nationalism: Personal Recollections* (New York: Research Program on the U.S.S.R, 1973), p. 71.

¹⁵ Heinz Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten: Mit 37 Kartenskizzen und 32 Abbildungen*, 4th edition. (Neckargemünd: Kurt Vowinkel Verlag, 1960), p. 74; Nikolay Zen'kovich, *Tainy ushedshego veka. Granitsy. Spory. Obidy* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2005), p. 354.

¹⁶ „On the Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union: Report of Comrade V.M Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and People's Commissar of Foreign

Soviet propaganda presented the „reunification” as a realization of the desires of the Belarusian people, and the destruction of Poland as a result of a failed Polish war of aggression against Germany.

The closer the Polish economy got to the verge of collapse, the more evidently clear became the inability of the incompetent Polish rulers to increase the forces of production of their country. The more painful the lives of the Western Ukrainians and the Western Belarusians became, the less support did the Polish lords receive. And in this situation of economic collapse, hunger, the oppression of the masses, and general popular dissatisfaction the Polish rulers started war with Germany. It is fully understandable that the war the Polish rulers forced upon its people could not be met with approval by the millions of the working masses. The Polish state began to collapse. The Polish army was crushed. The unsuccessful Polish rulers escaped, leaving the people to their fate. It was only natural that the Ukrainian and Belarusian masses, which had been under Polish oppression, looked eastward with hope, towards the mighty Soviet Union, expecting its help.¹⁷

In order to justify the occupation and annexation of Western Belarus (and Western Ukraine), Molotov relied on nationalist rhetoric.

You can never expect the Soviet government to be indifferent to the fate of its Ukrainian and Belarusian blood brothers, (*edinokrovnykh ukraintsev i belorussov*) who live in Poland and previously were subjects of lawless nations, and today are left entirely to fight for themselves.¹⁸

On the other hand, this rhetoric, which emphasized „reunification” of the Eastern Slavs with their brothers, delineated the Poles as both ethnically alien and class oppressors. The propaganda term *pol'skie pany* linked these two concepts. The Soviet invasion was thus presented as a national liberation as well as class emancipation.¹⁹ The annexation of Western Belarus meant the creation of a Belarusian nation-state for the first time in history. The status of the Belarusian republic was elevated, something reflected in official rhetoric, which now started to contain references to the *vialiki*, (gre-

Affairs, at Sitting of Supreme Soviet of USSR on Oct. 31, 1939,” *Moscow News*, No. 45, November 6, 1939. See also Ann Su Cardwell, *Poland and Russia: The Last Quarter Century* (Sheed and Ward: New York, 1944), pp. 223-245; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *On the Law of Nations*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 93; and Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1929-1941* (New York: Norton Press, 1992), p. 612.

¹⁷ Vladimir Ivanovich Picheta, *Osnovnye momenty istoricheskogo razvitiya zapadnoi Ukrainy i zapadnoi Belorussii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1940), p. 126.

¹⁸ *Pravda*, September 19, 1939, cited in *Komu my idem na pomoshch'*, p. 27.

¹⁹ Jan T. Gross, „The Sovietisation of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia,” in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (eds.) *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-46*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 65.

at) Belarusian people. This adjective had previously been reserved for the Russian people, which had been promoted to this status in 1937.²⁰ In the post-1930 „Stalinist national-hierarchical scheme,” the Russians became „the elder brother in the family of the equal Soviet peoples.”²¹ In 1933, Stalin referred to the Russians as „the most talented nation in the world,”²² and in 1945 he called them „the leading nation of all nations of the Soviet Union.”²³ Belarus, particularly after the 1939 annexations, increasingly appeared as the third brother. The three Slavic ethnic republics were followed by the nationalities which had their own titular republics, followed by the nationalities of the autonomous republics.²⁴

In 1939, the spelling of the name of the republican capital was officially changed from Miensk to Minsk, a move to bring it closer in line with the Russian language.²⁵ The BSSR now reached its maximum geographical extent. Until the German invasion in 1941, the Belastok (Bialystok) area constituted the westernmost oblast of the BSSR, including territories with a mixed Belarusian-Polish population.²⁶ For ordinary people the old western border of the BSSR long remained intact, as the Soviet government worried about political influences from Western Belarus on the eastern regions.²⁷ At the same time, the Sovietization of the newly annexed areas required specialists from the „old” BSSR. There was an intense interest in the newly annexed territories, and cultural workers flocked to the new territory: poets, writers, singers, actors, musicians, and theater workers enthusiastically embarked on business trips or study tours to the former Western Belarus.²⁸ The Soviet authorities did not trust the local Western Belarusians to elect their own local delegates to the Supreme Soviet but brought in many of the candidates that appeared on the ballots in the newly annexed areas. These were, as a rule, cowed survivors of the purges of the 1930s.²⁹ The most celebrated

²⁰ Picheta, p. 136; See also Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and the Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist*. Trans. Karen Forster and Oswald Forster (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 149-150.

