

# **Karl Popper and Conspiracy Theories in Polish Political Thought**

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**Abstract:** Over the last century, Polish national discourse and political culture have produced an uncommonly high incidence of conspiracy theories. A similar tendency can be shown to occur among expatriates, even those one or two generations removed from the home land. Two hundred fifty years of partitions between hostile neighbors resulting in deprivation of a national identity, along with systematic oppression by the occupants' secret police, and a tradition of uprisings and mass emigration recurring generation after generation account for some of the propensity for conspiracy theories. Karl Raimund Popper recognized conspiracy theories as psychologically anomalous phenomena based on flawed cognitive patterns and misguided axiomatic beliefs that the more consequential an event, the less likely it is to be random or unintended. This paper examines Polish evidence of Popper's diagnosis of a widespread aversion to attributing significant events to good or bad luck and of an assumption of an underlying intentional order. Many conspiracy theories go wrong not by mistakenly assuming intentional actors but their identity, motives, or degree of coordination. The common denominator of all conspiracy theories is a misjudgment of the forces of randomness, invisible hand mechanisms, or accidentally disproportionate consequences of relatively minor causes and/or overestimation of the possibility of maintaining control and secrecy of conspiracies in open societies. While not a universal panacea, simple interest analysis can dispel the notion of conspiracy but it can also form part of the misleading theory itself.

**Keywords:** Poland, Karl Popper, Conspiracy Theories, Politics, Rhetoric and Communication, Discourse.

## **Polish fascination with tragic heroism and victimhood**

Although much of it seems akin to some of the more bizarre conspiracy theories surrounding 9/11, Western media observed with growing skepticism the proliferation and endurance of wild rumors and speculation surrounding the fatal crash of Polish Air Force One near Smolensk airport in Russia.<sup>1</sup> On board were president Lech Kaczyński with his wife and entourage, including the chiefs of staff of all Polish armed services. Rumors of foreign conspiracies have traditionally surrounded predicaments and death of Polish public figures before, such as the fatal crash of Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski off Gibraltar in World War II, and later the bizarre narratives surrounding Simon Wiesenthal and Roman Polański, to mention just a few. In part, this has to do with the emergence of predictably unruly free and unrestrained media reporting post-1989. But the conspiracy theories with which Polish national life is so rife are by no means restricted to commercial motives of news organizations, even though they may draw increased attention to the conjecture and stoke the fires.

Conspiracy theories are, in fact, a rather typical phenomenon that regularly accompanies death or major legal troubles of celebrities all over Eastern Europe. In many cases, they are further inflamed by media seeking to exploit national grief in a voyeuristic manner. But they also draw on an unusually rich legacy of a millennium of mutual resentment. In this region people are only too aware of the tragic history of competing ‘just claims,’ past atrocities, and other common characteristics of neighborly relations as they exist almost everywhere in Europe and indeed across the world. But one ingredient makes for a particularly potent paranoid mixture here: Poland’s tortured history of aggressions by and partitions between its predator neighbors Prussia, Russia, and Austria. Famously known as the “Alliance of the Three Black Eagles,”<sup>2</sup> Prussia, Russia, and Austria used the territory of Poland for the sake of maintaining a balance of power between them<sup>3</sup> – a balance that has, even in the pre-nuclear age, never really existed, unless one is prepared to accept the mere absence of war as convincing evidence of balance and peace (Curtis 1992).

### **Popper’s Empirical Realism**

Widespread popularity of conspiracy theories in mass culture<sup>4</sup> may be due, at least in part, to the continued and pervasive influence of Marxist-inspired critical theory since the 1970s (Latour 2004). Karl Popper argued that totalitarianism itself was founded on “conspiracy theories” that drew on imaginary plots driven by paranoid scenarios predicated upon tribalism, chauvinism, or racism. Many social and economic effects occur as aggregate results of acts or omissions of a multitude of individuals, few or none of whom actually intended to cause this effect. In part as a result of the Judeo-Christian cultural and philosophical heritage that includes teachings about the freedom of the human will, it is almost inevitable for people to think that significant effects are caused by intentional action, so the first and most obvious question needs to be “*cui bono?*” (Popper 2006). Significantly, though, Popper did not imply that the events conjectured in conspiracies never actually happen (Popper 1963). Rather, he identified them as typical social phenomena. Yet, despite their occurrence, he finds conspiracy theories routinely disproved by empirical evidence showing that very few of these conspiracies are ultimately successful: “Conspirators rarely consummate their conspiracy.” And so the matter remains an epistemological quandary (Hardin 2002:3, 16). Or one might say that the rich Polish legacy of remarkably imaginative conspiracy theories would appear to turn into a verification of Popper’s theory that plainly discounts the genre by scientific means of logic, sociology and organizational behavior (Popper 1999). Christopher Hitchens has called conspiracy theories the ‘exhaust fumes of democracy,’ the consequence of a large amount of information percolating aimlessly among a large number of people (Hitchens 2001:83). Claire Birchall refers to conspiracy theories even as a form of popular knowledge, in addition to more ‘legitimate’ forms of knowledge (Birchall 2006). Although deficient, the subtle relationship between legitimate and illegitimate or contaminated forms of knowledge is far closer than common dismissals of conspiracy theories would lead one to believe. This would be indisputable once we afford lesser or lower

