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The “Double Genocide” Theory

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THE NEW AND OFFICIAL FORM OF HOLOCAUST DENIAL

by Dovid Katz

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Photo at top: A scene from the June 1941 Lietukis Garage Massacre in Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania. An eyewitness wrote: “The behavior of the civilians present (women and children) was unbelievable. After each man had been killed they began to clap and when the national anthem started up they joined in singing and clapping.”

AMERICA WAS JOLTED this past summer not only by a [neo-Nazi event](#) in Charlottesville, Virginia that left an anti-Nazi protester dead by vehicular homicide, but by President Trump’s “blame on both sides” line, which created in America a microcosm of a debate that has been raging for some years in Eastern Europe among historians of World War II and the Holocaust and several Eastern European governments.

The entire Charlottesville debate was over a bogus moral equivalence that Trump drew between American neo-Nazi demonstrators and those who turned out to oppose them. The larger context was about whether those who fought for slavery and secession in the Civil War are “the same” as those who fought against slavery and for the Union. Magnify that all a hundred-fold to begin to comprehend what is a major intellectual and political push to contextualize the actual Nazi genocide, the Holocaust, within the Hitlerist “freedom fight” against Soviet Communist domination in Eastern Europe.

Such are our times, in which well-presented postmodernist slop can stultify elementary clarity of thought. In the various cases at hand, different versions of the same bogus moral equivalence strategy of argumentation are used, at a minimum, to make prosaic and palatable that which is inherently beyond the pale, such as state-sponsored public-square adulation for those who collaborated in genocide in Eastern Europe (or, indeed, in slavery). Bogue moral equivalence is having a profound and demonstrable effect upon evolving 21st-century perceptions of the Holocaust.

IN NO OTHER GENOCIDE did a mighty state put its government’s resources to work to murder every child, woman, and man of a designated ethnic group, far from its own borders, with no “baptismal” (or other recanting) option for a victim to be spared, and with zero provocation from the victims beyond their being living humans of the group slated for extermination. I had thought, growing up in New York City, that I understood this. But it is only now, after more than a quarter-century of traversing Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine, and meeting the last Yiddish speaker in hundreds upon hundreds of towns, that I have comprehended the Holocaust as a genocide that wiped out an entire living people on its own native territory.

Among my goals has been to catch the tiny number of survivors before they, like all of us, go the way of the world, in the hope of recording their town’s specific Yiddish language, folklore and memories as best as one can from a last, lone survivor. But as I have learned about some of the delightfully exotic local elements of Yiddish from these people, I have learned from them also about the experience of losing all of one’s family, friends, teachers, environments, and cultural and religious universe — in many cases, every single close person of one’s youth — to genocide. I have also learned, in the Baltics and Ukraine, about mass betrayal by neighbors, including

many with education and proper prewar careers, with whom Jews had previously lived in peace and harmony.

At the heart of the debate lurks one of the most primal human predispositions, evident in the defenses against all alleged wrongs perpetrated against another, at the personal psychological level and up through the spheres of social, political, societal and international affairs: "But look at what they did to me!" From the kindergarten child lashing out against a peer to august nations attempting to explain away some alleged misdeed against a minority by recasting it as mere reaction to a nasty provocation, one of the most primary human defenses is the claim of some kind or other of equivalence that is supposed to mitigate or even fully countermand the alleged misdeed, all the more so when the supposed provocation came first. I have heard it countless times in the Baltics: "Look, the Jews were all communists, and the Soviets occupied us before the Nazis invaded!" By this logic, the locals who often initiated carnage against Jews were involved in self-defense.

Never mind that the vast majority of their victims were traditionally religious neighbors, no more involved in Communism than a *khosid* in Brooklyn would be today.

THE HOLOCAUST REMAINS a daunting obstacle for the most diverse of antisemites (there is much diversity in evil as in good), for it illustrates starkly what antisemitism (or other genres of racism and bigotry) brings to the world — a mind-numbing, largely incomprehensible criminality. That the prime initiators of that worst genocide in human history were highly sophisticated, highly educated folks from a major European nation brings a fright, a diminution of optimism that education and higher culture are somehow reliable brands of insurance against mass atrocity. It is no surprise, therefore, that Holocaust Denial emerged in the second half of the 20th century. Antisemitism could have no meaningful future in mainstream society if the Holocaust really happened.