²¹ Gennadii Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows: Anti-Semitism in Soviet Russia*. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books 1995), p. 28.

²² Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001), p. 453.

²³ Serhy Yekelchuk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 88.

²⁴ Kostyrchenko, p. 28.

²⁵ Zen'kovich, p. 347.

²⁶ Eugen von Engelhardt, *Weissruthenien: Volk und Land* (Amsterdam, Prague, and Vienna: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1943), pp. 278-279.

²⁷ Zahar Szybieka, *Historia Białorusi* (Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 2002), p. 332.

²⁸ Krushinsky, p. 70.

²⁹ Panteleimon Ponomarenka, the Belarusian party leader, ordered the Chairperson of the

Belarusian intellectual, poet Yanka Kupala, was taken on a showcase tour of the newly annexed territories, receiving „popular representatives” of the peoples of „liberated” Western Belarus in Belastok. The voters of the Lida electoral district were so enchanted with Kupala that they „elected” him as their political representative for the Supreme Soviet.³⁰

The Soviet authorities initiated a rapid process of Sovietizing the area, breaking all organized resistance and dismantling the remainder of civil society in short order. Polonization was replaced by a Belarusization of school, newspapers, and administration.³¹ However, the collectivization of agriculture, which often was carried out on the expense of the Polish landowners, went slower than in other parts of the newly annexed territories. In June 1941, only 6.7 per cent of Western Belarusian rural households had been collectivized as compared to 13 per cent in Western Ukraine.³² The deportation of the largely Polish landowners and the redistribution of land generated considerable support and goodwill from the landless Belarusian and Ukrainian peasants.³³ The arrival of the Soviets disrupted the social order in society. While the Soviet troops liberated political prisoners from Polish prison, already on the second day of the occupation the Communist Party of Western Belarus (officially dissolved by the Comintern a year earlier) was denounced as a hostile organization, created by Polish military intelligence. Large numbers of Western Belarusian Communists were soon returned to jail, while others were placed under constant surveillance.³⁴

Presidium of the Supreme Soviet BSSR, N. Ya. Natelevich, personally to organize the elections to the People's Assembly in Belastok. See Protokol No. 90, 2 October 1939, no. 1, National Archives of the Republic of Belarus [hereafter NARVB], F.4, op. 3, d. 800. The document indicates how every stage of the election was closely supervised by the party authorities in Minsk. When the decision to include Western Belarus in the BSSR was „accepted,” a celebration was held in Belastok attended by Panamarenka and other members of the leadership as 360 planes flew overhead and the „International” was played. S. Zhuravlev, „Demonstratsiya nesokrushimogo edinstva,” *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, 15 November 1939, p. 1. A decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus of 20 December 1939 ordered that 1,600 party activists be dispatched into the western regions, including 300 who were to take the positions of party secretaries, 110 leaders of propaganda sections, 100 editors of rayon newspapers, and 110 secretaries of Komsomol organizations. NARB, F.4, op. 3, d. 862, l. 1.

³⁰ I. Zhydovich, „Zhytstsevy shliakh paeta,” p. 21; and Syarhey Novik-Piaion, „Nezabyunaya sustrecha,” 185-192, in T. Khadkevich (ed.), *Narodny paet Belarusi* (Minsk: Vydavetstva Akademii Navuk BSSR, 1962).

³¹ Protokol No. 107, 1-2 December 1939, „Concerning measures for the organization of people's education in the western oblasts of the BSSR,” NARB, F.4, op. 3, D. 850, L. 79.

³² Musial, pp. 38, 56.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁴ Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44*. (New York: St. Martin's Press and the United States Holocaust Museum, 2000), p. 2.

Soviet Terror in Western Belarus

During the violent occupation of 1939-1941, the Soviet regime applied a terror policy to the new borderlands. While the dismissal of NKVD chief, Nikolay Yezhov and the ascent of Lavrenty Beria led to a relative thaw in pre-1939 USSR, large-scale purges and deportations were introduced in the newly annexed, former Polish territories. Political terror now paralyzed Western Belarus and more arrests were carried out by the NKVD there than in the rest of the Soviet Union in 1939-1941.³⁵ Two Russian scholars have noted that although there might have been some benefits for the poorer stratum of population, the change of regime also introduced typical Soviet practices of the 1930s. A „revolutionary transformation” took place in Western Belarus (and also in Western Ukraine and the Baltic States), which was carried out using „administrative methods combined with a nihilistic lack of attention to laws, to national traditions, or morality.” Assaults on political and social institutions, and especially the vicious attack on churches alienated a considerable portion of the population from socialism. A negative attitude to Soviet authority increased especially after the beginning of mass repressions, which developed most widely immediately prior to the outbreak of the German-Soviet war.³⁶