connotations to the term knowledge than the certitudes it implies – a status that may be closer to the reality of the vast majority of individuals who seldom dedicate time and material resources to fact checking or review of their assumptions concerning methodology and interpretation of data. Absent such sobering routines, paranoid tendencies remain unchecked. In the words of Daniel Pipes (2004:13):

Fears of a petty conspiracy – a political rival or business competitor plotting to do you harm – are as old as the human psyche. But fears of a grand conspiracy – that the Illuminati or Jews plan to take over the world – go back only 900 years and have been operational for just two centuries, since the French Revolution. Conspiracy theories grew in importance from then until World War II, when two arch-conspiracy theorists, Hitler and Stalin, faced off against each other, causing the greatest blood-letting in human history. This hideous spectacle sobered Americans, who in subsequent decades relegated conspiracy theories to the fringe....

### **Poland's national predilection for history's mysteries and conspiracy theories**

On the occasion of the successful Polish presidency of the European Union,<sup>5</sup> the time seems ripe for reviewing causes, purposes, and consequences of the country's national obsession with the role of victim, and the beneficiaries of this pathology. At various times, 'the' Russians, Germans, Jews, Americans, Freemasons, Bilderbergers and Illuminati could all be virtually certain to rank prominently among the usual suspects (Thompson 2010). This never required a coherent theory as to motive or the difficult economics and logistics of maintaining a functioning conspiracy in the real world. After all, strong and persistent countervailing forces are inimical to conspiracies: investigative journalism and the intelligence services of parties interested in potentially exploiting such news are just the most obvious. The popularity of conspiracy theories is easy enough to recognize in an age of sound bites barely ever reflected upon, where the story itself is and remains the entire message, and often a key to celebrity positioning: these theories are actually comforting because they are models of radical simplicity. Fears, rumors and speculation generally are accepted and used to trump facts, while inconvenient evidence is ignored. It is instructive to view our reactions to various conspiratorial rumors through the lens of teleological analysis: who stood to benefit from the event and/or the rumor, and in what fashion – and is this benefit a consequence intended by causation or is it nonetheless a product of inadvertence or stochastic factors? For therein often lies the crux.

### **The Smolensk incident viewed through Popper's lens**

President Lech Kaczyński perished on April 10, 2010 near Smolensk airport in Russia en route to a state memorial for the victims of Stalin's and Beria's 1940 massacre of the Polish

military elite in the Katyń forest.<sup>6</sup> A number of stark inconsistencies appeared early on in public accounts of the Russian crash investigation, some of which seemed significant up to a point. But none of them affected the ultimate conclusion of grave pilot errors of judgment, whether or not they had been committed accidentally or at the insistence of senior politicians or military commanders among the passengers (New York Times 2011). But most importantly, no rational benefit or motive for the alleged Russian conspiracy could ever be credibly articulated, much less persuasively established, save perhaps random malice, although a Soviet-style cover-up of contributory negligence affecting the accident cannot be ruled out from the evidence that is now in the public domain.<sup>7</sup> Still, conspiracy theories never died and later received a powerful boost by the release of Wikileaks material in March 2012 (TheNews.pl 2012). There are distinct parallels here to the equally diehard 9/11 Truth Movement, another effort to irrationally allocate individual responsibility for negative events. In 2010, democratic Russia had no discernible interest in a Poland weakened by what would all too predictably be interpreted as a cynical replay of 1940, a second decapitation of Polish leadership while headed for Katyń, the memorial of the first such event. Neither Kaczyński nor his brother Jarosław – Prime Minister before Donald Tusk – nor his Law and Justice Party were opposing or significantly endangering major Russian interests - evidence the fact that agreements with the U.S. on a missile shield had been concluded successfully well before the accident and were not pending at the time of its occurrence (AFP 2008). In fact, by 2010, Kaczyński's political significance had been reduced largely to vetoing laws in accordance with his fundamentalist beliefs and to blocking personnel appointments.<sup>8</sup> Poland was and is a stable major member of the European Union and thus more difficult to subject to tactical manipulation than ever in its history.

