Katyń Conference... May 5, at the Library of Congress

An exhumed body of a Polish officer from the Katyń forest massacre. The officer’s hands are tied behind his back and there is a bullet wound in the base of his skull.

WASHINGTON, DC – The Kosciuszko Foundation, in cooperation with the U.S. Helsinki Commission, today announced that an international conference on the Katyń Massacre would be held at the Library of Congress on May 5. In 1940, the NKVD, Josef Stalin’s secret police, murdered 22,000 Polish officers held as prisoners of war, shooting them, one by one, in the back of their heads. The Soviet Union covered up this atrocity for 50 years, blaming it on Nazi Germany, but the truth about the massacre began to emerge after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The conference will provide a forum for political leaders, scholars, authors and human rights advocates from Poland, Russia and the United States to discuss new details on the massacre, and the possibility of finding a path toward reconciliation between Poland and Russia. The Katyń conference will also include participation from the Cold War Studies program at the Harriman Institute, the Memorial human rights group based in Moscow, and the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C.

There will also be a display of rare Katyń photographs and documents on loan from The Council to Protect the Memory of Struggle and Martyrdom.

On April 7, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk met in the Katyń Forest, near Smolensk, where Polish officers were murdered.

“I hope the Tusk-Putin visit at Katyń will pave the way for important actions the Russians must take in order to break with the Stalinist past,” Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), Chairman of the Helsinki Commission said. “First and foremost, they owe the Poles a profound apology for crimes committed against them during the war. The countries should work to establish a just and lasting peace in Eastern Europe and to move toward full reconciliation.”

The Katyń Massacre caused the greatest diplomatic crisis of World War II. The Wehrmacht discovered the bodies of the Polish officers in the Katyń Forest, while overlooking the Dnieper River in early 1943. At the time, the Germans were realising the threat targeting the Soviet Union. Stalin exploited the discovery of the mass graves at Katyń to split the Western Allies from each other when the war broke out in 1939. The Soviet Union and the United States were then allied with the U.S. and Great Britain against Germany, but because the Poles demanded a neutral investigation of the crime by the International Red Cross, Stalin broke off relations with the Polish Government. In an interview later, Stalin declared to be a Communist puppet regime in Warsaw.

The massacre was symbolic of a broad policy of territorial aggression and Polish intelligentsia soon after he and Hitler overran the country in 1939. Nearly 22,000 officers captured by the Soviets were murdered in a mass grave in the Katyń Forest. The exact number of victims remains undetermined, probably between 20,000 and 25,000. The Soviet Union admitted that in fact it was their deed. A Polish government official sent to gulags in Siberia. It’s time that the Western world takes up this challenge and commemorates this with a memorial ceremony in 2010.

The cause of the catastrophe is not yet known. There are reports that according to the Guinness Book of the World Records, the Polish intelligence agency claims that the pilot’s error. This is hard to believe. The Polish pilots have a good reputation and these were the best of them. It is easier to believe Soviet pilots were attacked by a capable American pilot. So, the most plausible explanation is the presence of many thousands of Polish officers held in a mass grave, that a Soviet anti-invasion forces captured the elite units of the Polish Armed Forces, and then imprisoned, sentenced and executed them.

The condition of “fog” should have no effect on a flight. A Polish bus crash in 2009 in Smolensk, Russia caused the greatest diplomatic crisis of World War II. The Wehrmacht discovered the bodies of the Polish officers in the Katyń Forest, while overlooking the Dnieper River in early 1943. At the time, the Germans were realising the threat targeting the Soviet Union. Stalin exploited the discovery of the mass graves at Katyń to split the Western Allies from each other when the war broke out in 1939. The Soviet Union and the United States were then allied with the U.S. and Great Britain against Germany, but because the Poles demanded a neutral investigation of the crime by the International Red Cross, Stalin broke off relations with the Polish Government. In an interview later, Stalin declared to be a Communist puppet regime in Warsaw.

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