The number of people suffering repression in Western Belarus was more or less similar to the terror experienced by the people in BSSR during the previous three waves of purges in the 1930s. Still, many young people in the USSR, who had received their life-determining experiences in the Stalinist 1930s, approved of the annexation of the western borderlands. Pavel Negretov from Kirovohrad was sixteen at the time of the annexation of Western Belarus and Western Ukraine. In his memoirs he recalled the popular support and pride of the enlargement of the western republics. „[W]hen western Ukraine and the Baltic Republics were annexed, we were glad about the successes of our policy. I remember that at that time one of my schoolmates said: *пАИ*Well, now the NKVD will clean things up there’.”³⁷ In the BSSR „Soviet ideology had gained wide acceptance, despite discontent concerning some aspects of Soviet policy, such as collectivization.”³⁸

³⁵ Snyder (2005), p. 177. See, for example, the top secret letter of L. Tsanava, People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Belarusian SSR, „Sekretaryu TsK KP(b) tovarishchu Ponomarenko,” 23 November 1939, NARB, F.4, op. 3, g. 856, 1.303, 1.304, citing the alleged crimes of three of the victims of the purges in Western Belarus.

³⁶ S.V. Volkov and Yu.V. Emel’yanov, *1939: Do i posle sekretnykh protokolov* (Moscow: Voenno-izdatel’stvo, 1990), pp. 200-201.

³⁷ Pavel Negretov, *Vse dorogi vedut na Vorkutu* (Benson, VT: Chalidze, 1985), pp. 24-25.

³⁸ Epstein, in David Gaunt, Paul A. Levin, and Laura Palosuo, eds., *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (Berne, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 434.

Materials from the NKVD archives show that between 1939 and 1941 in the former Polish territories now under Soviet occupation, about 300,000 former Polish citizens were deported.³⁹ Some 200,000 were ethnic Poles, nearly 70,000 were Jews, and 25,000 were Ukrainians, while deported Belarusians numbered in the tens of thousands. That meant that while some 4.5 per cent of all Poles in the territory were uprooted, the titular nationalities were heavily affected proportionately in terms of the numbers deported.⁴⁰ The comment hardly detracts, however, from the severity of such measures. From Western Belarus 50,732 people were deported, including 16,860 from Baranovichi Oblast, 11,679 from Belastok Oblast, 3,828 from Brest Oblast, 9,159 from Vilnia Oblast, and 9,206 from Pinsk Oblast.⁴¹ On 5 March 1940 the Politburo decided to shoot the leading former Polish military officials. Between 3 April and 13 May 1940, on Beria's orders, about 22,000 interned Polish officers and policemen were liquidated in Katyc, Khar'kiv, and Midnoe outside Kalinin (Tver) by the NKVD.⁴²

One form of repression was forced recruitment into the Red Army and redeployment far from home. As the former Polish citizens of Western Belarus automatically became Soviet citizens, they had to serve in the Red Army. An estimated 230,000 Poles were recruited to fight in the Winter War against Finland in 1939-1940, for example. In addition, more than 100,000 young men were forcibly employed in Soviet industry, particularly in coalmines of Donetsk, or in the Urals and Western Siberia.⁴³ Between 1939 and 1941 3,880 people were sentenced to death by so-called troikas, in the BSSR, compared to 3,405 in Ukraine. Again, many of these people were Poles.⁴⁴

³⁹ Snyder, p. 177.

⁴⁰ Stanisław Ciesielski, Grzegorz Hryciuk, and Aleksander Srebrakowski, *Masowe deportacje ludności w Związku Radzieckim*, (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2005), pp. 246-247.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 219. However, it should be pointed out that with the exception of Jan Gross' work cited above, the history of Western Belarus in 1939-1941 has received little attention from Western historians. Some émigré Belarusian historians, writing before the NKVD archives were made available gave considerably higher numbers of deportees. Symon Kabysh, for example, estimated that 305,000 people were deported from Western Belarus between 1939 and 1941, of which „at least 100,000” were ethnic Belarusians. Symon Kabysh, „Genocide of the Byelorussians,” in Vitaut and Zora Kipei (eds.) *Byelorussian Statehood: Reader and Bibliography* (New York: Byelorussian Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1988), pp. 237-238. Other accounts, such as that of Bronisław Kusnierz, the Minister of Justice in the government of General Bor-Komorowski, indicate that the total number of deportees from Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland during four waves of deportations during 1940 and 1941 was „about” 980,000 people. Bronisław Kusnierz, *Stalin and the Poles: An Indictment of the Soviet Leaders* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1981), pp. 68-69.