### **The convenient death of an inconvenient hero: General Władysław Sikorski**

This situation is, of course, a far cry from another catastrophic precedent shrouded in undying rumors of conspiracy: on July 4, 1943 the prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile, Władysław Eugeniusz Sikorski,<sup>9</sup> perished in a plane crash 16 seconds after taking off from Gibraltar Airport, along with his daughter, his Chief of Staff and seven others. Only his Czech pilot survived (Mac 2000). Shortly beforehand, Sikorski had severely antagonized Stalin by refuting the Soviet position that the Katyń murders, first publicized by Goebbels, had been committed by the Germans, and had requested an investigation by the International Red Cross (Piekalkiewicz 1988).<sup>10</sup> Sikorski, a former defense minister, highly decorated war hero and champion of Polish independence, carried considerable respect and weight among the Western allies and was a serious obstacle to the international acceptance of Stalin's territorial aspirations.<sup>11</sup> It took Churchill and Roosevelt only four months after Sikorski's plane crash to cede to Stalin at Teheran<sup>12</sup> all of Poland east of the Curzon Line,<sup>13</sup> amounting to more than one-third of her territory since the Middle Ages (Arte 2011).

In Sikorski's case, the question "cui bono?" supports conspiracy theories with ease, as does the fact that five of the victims' bodies were never found (including Sikorski's daughter

Zofia Leśniowska); several other bodies were never positively identified; Sikorski's plane had been parked unguarded at Gibraltar airport next to the aircraft of Soviet ambassador to London Ivan Maisky; about a dozen unidentified Soviet officers and soldiers had stayed at the same Governor's palace where Sikorski had spent his last days (Kombatant 2003); and the majority of British intelligence documents on the incident have remained classified despite close ties between the countries and despite the fact that no legitimate public interest in continued secrecy would appear to exist in face of persistent public pressure to disclose. Kim Philby, British-Russian double agent of 1940s infamy, was head of British counterintelligence for the Iberian Peninsula at the time of the Sikorski accident and it is well established that he did have contacts and expertise useful in sabotage and diversion (Mac 2000).

A ceaseless stream of rumors has since implied German, Soviet, Western, and even competing Polish interests to bear responsibility for Sikorski's death. The Sikorski 'accident' demonstrably inaugurated an era of almost two decades of systematic extermination of non-communist Polish military resistance figures by the Soviet regime and its post-war Polish lieutenants. Slandorous rumors equally sought to justify the murder by the Soviet NKVD of military-patriotic heroes Witold Pilecki – the man who had alerted the Western powers to the existence of Auschwitz by having himself incarcerated there and later escaping without help upon completion of his mission (Pilecki 2012:460-466)<sup>14</sup> – or Emil August Fieldorf, deputy commander-in-chief of the Polish Home Army (Kryska-Karski and Żurkowski 1991:91), both loyal to the non-communist Polish government-in-exile, along with most of their fellow Home Army officers raising the number of executed victims into the thousands (The Doomed Soldiers N.d.). While British files remain classified for reasons not satisfactorily explained, it is possible that review by historians at a later date will indeed confirm 'Churchill's betrayal of Poland.' That is because allied interest in continuation of wartime cooperation with Stalin was a vital and geostrategic governmental and military necessity they could ill afford to sacrifice for any reason, even for establishing the truth about the murder of 22,000 innocent victims of the Katyń genocide or for shifting the Polish eastern border 300 miles westward to the Curzon line, resulting in effect in yet another partition of the country. And still, it would be remiss even in Sikorski's case to overlook the likelihood of a technical defect without political causation. It is, however, by the very same governmental interest analysis that Russian guilt in the Smolensk disaster must be denied since no persuasive answer to "cui bono?" as to motive is conceivable there.