That project was defeated, however, by massive projects to document the Holocaust empirically, including large-scale recordings of eyewitnesses', survivors', and perpetrators' testimony — as well as Germany's achievements in forthrightness, and such public spectacles as the trial of David Irving's libel claims against Deborah Lipstadt. That trial culminated in the London High Court's Justice Charles Gray's ruling in the Spring of 2000, not only on the libel case at hand, but on the Holocaust's

historicity per se, making way for a millennially symbolic change of periods. It was a kind of death knell for Holocaust Denial in the Western mainstream.

There has been some backtracking in the early years of our current century, due in part to the rise of the Internet and the potential it presents for well-presented false information (“fake news”) to influence many. Still, the Internet’s revival of peripheral Holocaust Denial, disturbing as it is and countered as it must be, is a low-wattage phenomenon compared to the new, truly dangerous and infectious genre of the malady, which was arising just as the old version was losing its last vestiges of currency.

Within the mythology of East European nationalists, particularly but not exclusively in the Baltics and western Ukraine — where there was massive local participation in the actual killing of Jews, usually by shooting at local pits rather than by deportation to faraway camps — the Bogus moral equivalence of the Holocaust has been from the time of the actual massacres the myth that the Jews were all Communists and got what they deserved because Communism was every bit as genocidal as Nazism. Hence what the Jews call the Holocaust is a kind of opposite and equal reaction to the first genocide, the crimes of Communism.

For decades after World War II, this view was especially pronounced in Western diaspora communities from these countries, especially among those who migrated to the West at the war’s end. But such views on the fringes of obscure ultranationalist communities generally had little effect on wider society. It was only with the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of pro-Western states in much of Eastern Europe that the ultranationalist trope, emanating from those who rejoiced in the Nazis’ 1941 invasion of the USSR and in the “achievement” of a much more ethnically “clean,” homogeneous homeland, would be established as an acceptable-sounding new “analysis” of World War II. That new analysis would, in the fullness of time, recast the Holocaust as one of two essentially equal genocides by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

The capacity of East European states, including the Baltics, to rise as successful, impressive new democracies and join NATO and the EU in short order actually belies the notion that the Soviet crimes these nations suffered — and they suffered many, including deportations and the loss of religious, political and personal freedoms, including the freedom to emigrate — could have included genocide. Nevertheless, upon gaining their independence, these nations set about what the British

parliamentarian and human rights champion John Mann has aptly called “an industrial-scale rewriting of history.”

Mann, cofounder of the British parliament’s cross-party group to counter antisemitism, was in fact the first elected official in Europe (or anywhere) to expose an ongoing, powerful, but under-the-radar movement to rewrite Holocaust history. It was formally launched in January 2008, when a group of European Parliament members held a conference in Tallinn, Estonia, called “Common Europe — Common History,” dedicated to the idea that European unity in effect requires Western Europe (“Old Europe”) to give up its World War II notion of an anti-Nazi alliance — which crucially included the USSR from 1941 to 1945, without which Europe would have been Hitler’s — and replace it with a new paradigm of two equal evils, Communism and Nazism, in commemorating World War II.

Rising in the House of Commons on 31 January 2008, Mann slammed the effort to impose this kind of historical revisionism upon the West in the interests of “unity” (as if unity cannot tolerate diversity of views on history). Common Europe — Common History, Mann said, “is just a traditional form of prejudice, rewritten in a modern context. In essence, it is trying to equate Communism and Judaism as one conspiracy and rewrite history from a nationalist point of view.”

In fact, the next offensive in the crusade to entrench the idea that there were two equal genocides in 20th-century Europe was launched, with dozens of European parliamentarians signing, in June of that year: the “Prague Declaration.”

“Consciousness of the crimes against humanity committed by the Communist regimes throughout the continent must inform all European minds to the same extent as the Nazi regime’s crimes did,” said the document. It went on to demand that recognition must be given “for their sufferings in the same way as the victims of Nazism have been morally and politically recognized.” The declaration called for a process of assessment equal to the Nuremberg Tribunal, and the establishment of August 23rd, the date of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, as a date of pan-European commemoration “in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust on January 27th,” an “overhaul of European history textbooks so that children could learn and be warned about Communism and its crimes in the same way as they have been taught to assess the Nazi crimes.”