⁴² Musial, p. 35.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

The mass graves in Kurapaty, outside Minsk, contain an estimated 150,000 victims, mostly from the period 1939 to 1941. According to Robert Conquest, five of the eight graves at the site were composed of corpses of Western Belarusians, and three contained victims of the Great Terror of 1937-1938. Other mass graves have also been found in Belarusian regional capitals.⁴⁵ The number of Polish deaths in 1937-1938 and 1939-1941 were similar, with roughly 100,000 killed in each wave. Yet, the chances of ultimate survival for the arrested Poles were higher during the period of Soviet occupation prior to the German invasion.

While the number of arrested Poles in 1939-1941 was much higher than in 1937-1938, most did survive during the second wave of arrests. Whereas four in five arrested Poles in 1937 and 1938 were shot, Timothy Snyder estimates that out of a total of some 500,000 Polish citizens who had been arrested, deported or otherwise repressed in 1939-1941, 400,000 survived. Out of a population of 13 million people in the Soviet zone of occupation, some 1.25 million people were „resettled” by the Soviets. As a result of this government-organized violence a full 10 per cent of the inhabitants in the Soviet-occupied zone were deported in one way or another. After the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty and the partition of Poland ethnic Poles were no longer perceived as the threat they had been two years earlier.⁴⁶ However, as noted, the authorities then turned on the native population and thus simply redirected the acts of violence. By the summer of 1941 therefore, the initially benign Soviet administration (from the perspective of native Belarusians) had turned into a harsh regime that varied little from the sort of policies and behavior demonstrated in Soviet Belarus and other regions of the USSR during the Stalin Purges.

The Outbreak of War and the Brest Fortress

The grim legacy of this first period of Soviet rule suggests that loyalty to the Communists would be a low priority when war with the Germans broke out. The new Soviet rulers’ behavior toward the local population exceeded in cruelty anything experienced in the period of Polish control. The Brest Fortress, meanwhile, had been transformed into an army base for the forces of the 4th Army under Major General A.A. Korobkov. The city and fortress fell under the purview of the 6th and 42nd Infantry Division of the 28th Infantry Corps, commanded by Major-General V.S. Popov, along with the 132nd battalion of NKVD troops and the 17th Border Unit. In order to offer a broad

⁴⁵ Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: a Reassessment* (Edmonton AB: University of Alberta Press, 1990), p. 288; David R. Marples, „Kurapaty: The Investigation of a Stalinist Historical Controversy,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 1994): 514.

⁴⁶ Gross, *Revolution*, p. 227; Snyder, pp. 177-178.

portrayal of the events that took place at the Fortress, four types of analysis will be outlined: first, that of a book published in the West; second, that of a Belarusian author writing a text specifically for schools; third a Russian source, which is linked to the Icebreaker thesis propounded by Viktor Suvorov; and lastly a variety of Belarusian sources, including the most popular account of the defense of the fortress published in the 1950s.

In their book on the Soviet Partisan Movement, Leonid Grenkevich and David Glantz note the following with regard to the resistance offered by the defenders of the Brest Fortress. The latter was defended by three main figures: Captain I. Zubachev, the Regimental Commissar Ya. Fomin, and Major P. Gavrilov. Although the Germans greatly outnumbered the defenders and had far more weaponry at their disposal, the garrison held out for some three weeks, and fighting continued at the same time as the forces of Army Group Center reached the town of Smolensk in western Russia.⁴⁷ In a study aid published for Belarusian students, V.I. Vernigorov divides the war into three stages, with the siege of the fortress incorporated into the narrative early in the first stage (22 June 1941-18 November 1942). He states that the Brest Fortress garrison fought against overwhelmingly superior enemy forces from 22 June to 20 July 1941 (28 days). Parts of the units of the 42nd and 6th Rifle Divisions and of the 33rd Engineer Regiment and a detachment of border troops remained there. They were essentially trapped and short of ammunition, food, and water, but determined to fight to the last man. The narrative cites the admiration of Guderian for the gallant Soviets, but comments that the German general mistakenly wrote that resistance continued „for a few days” whereas it had lasted for about a month.⁴⁸

Vernigorov continues by referring to the inscriptions the defenders left on the walls: We will die but we will not leave the fortress”; „I am dying but will not surrender. Farewell Motherland, 20 July 1941.”⁴⁹ This author recounts in detail the disastrous losses elsewhere in Belarus in this period—with the proviso that strong resistance to the invaders took place around the town of Mahilou. Another source cites the recollections of Hero of the Soviet Union P.M. Gavrilov, who entered the fortress on Saturday evening, 21 June 1941, to attend to his sick wife and small son, and then remained stranded there when the Germans attacked. With several others he ran to the North Gate, which led to the outskirts of Brest where his regiment had been quartered. But the fortress was already surrounded. However, even though the

⁴⁷ Leonid Grenkevich and David M. Glantz, *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999), p. 70.