### **The Kreisky-Wiesenthal Affair**

In another curiously bizarre conspiracy theory, Polish-born Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal found himself accused by Jewish-born Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky of having collaborated with Nazi Gestapo to engineer his own survival in at least four concentration and death camps (Auschwitz, Gross-Rosen, Buchenwald and Mauthausen) (Böhler 1996:510; Lingens 2009; Rathkolb 2005).<sup>15</sup> Kreisky, a life-long agnostic socialist hailing from a wealthy

assimilated merchant family of Polish extraction, made these allegations based on Czech and Polish communist intelligence documents. The documents later proved to be forgeries,<sup>16</sup> and Kreisky was convicted of libel in the Austrian courts (notably while holding office as the country's prime minister) and ordered to pay what then amounted to a substantial fine.<sup>17</sup> A vitriolic and highly public campaign between two of the world's best-known Jews of Polish descent of their day was launched ostensibly because Wiesenthal had exposed the Nazi past of several members of Kreisky's cabinet and of the leader of the right-wing Freedom Party to whose parliamentary acquiescence Kreisky had owed his first socialist-only government (van Amerongen 1977).<sup>18</sup> This parliamentary support had created an historic opportunity. Once Austria's first socialist-led minority government in history was formed under Kreisky's control, he parlayed it into a highly successful 13-year era of successive socialist-only governments under his larger-than-life leadership.

But as a conspiracy theorist, Kreisky failed dismally. One reason was that he misjudged probability, namely the possibility of Wiesenthal having, in fact, survived four concentration camps without German connivance in exchange for services as an informer. On the other hand, Kreisky miscalculated the credibility to the Austrian public of his *de facto* coalition partner Friedrich Peter (Wodak *et al* 1990). This chairman of the notorious Freedom Party had served during World War II, as he admitted, in an SS unit whose sole *raison d'être* had been weekly executions of civilians.<sup>19</sup> Peter claimed that he neither participated nor even knew of such atrocities. And yet he was awarded the Iron Cross (Second Class) as one of only 31 members so honored in his unit of 5,000, the 1. SS Infantry Brigade, and one of only 28 volunteers for a leadership training program there.<sup>20</sup> So it is safe to conclude that conspiracy theories are fundamentally based on either ignorance of, or willful blindness toward, basic probability and statistics, but also of elementary mechanisms of human nature, group psychology, organizational behavior, and government reality. Most importantly, though, conspiracy theories require an underestimation of the frequency and normalcy of unintended or disproportional consequences of (at least in the public awareness) small or relatively insignificant causes.

### **The Polański Affair**

A more recent memorable example is Roman Polański, born Rajmund Roman Liebling, one of the most highly decorated living international film directors, a Polish Holocaust survivor whose mother had perished at Auschwitz, and whose wife Sharon Tate had been brutally murdered by the Manson Family (Leaming 1981). In 1977, Polanski had accepted a guilty plea to Unlawful Sexual Intercourse with a Minor to dispose of charges of sexual assault and rape of a 13-year-old girl. It was a deal upon which a California judge had reneged, purportedly in search of publicity for himself. When he saw a much more severe prison sentence looming than what had been agreed, Polański fled to France (Cieply 2009a; Los Angeles Times 2009). At the request of the U.S. Government made some three decades later,<sup>21</sup> Switzerland arrested Polański, then age 76, on September 26, 2009. He was jailed for two months, then released on CHF 4.5

million bail,<sup>22</sup> and spent seven months under house arrest<sup>23</sup> pending appeals on which he prevailed at the Swiss Tribunal Pénal Fédéral (Le Temps 2010). Following close review, the Swiss Government rejected the U.S. extradition request on July 12, 2010 and unconditionally released Polański, a Polish and French citizen (The Federal Authorities of the Swiss Confederation 2010). In a twist bizarrely reminiscent of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, all six of the original charges remain pending against him in the U.S. as Polański, having left the jurisdiction, was deemed a fugitive from justice for the last 33 years.

Most U.S. filmmakers<sup>24</sup> and just about all Polish film directors and most public figures railed against the Swiss for arresting Polański, conveniently ignoring the fact that, even as a member of the European Union, Poland has among the harshest penal statutes against pedophilia anywhere (Rolski 2009). Prime Minister Tusk had to remind the nation that this was “a moral and legal matter, not one of any national or political consequence” (Rolski 2009). Former president Wałęsa opined that Polański “had already repented for the sins of his youth” (Rolski 2009) while sitting ultraconservative president Kaczyński, later the crash victim at Smolensk, managed to straddle both positions: “Polański is morally wrong. But much time has passed...” (Rolski 2009). Polish public opinion quickly concluded that the U.S. Department of Justice was holding the New York banking licenses of UBS and Credit Suisse ransom to compel the Helvetic gnomes, who had been compromised by a political witch hunt in the U.S. for aiding and abetting tax fraud since 2008 (Costello 2008), to carry out an unlawful arrest of an innocent artist of global renown. The fact is, and the course of events showed, that Switzerland respected De Gaulle's May 1968 dictum about Sartre made to Christian Fouchet, his own minister of the interior. In reference to yet another fugitive from justice whom Geneva had hosted some 200 years earlier, the father of the Fifth Republic tersely remarked: “*on n'arrête pas Voltaire*” (Lachat 2009).