THERE IS MUCH in the Prague Declaration that sounds exquisitely fair and in the spirit of equality of all peoples — for example, its call for the “principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination of victims of all the totalitarian regimes.” But for those living in Eastern Europe, it turned out to mean that there be equivalence in principle between, say, a town where all Jewish people were murdered and a town where a small minority of resident Latvian citizens were wrongfully deported by the Soviets to Siberia or otherwise deprived of human rights — truly a serious crime that needs to be documented and acknowledged, but not equivalent to genocide. Dr. Clemens Heni, a young Berlin-based political scientist, deserves much credit for academically deconstructing and exposing the Prague Declaration for what it is, when most academics in the field have feared to touch these issues with a barge-pole (lest they be thought of as “Putinist lackeys” — such is the McCarthy-spirited shutdown of debate on the topic in recent years).

The roots of bogus moral equivalence argumentation are older, go deeper, and have distinct offshoots. A project to redefine “genocide” was already underway in the 1990s, with a number of Eastern European governments and parliaments passing laws (Lithuania in 1992, Estonia in 1994, Latvia in 1998) that defined as acts of genocide deportation and the elimination of “social classes” (such as the class of dissident intellectuals) from society by means including imprisonment, unemployment, deportation, and death. National museums were also established that equated the Communist and Nazi regimes, including the Museum of Genocide Victims founded in central Vilnius in 1992 (which until 2011 did not even mention the word “Holocaust”); the Lonsky Street Museum in Lviv, Ukraine, founded in 2009 (which has used Photoshop to obscure Jewish victims from a 1941 photograph); and Budapest’s “House of Terror,” which dates to 2002 and includes the “general” Communist star alongside the symbol specific to the Hungarian fascist leaders who deported their Jewish citizens to Auschwitz.

These museums have cumulatively welcomed millions of Western visitors, many of whom haven’t a clue that there is an active, state-sponsored attempt at Holocaust revisionism underway. It is shocking that young reporters from the *New York Times* in 2015, and the *San Francisco Examiner* in 2016, gave the Vilnius “Museum of Genocide Victims” uncritical, glowing write-ups, as if they had finally discovered what that genocide over in Europe was all about. By contrast, an older *Guardian* reporter (now retired), saw right through the place back in 2008.

ONE MAJOR SYMPTOM of the revisionism underway in Eastern Europe is the rehabilitation of Nazi collaborators as “national heroes” on the grounds that they were anti-Soviet. Here we see direct parallels with the current American debate on Confederate statues and memorials, but in Eastern Europe it is commission of genocide rather than the defense of slavery that is being honored.

It is fair to say that nearly all the local killers in Eastern Europe were, at the time of their crimes, reliably anti-Soviet. From the Nazi invasion of June 22, 1941 onward, when the actual genocidal phase of the Holocaust got underway, each and every murderer was anti-Soviet and yearned for a Nazi victory. By contrast, every victim of the Nazis, and all the Righteous among the Nations who risked all to just do the right thing and save a neighbor, prayed for a Soviet victory — not because they were all Communists, but because the Soviet Union was the only force seriously fighting the Nazis on ground zero of the Holocaust from the onset of the genocide and right through to liberation.

At its theoretical apex — and moral nadir — among scholars, politicians, and prosecutors in the Baltics and Ukraine, Bogus moral equivalence has also involved unstinting efforts to smear Holocaust victims and survivors. This reached its low point with a campaign by Lithuanian prosecutors to open “pre-trial investigations” of Holocaust survivors — particularly those who survived by joining groups of Soviet-sponsored partisans in the forests, or who in recent years supposedly committed “libel” against Baltic “heroes” who had collaborated with the Nazis. The campaign started in 2006, and it goes on indefinitely (one of the five primary victims of these “investigations,” Dr. Rachel Margolis, passed away in 2015), although charges or specific allegations have never been proffered — nor have any state apologies ever been forthcoming.

As the official revisionist theory sees it, the Holocaust’s local perpetrators may have indeed committed murder against their neighbors, but they were heroes for standing up against the Soviet Union, while Holocaust survivors, victims of the Nazis and their collaborators, became war criminals if they survived by joining the partisans. One of the most specific enunciations came from the executive director of the Lithuanian government’s lavishly sponsored “International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania” (known in the diplomatic community as the “Red-Brown Commission”), in an on-camera statement made at Ponár (Ponary, Paneriai), the mass-murder site outside Vilnius where 100,000 people were murdered, among them 70,000 Jews. In the statement, for a recent

German-made documentary film, when asked about one of the defamed Jewish partisans, Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky, he said: "I entirely agree that Fania Brantsovsky and others may feel bad, and I understand, but you know, the whole history was complex. In one situation, you know, the same person could be a victim, in another situation the same person can be a murderer and vice versa [. . .] Our commission is set up for reconciliation between these nations, between these groups who suffered from two totalitarian regimes [. . .]"