⁴⁸ V.I. Vernigorov, *Velikaya otechestvennaya vojna sovetskogo naroda (v kontekste Vtoroy mirovoy voyny)*, *uchebnoye posobiye* (Minsk: Novoye Znaniye, 2005), p. 46.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Germans attacked the defenders with tanks, the assaults were beaten back with heavy losses. One lieutenant took the lead in crippling three tanks before falling to the ground.⁵⁰ A Belarusian university textbook also notes the unequal struggle and lengthy resistance that continued for „over a month.” The fortress was still standing even when battle was taking place at Smolensk.⁵¹

The controversial Russian historian Constantine (Konstantin) Pleshakov is an adherent of the Icebreaker thesis, which implicitly would suggest a perspective of the defense of the Brest Fortress somewhat different from that of his contemporaries. Nevertheless the description of the heroism of the defenders does not depart appreciably from other accounts. He notes additionally that on 24 June, the commanders of six resistance groups gathered together at the behest of Commissar Efim Fomin, a 32-year old Jew, who had been a political officer already for eleven years. He „worshipped Communism as others worshipped God.” Fomin asked all personnel to bring papers (presumably this signified only the military personnel as, according to his account, including women and children, there were about 3,500 people inside the fortress). On Fomin’s orders, Captain Ivan Zubachev took charge of the defense, though Pleshakov makes it plain that the commissar was the real leader and remained at Zubachev’s side at all times. Men were asked to continue fighting until the last bullet and to try to break out of the encirclement. Eventually women and children were let out because of the lack of food and water, and Fomin and Zubachev were captured a few days later. Fomin was executed as a commissar and Jew, whereas Zubachev ended up in a concentration camp. Gavrilov, however, evaded capture for 32 days until 23 July.⁵²

The Evolution of the Legend of the Brest Hero-Fortress

Current texts and school course books in independent Belarus demonstrate the importance of the Brest Fortress as a national symbol of the war.⁵³ The defense occurred despite the brutality of earlier Soviet rule. However, the resistance of the small garrison was quickly overshadowed by subsequ-

⁵⁰ Igor A. Adviev and Aleksandr M. Il’kevich, *Velikaya otechestvennaya voyna sovetskogo naroda. Praktikum 11 Klass* (Minsk: Yunipress, 2005), pp. 55-56.

⁵¹ A. Kokhanovskiy, et al, *Istoriya Belarusi: polnyi kurs: posobie dlya starshklassnikov i postupyushchikh v vuzy* (Minsk: Yunipress, 2008), p. 363.

⁵² Constantine Pleshakov, *Stalin’s Folly: The Secret History of the German Invasion of Russia, June 1941* (London: Cassell, 2005), pp. 242-245.

⁵³ See, for example, V.R. Karnalyuk, *Naynoushaya historyya Belarusi 1917-1945 hh.: Fakty, Pytanni, Zadanni* (Minsk: Ekoperspektiva, 2009), pp. 141-142; and M.F. Kadzet and U.P. Salamakha, *Nasha peremoha* (Minsk: Literatura i Iskusstvo, 2004), pp. 13-14..

ent events and was not mentioned at the time in Soviet news reports. On 26 August 1941, Hitler, Goering, von Ribbentrop, Field Marshal Kesselring, and Mussolini visited the fortress and after April 1942 it was a billet for German, Italian, and Hungarian soldiers. Later this same year, the Germans destroyed the Brest Ghetto and killed some 18,000 people, mainly Jews. The fortress fell into Soviet hands again on 28 July 1944, and subsequently, the chairman of the Brest Oblast Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, N.I. Krasovsky (M.I. Krasouski), began to collect materials about the defense of the citadel. In 1948, his article appeared in the journal *Belarus'*. The following year the remains of Infantry Lieutenant A.F. Nagonov and fourteen soldiers were discovered in the remains of the Terespol Gate. P.I. Krivonogov completed a painting entitled „The Defenders of the Brest Fortress” in 1951, and a play of the same name was issued by the dramatist, K.I. Gubarevich, in 1953.⁵⁴