Much as Polański may not have been Voltaire's peer and the Polański affair may have featured a measure of reprehensible or objectionable conduct by either party, conspiracy was not involved. But career ambitions only too familiar in a media-driven society were: the judge originally having jurisdiction over Polański's 1977 case had sought some personal publicity exposure that exceeded by far, as is not uncommon for celebrity trials in Los Angeles County, the measure of publicity inherent in a public trial (Finke 2008). Similarly, 32 years later it was a district attorney with ambitions to run for attorney general who stumbled upon jurisdiction over Polański's file and thought he would be able to extract some visibility for himself by aggressively going after a celebrity ‘statutory rapist’ who, not quite unexpectedly, happened to be a fugitive from justice run amok (Cieply 2009b). The resulting media circus would have been a foregone conclusion had extradition been granted.

Because conspiracy theories, as they deviate from probability and commonly accepted logic, are inherently sensationalist, they thrive on media attention. And media must pursue sensationalism as a matter of competitive commercial necessity, whatever the factual truth of their reporting – within limits drawn by the editorial policies of each individual media outfit. But just like even conservative investors subject to metrics find it irresistibly difficult to stay away

from bubble investing, reputable media outfits cannot economically afford to cede the attention gleaned from sensationalism to their tabloid competitors entirely. Nor, as the Polish example showed, can democratically elected politicians.

### **A governmental interest analysis of the Smolensk disaster**

As an empiricist, Sir Karl Raimund Popper seems to have been right again: plausible explanations tend to be simple and quite often banal, while conspiracy theories overlook the pervasive unintended consequences of political and social action, assuming that all consequences must have been intended by someone (Popper 1990; Popper 1963). What may be the extent of Russian contributory influences on the Smolensk disaster carries considerable plausibility in view of a March 2012 disclosure by Wikileaks (Grier 2012). A former Russian foreign intelligence officer code-named “Comrade J” (believed to have been Sergei Tretyakov who had defected to the U.S. in 2000)<sup>25</sup> opined to Stratfor, a private company sometimes described as a ‘shadow CIA’:<sup>26</sup> “The Russians purposefully denied the aircraft the ability to land knowing that the Polish President would either force the pilot to land [...] or the plane would return and not land at the location.” Another Stratfor operative, Marko Papic, is quoted in the disclosed communication as saying: “This was actually one of the theories that one of my contacts also gave me. But the intention was not to kill Kaczynski [sic] just make his life difficult by forcing him to land in Minsk and therefore miss the Katyn Massacre ceremonies set to begin in an hour from landing. But instead, the pilots tried to land anyways and crashed the flight” (TheNews.pl 2012). That theory is nothing short of plausible, and it is fully covered by Popper’s argument that the appeal of conspiracy theories stems on the one hand from their attribution to intentional action of events that are otherwise inexplicable or, in most cases, do not offer traction or attention as a conspiracy theory would, and on the other hand from reluctance to accept the possibility that significant adverse consequences may be caused by an invisible hand - of market forces, individual or group psychology, evolutionary selection, or physical or chemical randomness.

President Lech Kaczyński, whose relations with the Kremlin had been tense ever since the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 when he had given strong support to the Georgian government, had not been invited by then Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to the official Katyń Memorial ceremony. Putin had chosen instead to invite his “peer” who was conveniently Kaczyński’s political opponent, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Kaczyński then had simply decided to organize his own Katyń Memorial service three days after the official event attended by Tusk and Putin (TheNews.pl 2012). It is fair to assume that the Russian side was less than enthusiastic about Kaczyński’s visit and may well have seen no need to go out of its way to avoid inconveniencing him by forcing him to land at Minsk and inevitably miss the scheduled memorial service at Katyń. But even in Russia, weather conditions are not known to be made by the government and leaving someone no rational choice but to miss an event is not to endanger his life – along with the lives of many others.

Deliberate obstructionism toward a strong-headed political opponent is certainly not unheard of in the history of diplomatic relations, especially coming from a seasoned chess player like Putin. But it does not support a conjecture of murder conspiracy. Even if it contained some *dolus eventualis*<sup>27</sup> – exploiting Kaczyński’s known penchant to force his will on those under his command (and certainly on his pilot, as he had done in Georgia the year before) – the proximate causation of the accident was pilot error, pure and simple. It cannot matter whether such pilot error had been caused by flawed judgment or by actual or anticipated threats to his career, or whether such threats by Kaczynski may somehow be deemed provoked by Russian air traffic controllers acting as instrumentalities of Russian government agencies.

But as is common in the case of such intense reactions, the true reason for them was that the air crash had just been the tip of a larger iceberg, the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. Polish sensitivities were elevated and tense with regard to Russia already prior to the Smolensk accident because the Russian government did not appear to have resigned itself to the loss of its former quasi-colony, and Russian intelligence and influence operations in Poland have continued almost unabated since 1989. In 1996, Polish Prime Minister Józef Oleksy had been forced to step down after serving only one year of his term when his relationship with Russian SVR operative Vladimir Alganov was discovered (The Independent 1996). The same agent Alganov had been recorded 2004 by Polish counterintelligence making reference to bribery of leading Polish politicians on behalf of Gazprom (Fleishman 2004). It did not help matters that Russia as late as 2009 conducted military drills of an offensive nature directed at Poland, including the use of nuclear weapons and the suppression of an anticipated insurgency by the Polish minority in Belarus (Osborne 2011), one of the major beneficiaries of Stalin’s territorial gains up to the Curzon line conceded by Churchill and Roosevelt at Yalta, Teheran and Potsdam.<sup>28</sup> As a consequence, Poland is aware that it is an early stage target of a sophisticated program of subversion, destabilization, and disinformation spearheaded by the Russian special services supported by a strategy drawing on Russia's gas, oil, and natural resources.<sup>29</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It was exactly Popper’s point that the existence of an alleged conspiracy, even the mere suspicion of one, explains nothing at all: what requires a close look instead is how this or that conspiracy succeeded, given that most fail (Popper 1945). And, as the Polish evidence has showed, conspiracies can and do have a plurality of catalysts, but in most cases, they can be traced to “crippled epistemology”: adherents know very little, and what they know is wrong or seriously incomplete, or else they misjudge or miscalculate functions of probability and workings of social systems. They typically thrive on rumors and speculation indifferent to factual analysis or verification, be it because of a lack of resources, of the necessary theoretical or practical skills to interpret data, or simply because more drama and collateral benefit can be derived from an allegation of a “conspiracy.” It can also not be overlooked that the circumstances as implied or expressed in any conspiracy theory tend to characterize and cast the

target of it as a victim, something that may or may not contain a measure of factual accuracy. Quite the contrary, propagation of conspiracy theories is in many if not most cases a classical ‘catch the thief’ strategy more often reflective of *mens rea* than of innocent victimization. That was certainly true in the case of the Smolensk accident where the Kaczyński brothers’ flagging Law and Justice Party was trying to usurp the fatal tragedy for political gain,<sup>30</sup> or rather to slow down its already ongoing downward spiral. It must also be said that post-communist Eastern Europe as a whole has been substantially more vulnerable to sensationalist and predatory media than traditionally democratic Western societies. It is remarkable, though, to track through history just how pervasive conspiracy theories are and have been in the Polish nation for a very long time. The collective experience of partitioning and repression suffered at the hands of others may be partially to blame, but this conjecture is not credible as an explanation overall. Only a profound healing of Polish national sentiment and self-esteem in a more integrated European Union can ultimately cure its reflexive presumption that “the Pole is always the victim” – because of his fidelity, purity, faith, naïvity or guilelessness – a White Eagle all alone in a fundamentally dark and evil world. The truth is, there are entirely too many unintended outcomes of intentional action aimed at the downfall of a very public figure not to rethink contemporary conspiracy theories as anything but facile and opportunistic bait. This is especially so in light of Poland’s post-1989 mooring as a prosperous and open, pluralistic and increasingly secular society with a major role to play in Europe. None of that, of course, may be relied upon to have permanently removed or even reduced its geographical risk.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., The Week. 2010. "Video of Russians 'shooting Polish air crash survivors.'" 14 May 2010. <http://www.theweek.co.uk/arts-life/14629/video-russians-%E2%80%98shooting-polish-air-crash-survivors%E2%80%99>, accessed 2 September 2012; Connolly, Kate. 2010. "Language barrier and a president determined to land – theories swirl over Polish air disaster. Pilots' lack of Russian led to tragedy says controller as technical problems with plane ruled out." The Guardian, 12 April 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/apr/12/language-president-theories-polish-air-disaster>, accessed 2 September 2012; Daily Mail. 2010. "Russia engineered air crash that killed President Kaczynski,' claims Polish MP." 13 April 2010. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1265482/Leck-Kaczynski-Russia-engineered-plane-crash-claims-Polish-MP.html>, accessed 2 September 2012; Daily Mail. 2010. "Footage of Polish air crash 'shows Russians executing survivors'... but is it a vile propaganda stunt?" 15 May 2010. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1278175/Footage-Polish-air-crash-emerges-claiming-Russian-speaking-men-shooting-survivors.html>, accessed 2 September 2012; ABC News. 2010. "Polish President's Plane Crash Was Assassination, His Brother Says." 29 March 2012. <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/03/polish-presidents-plane-crash-was-assassination-his-brother-says/>, accessed 2 September 2012; The Economist. 2011. "Poland and the Smolensk Crash: Landing in Fog." 29 July 2011. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2011/07/poland-and-smolensk-crash>, accessed 2 September 2012; Stack, Megan K. 2010. "For Poland, Plane Crash Rips Open Old Wounds." 11 April 2010. <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/11/world/la-fg-polish-president-crash11-2010apr11>, accessed 2 September 2012; Day, Matthew. 2010. "Polish Plane Crash: Investigators Rule Out Technical Fault." *The Telegraph*, 11 April 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/poland/7579076/Polish-plane-crash-investigators-rule-out-technical-fault.html>, accessed 2 September 2012; Scislowska, Monika and Vanessa Gera. 2012. "2010 Poland President Plane Crash Victim's Remains Exhumed." *Huffington Post*, 23 March 2012. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/23/2010-plane-crash-remains-exhumed\\_n\\_1376184.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/23/2010-plane-crash-remains-exhumed_n_1376184.html), accessed 2 September 2012.