As V.V. Beshanov has noted, however, these attempts to capture the events of the defense could receive little attention during the lifetime of Stalin. According to Order 270 of 16 August 1941, servicemen falling into the hands of the enemy were regarded as traitors and deserters. The Soviets sent released prisoners to special filtration camps, and then held a series of investigations before dispatching a portion of them to labor camps for ten years. Even those who went into the Red Army were treated as renegades. The heroes of Brest Fortress were thus in this category and restricted in choices of profession and residence in the future. Many of the defenders lived out their lives in remote regions of the Far East; Gavrilov, for example, lost his party membership as a result of his capture by the Germans and spent the early postwar years in charge of a camp for Japanese military prisoners in Siberia.⁵⁵ Thus for a period of almost fifteen years, the story of the defense was simply expunged from the historical record. Beshanov maintains that the situation changed for two principal reasons: the emergence as Soviet leader of Nikita Khrushchev, who renounced some of Stalin's crimes at the 20th Party Congress in 1956; and the work of the writer Sergey Smirnov. In November 1956, the Museum of the Heroic Defense of the Brest Fortress was created at the garrison of the house of officers, and in January 1957, the leader of the defense of the eastern fort, P.M. Gavrilov, was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ V.V. Beshanov, *Brestskaya Krepost'* (Minsk: Belarus', 2005), p. 131.

⁵⁵ Cited by S.S. Smirnov, *Geroi Brestskoy kreposti* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva Oborony Soyuzov SSR, 1959), pp. 152-153. Smirnov met Gavrilov in Krasnodar, where the latter was living after the war and writes how he assisted the fortress defender in his quest to regain his party membership, which was granted on 22 April 1956.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Smirnov's famous book, published in 1957, elevated the defense of the Brest Fortress into a key event of the war, comparable to the more famous acts of resistance at Sevastopol or Stalingrad. The book is brief and reads like an epic novel. There are no footnotes or citations, and dates are offered somewhat rarely. The goal is simple: to elevate the defenders into heroes. A typical example of the hyperbole deployed is the following statement toward the end of the book:

The achievement of the heroes of the Brest Fortress has become famous throughout the world and it will go down as one of the greatest feats of military valour in the history of man.⁵⁷

Smirnov describes in particular the hero figures of the defense: Gavrilov, Fomin, Vasily Bitko, Andrey Kizhevator, and others. He in particular seeks to emphasize the longevity of the resistance. Gavrilov was captured and taken to hospital on 23 July 1941, he writes, and the Germans were so impressed by his bravery that they let him live.⁵⁸ However, he was not the last defender. Resistance ended only when the Germans flooded the cellars.⁵⁹ Smirnov does reveal on the other hand that by 28 June, Fomin had already been captured and shot, i.e. just six days after the invasion of the USSR began.⁶⁰

In Belarus, major changes in the story of Brest Fortress took place two decades after the end of the war, when Brezhnev became General Secretary of the CC CPSU, and shortly afterward, former Partisan leader P.M. Mashe-
rau became the leader of the Communist Party of Belarus. On 8 May 1965, by a decree of the USSR Supreme Soviet, Brest Fortress received the title of „Fortress-Hero,” along with the Order of Lenin and the gold star medal. The status was equal to that of cities designated with the same title. Gavrilov and Kizhevator (posthumously in the latter case) were awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, competitions were held to come up with a design for a monument that would reflect fittingly the events of late June 1941, but a final plan was not approved until 1969, under the supervision of Aleksandr P. Kibal'nikov, People's Artist of the USSR. On 25 September 1971, the ceremonial opening occurred of the Brest Fortress-Hero Memorial Complex, one of the largest and most elaborate memorials of the former Soviet Union and one that has proved particularly difficult to maintain.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Sergei Smirnov, *Heroes of Brest Fortress*, translated by R. Daghish (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957), p. 211. The text is an abbreviated version of the 1959 book cited above.

⁵⁸ According to an account written by Tatyana Shevtsova, Gavrilov was „captured on the 33rd day, wounded and shellshocked. They looked at him in stunned admiration.” RUVR (Voice of Russia), 16 March 2006.

⁵⁹ Smirnov, pp. 173-175.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143. See also Smirnov (1959), pp. 85-86.

⁶¹ Suworov, *Brestskaya Krepost'*, pp. 38-39.

There are several sections of the Memorial, which occupies 16,000 square meters of territory on the grounds of the old fortress (parts of which are now in Terespol, Poland), and effectively relegates the 19th century complex to the status of background buildings. The main entrance is in the shape of a Soviet star. Once through there—it repeatedly broadcasts the speech by Molotov at the outbreak of war on 22 June 1941—one encounters over the bridge the sculpture „Thirst,” a horizontal male figure carrying a helmet and forlornly stretching for water, constructed on a grand scale. By the large ceremonial square stand an obelisk and the Main Monument. The obelisk is fairly typical of the era. It is 104.5 meters high, and made up of 620 tons of material along with 14 tons of titanium. Photographs in the nearby museum show how it was hoisted on 5 July 1971, a process that took over five hours. The main monument is an immense granite block called „Courage,” which required almost 4,000 cubic meters of concrete and was built under the supervision of the Ministry of Industrial Construction. On the reverse of the block are depictions of the resistance at the fortress. At the front is a giant and severe head of a man that appears to scowl toward the ground. The government of Lukashenka ordered a capital repair of the object in 2004 so that it would be in a suitable state for the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the victory in May 2005.