<sup>2</sup> The secret Treaty of Berlin (signed between Russia and Austria on 13 September 1732 and joined by Prussia on 13 December 1732, all of whom carried a black eagle in their coat of arms, as opposed to the Polish white eagle). (Cierlińska 1982:73)

<sup>3</sup> A traditional interest of shifting alliance between European powers to preclude any one of them from establishing dominance. (Sheehan 1986). Cf. also (Luard 1992) and (Schroeder 1994)

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g. the almost encyclopedic overview of conspiracy theories of the last century given by lifelong conspiracy theorist Cooper (1991). Cooper was killed resisting arrest for income tax evasion in 2001. No matter - the torch was carried on by others. Cf. Fassin (2011).

<sup>5</sup> July-December 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Victims were 22,000 Polish military personnel with POW status - nearly half the Polish officer corps - at Katyń forest near Smoleńsk and elsewhere, including 1 admiral, 2 generals, 24

colonels, 79 lieutenant colonels, 258 majors, 654 captains, 17 naval captains, over 200 pilots, 300 physicians, 3,420 NCOs, 85 privates, 7 chaplains, 3 landowners, 1 prince, 43 officials, 31 refugees, 20 university professors, several hundred lawyers, engineers, and teachers, and over 100 writers and journalists. Most had been captured in a military capacity (Kuźniar-Plota 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Including the accident investigation report of the binational commission, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20110112/162114546.html> and the Polish dissenting response <http://home.comcast.net/~fotoszop/ks/Smolensk%20Crash%20Status%20Report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Reuters reported, “President Kaczynski's dislike of communism and distrust of Russia led him to block the appointment of any ambassadors who had studied in the Soviet Union, the cables said.” (Reuters 2011)

<sup>9</sup> No relation to the present foreign minister of Poland, Radosław Sikorski.

<sup>10</sup> It was in the British interest to maintain, at almost all cost, the British-Soviet wartime alliance that was threatened by Sikorski's intention to publish the results of the Katyń investigation.

<sup>11</sup> The Polish-Soviet crisis over Katyń and Stalin's western territorial ambitions endangered the vitally necessary continued military cooperation between the western Allies and the Soviet Union at a time when Poland's importance to the western Allies, essential in the first years of the war, was beginning to fade with the entry into the war of the Soviet Union and the United States.

<sup>12</sup> Poland or Sikorski's successor Stanisław Mikołajczyk were not even represented at the Teheran, Yalta or Potsdam conferences.

<sup>13</sup> Named after the British Foreign Secretary George Nathaniel Curzon, 1<sup>st</sup> Marquess Curzon of Kedleston who had been Viceroy and Governor-General of India, this border was designed as a demarcation line by the Supreme Allied Council first in 1919 between the newly established Second Polish Republic and the Soviet Union. It was supposed to divide areas populated by a Polish majority from areas where Poles were a minority. Both Poland and the Soviets disregarded the line whenever the military situation favored them. It had no role in the Treaty of Riga establishing the Polish-Soviet border in 1921 until it was unearthed by Stalin as a justification in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and subsequently in negotiations with the Western Allies. Interestingly, Curzon, a major strategist of the Great Game, had thought of Russia as the greatest threat to India, Britain's most valuable colony. (Cienciala and Materski 2007:9-11)

<sup>14</sup> *See also* Garlinski (1993:191-197).

<sup>15</sup> *See also* Lackner (2010).

<sup>16</sup> Polish intelligence had raised similar allegations already in 1969 in response to Wiesenthal's charge of anti-Semitism instigated by the governing communist party (Böhler 1996). Kreisky had no communist sympathies but most concentration camps had been established by Nazi Germany on the territory of occupied Poland, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia and a substantial

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number of surviving witnesses lived there. Hence, Polish and Czech government authorities held a monopoly of sorts over the production of some of the evidence.

<sup>17</sup> ATS270,000 (€15,000 or \$18,500). The 1975 purchasing power equivalent of the award was a multiple of today's amount, roughly the equivalent of an average 2-bedroom apartment in Vienna. Approximately the same amount was awarded by the European Court of Human Rights to Peter Michael Lingens, a journalist who had unsuccessfully exhausted all Austrian appeals on a defamation charge by Kreisky. (*Lingens v. Austria*, Judgment of 8 July 1986, EuCt.H.R. (Application No. 9815/82)).  
[http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx#{\"dmdocnumber\":\"695400\",\"itemid\":\"001-57523\"}}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx#{\), accessed 2 September 2012.

<sup>18</sup> *See also* the retrospective after Wiesenthal's death (Der Standard 2005).

<sup>19</sup> The highest casualty count recorded of the 1. SS Infantry Brigade on the eastern front was in Leltschitzky in September 1941 where 1089 male and female Jews were shot (Vogelauer 2001:10).

<sup>20</sup> *See also Der Spiegel*, 14 November 1975 and 24 November 1975 and continuous reporting in *Profil*, nos. 41-50, 14 November 1975-9 December 1975.

<sup>21</sup> Allegedly because the District Attorney in charge of the case was running for election as California's Attorney General. The victim's interests were ignored and she was not even consulted, in violation of the California Victims' Bill of Rights Act of 2008 (California Constitution article I, § 28, section (b)). (ABC News 2010)

<sup>22</sup> Decision of the Tribunal Pénal Fédéral of 24 November 2009, *Roman Raymond Polanski v. Bundesamt für Justiz, Fachbereich Auslieferung*.  
[http://bstger.weblaw.ch/pdf/20091124\\_RR\\_2009\\_329.pdf](http://bstger.weblaw.ch/pdf/20091124_RR_2009_329.pdf), (accessed 2 September 2012).

<sup>23</sup> While he gave highly effective and tightly reasoned statements to the media (Polanski 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Including Woody Allen, Pedro Almodóvar and Martin Scorsese, as well as Samantha Geimer, the victim of Polański's statutory rape (Tagesschau.de 2009; ABC News 2010).

<sup>25</sup> *See already* Earley (2008).

<sup>26</sup> Strategic Forecasting, Inc. (a.k.a. 'Stratfor') is a private company established and led by George Friedman that publishes analyses, reports and projections on geopolitical affairs (Laing 2001). Stratfor was targeted on Christmas Eve 2011 by the hacker collective Anonymous and a list of 4,000 clients was published. On 27 February 2012, Wikileaks, together with 25 partners in the media, published 214 email messages out of more than five million unlawfully seized emails.

<sup>27</sup> Recklessness or willful blindness can, under certain circumstances, constitute a violation of international law (Dörmann *et all* 2002:491)..

<sup>28</sup> Last in Exercise *Zapad* [West] (Dunin 2009). Russia's tolerance for the use of tactical nuclear weapons had been increased ten years earlier by *Zapad 99* which showed that Russia's conventional forces were unable to withstand a NATO offensive (Kipp 2001).

<sup>29</sup> See Dugin (1997), 600 pp., republished without change but with extensive supplemental materials in 1999, 925 pp.

<sup>30</sup> As late as March 2012, Jarosław Kaczyński sought to capitalize on the "murder" of his brother, see ABC News (2012).