The Brest Hero-Fortress and Lukashenka’s Belarus

The Brest Fortress memorial complex was formerly a Mecca for Communists, leaders of socialist countries, and reportedly even cosmonauts. Yasser Arafat evidently visited the fortress to become acquainted with the methods of Partisan warfare (presumably he was misinformed since the main Partisan sites are further to the north and east) and by 1991, over 19 million visitors had been to the site. How does the story of the defense of the fortress fit into the context of modern-day Belarus? The answer is that the government of Belarus has combined recently two factors: the assertion of a new patriotism that is linked to the modern state; and the Soviet-style commemoration of the war as the key event of the historical past and one that can be incorporated into the framework of the modern identity. The latter issue is quite simple. The enemies of Belarus (and Russia) have always invaded from the West, just as Germans twice occupied these lands in the 20th century, so also (President Alyaksandr Lukashenka claims) NATO threatens to do the same in the 21st. The Brest Hero Fortress stands as a reminder of how determinedly a small state like Belarus will resist future invaders. It also symbolizes past friendship with Russia, thus implying that Russians likewise would once again stand together with their Belarusian brothers against hostile intruders from the West.

The former issue is more difficult to explain. Under Lukashenka the Bela-

rusian government has, somewhat paradoxically, made a clear distinction between Belarus and Russia. As with the Khatyn complex and, to a lesser extent, the Liniya Stalina, the Brest Hero-Fortress stands as a symbol of modern-day Belarus. The wall writings that were transported to Moscow's Museum of the Great Patriotic War are also depicted on the walls of the central metro station (Kastrichnitskaya) in the city of Minsk. The capital itself has seen a new monument erected to Partisan heroes in the southern district of the city. The war is not a distant issue to the current government, and patriotic movements together with veterans are encouraged among Belarusian youth. The defense at Brest also symbolizes a commitment to the current borders (essentially acquired as a result of the Nazi-Soviet Pact) and to the extremities of the country, i.e. the Western border. Logically, the key event to commemorate might be Operation Bagration, the massive campaign that saw the destruction of the German Army Group Center on the territory of Belarus. But Bagration extended beyond Belarus and even outside the borders of the Soviet Union. The commanders, particularly K.K. Rokossovsky who led Operation Bagration, had little association with Belarusian lands.

As president, Lukashenka identifies closely with wartime events in Belarus. The website of the United Civic Party went so far as to allege that he shed tears for the loss of his own father during the war years, but that comment might have been concocted for amusement.⁶² Certainly he is a regular visitor at the site. In addition, his government has taken steps to repair crumbling memorials and to build new complexes in various parts of the country. There is no attempt here to make heroes of exclusively ethnic Belarusian figures; the essential factor is that the events in question occurred on the territory and within the present borders of the Republic of Belarus. The monument to K. Zaslonov at the railway station in Orsha, for example, is dedicated to a Russian who worked in Belarus.⁶³ Thus the patriotic stance is nationalistic but non-ethnic: the president is a Russian speaker who nonetheless can present himself as a patriotic Belarusian. Even in March 2009 he was referring to the opposition of the United Democratic Forces in Stalinist rhetoric as „enemies of the people.”⁶⁴ In the past he has used similar expressions about speakers of the Belarusian language. On the other hand, historians in Belarus today do not circumvent the harshness of Soviet rule in the 1930s or in Western Belarus after the annexation. There appears to be more emphasis than hitherto on the indignities suffered by the Belarusians under Moscow's control.⁶⁵

⁶² It is cited in Vladimir Podgol, *Narodnyy Televizor: potseluy prezidenta v raznye mesta* (Minsk: F. Skaryna, 2008), p. 79.

⁶³ H.P. Pashkou, et al, *Pamyats' Belarusi* (Minsk: Belaruskaya entsyklopedyya, 2005), p. 153.

⁶⁴ Cited in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya (Belarus' Segodnya)*, 18 March 2009, p. 1.

⁶⁵ See, for example, A.M. Suvorov, *Brest: Putechestvie po gorodu* (Brest 2008), p. 21.

Finally, it is perhaps self-evident but should still be stated that like other portrayals of the past, the story of the defense of the Brest Hero-Fortress combines fact and myth effectively to create first a Soviet but ultimately a predominantly Belarusian legend. The war on the borderlands was a disastrous affair for the USSR with few redeeming events. The resistance of a small garrison for about a week was an exception, but hardly affected the course of the war; the fact that a few soldiers remained in the fortress for over a month does not detract from the key issue: that the garrison had surrendered and the Germans could commit their forces further to the east. Perhaps that is why more emphasis is placed on figures like Gavrilov than on early casualties like Fomin, who was the real leader of the resistance.⁶⁶ Gavrilov remained alive, thus giving weight to the legend that the fortress fought on long after the German army had moved on to other battles. Fomin, on the other hand, who clearly gave the orders, was the NKVD man and thus linked to the repressions in Western Belarus noted above. Maintenance of the complex is expensive and time consuming, but the Lukashenka regime has staked its existence on its symbolic links to the past, whatever the inaccuracies and paradoxes entailed in adhering to a Brezhnev-era memorial and a Soviet legend.

Streszczenie

Autorzy w artykule „Wojna i pamięć na Białorusi: aneksja na zachodnim pograniczu i mit Twierdzy Brzeskiej 1939-1941” analizują powstanie mitu obrony twierdzy brzeskiej przez oddziały NKWD w czerwcu 1941 roku i jego wykorzystanie do budowy sowieckiej tradycji na Białorusi. Chociaż obrona twierdzy prowadzona przez małą grupę żołnierzy sowieckich nie zmieniła biegu wojny, to wydarzenie to urosło do rangi symbolu heroicznych walk sowiecko-niemieckich wiążąc Brześć i zachodnią Białoruś z sowiecką tradycją historyczną oraz podkreślając związki Białorusi ze Związkiem Radzieckim i Rosją. Dla Aleksandra Łukaszenki symbol Twierdzy Brzeskiej stał się jednym z ważnych elementów budowania na Białorusi sowieckiej pamięci historycznej. W czerwcu 2001 roku prezydent Białorusi gościł w kompleksie brzeskim patriarchę Rosyjskiej Cerkwi Prawosławnej Aleksego II, który 24 czerwca konsekrował cerkiew św. Mikołaja. Następnego lata wraz z byłym prezydentem Borysem Jelcynem obchodził na terenie Twierdzy Brzeskiej 61. rocznicę napaści Niemiec na Związek Sowiecki. 22 czerwca 2008 roku Aleksander Łukaszenko spotkał się na terenie brzeskiego kompleksu muzealnego z prezydentem Rosji Dymitrem Miedwiediewem. Twierdza Brzeska uznana została przez obie strony za symbol kooperacji dwóch państw przedtem związanych granicami Związku Radzieckiego, a teraz podejmujących działania w celu opracowania konstytucji państwowej Związku Rosji i Białorusi.

⁶⁶ See, for example, A.A. Kovalenya, et al, *Velikaya otechestvennaya vojna sovetskogo naroda: spravochnik* (Minsk: Belarusian State University, 2007), in which Gavrilov is cited as a key figure in the war whereas Fomin is not mentioned. According to reports, however, it was Fomin who organized and led the resistance in the central area of the fort.

Змест

Аўтары ў артыкуле „Вайна і памяць на Беларусі: анексія на заходнім паграніччы і міф Брэсцкай крэпасці 1939-1941” аналізуюць узнікненне міфа абароны Брэсцкай крэпасці атрадамі НКВД у чэрвені 1941 г. і яго выкарыстанне для пашырэння савецкай традыцыі на Беларусі. Хаця абарона крэпасці малой групай савецкіх салдат не змяніла ходу вайны, то гэтае здарэнне вырасла да рангу сімвала гераічных савецка-нямецкіх змаганняў, далучаючы Брэст і заходнюю Беларусь да савецкай гістарычнай традыцыі і падкрэсліваючы сувязі Беларусі з Савецкім Саюзам і Расіяй. Для Аляксандра Лукашэнкі сімвал Брэсцкай крэпасці стаў адным з важных элементаў пашырэння на Беларусі савецкай гістарычнай памяці. У чэрвені 2001 г. прэзідэнт Беларусі гасцяваў у музейным комплексе патрыярха Рускай Праваслаўнай Царквы Аляксея II, які 24 чэрвеня пасвяціў царкву св. Мікалая. Летам наступнага года разам з былым прэзідэнтам Расіі Барысам Ельцыным адзначыў у Брэсцкай крэпасці 61 гадавіну нямецкай агрэсіі на Савецкі Саюз. 22 чэрвеня 2008 г. Аляксандр Лукашэнка сустрэўся на тэрыторыі брэсцкага музейнага комплексу з прэзідэнтам Расіі Дзмітрыем Мядзведзевым. Брэсцкая крэпасць была абодвума бакамі прызнана сімвалам кааперацыі дзвюх дзяржаў, раней аб'яднаных межамі Савецкага Саюза, а цяпер узнікаючымі дзеянні па распрацоўцы дзяржаўнай канстытуцыі Саюза Беларусі і Расіі.

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