Most current antisemitism in Eastern Europe is closely related to these debates, as nationalists strive to "fix" their nations' collaboration (or in the case of the Baltics and Ukraine, participation) in the Holocaust with revised paradigms that equal everything out. One of the poisons of ultranationalism is the perceived need to construct a perfect history (no country on the planet has one of those). Another is hatred of local Jewish communities who have memory, or family, or collective memory, of nationalist neighbors turning viciously on their neighbors in 1941, and of the Soviets being responsible for their own grandparents or parents being saved from the Holocaust. In America, this would be akin to someone hating African Americans for having a different opinion of Washington or Jefferson because they were slaveholders.

In international parlance, the usual name for the revised history of the Holocaust era, reflecting the foregone conclusion that there were, morally speaking, two genocides, is "Double Genocide." But not all sides accept the term. In fact, the diplomatic and academic lexicon is replete with alternatives: "equal evaluation of totalitarian regimes" or "reconciliation of history" (the Eurospeak favorites in Brussels and Strasbourg); "rebalancing of World War II away from the Jewish-centric and Soviet paradigm that dominates in America" (that's the elite antisemitic/nationalist formulation); "saving the Holocaust for history by putting it in its actual historic context" (American historians after their umpteenth trip to Eastern Europe); or just plain "symmetry."

The European Union actually finances the Platform of European Memory and Conscience in Prague, which has produced lavish, glossy publications, exhibits, and events intended to create a culture of Double Genocide in Europe and beyond. Under the aegis of a rightwing director from Sweden, it is working to set up a permanent museum in Brussels, the capital of the European Union, that is slated to become the major shrine for the movement in the West.

Such examples may have limited impact themselves. They are, however, dangerous for having the capacity to misrepresent a far-right revisionist view of history as some

kind of new mainstream European Union norm. The real explosion of Double Genocide acceptability abroad has come from an acquiescence born of political impetus, or, to be more precise, from two political impetuses: Israeli and American.

ISRAEL NEEDS East European votes in the United Nations, the European Union, UNESCO, and myriad other international organizations, and can get these votes; Eastern Europe has little interest in Palestinian issues or the intricacies of Middle East affairs. The late Middle East specialist Barry Rubin openly crafted an Israeli policy of accommodation to the reappraisals of the Holocaust and World War II, including the Prague Declaration, as part of a program to strengthen Israel's diplomatic posture.

To its editor's credit, the Israeli *Journal of Foreign Affairs* in 2010 hosted a free and balanced debate on this issue in its pages. Around that time and in the ensuing years, Israeli foreign policy was shifting. Israel was pressed to give legitimacy to the aforementioned "Red-Brown Commission" by having Yad Vashem officially join it (actually rejoin; Yad Vashem had pulled out after Lithuanian prosecutors began proceedings against one of the commission's own members, former Yad Vashem director Yitzhak Arad, for "war crimes," in other words for escaping the ghetto to join up with the anti-Nazi resistance). Yad Vashem's repeated concessions to East European revisionism, under Israeli government pressure, have on occasion elicited the rare and painful specter of aged Israeli Holocaust survivors begging it to reconsider. There have even been modifications to Yad Vashem's own exhibit on the Holocaust in Lithuania.

Since opening an Israeli embassy in Vilnius (previously the embassy in Riga had covered Latvia as well as Lithuania) several years ago, the new ambassador has repeatedly betrayed Holocaust survivors, especially the three Israeli citizens waiting (or whose families wait) for a formal Lithuanian apology for the defamatory accusations of "war crimes" or "libeling heroes" that continue to mar their reputations, whether in history books or the Internet. After a 2016 neo-Nazi parade in Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania's second city, which featured banners extolling local Holocaust collaborators, he publicly congratulated the city's leaders on their Jewish remembrance policies without publicly mentioning, howsoever politely, the annual neo-Nazi extravaganza allowed to hijack the city center on the nation's very independence day.

But no discussion of Israeli foreign policy on the Holocaust in Eastern Europe can be complete without singling out for his exceptional courage, integrity and sheer

diplomatic genius the late Israeli Ambassador to the Baltics, Chen Ivri Apter (1958—2012), who demonstrated that he could build the best possible relations with Baltic states while standing up for his own citizens and for the truth of Jewish history. When I organized an evening in Tel Aviv in June 2009 to honor the late Dr. Rachel Margolis, one of the Holocaust survivors and partisan heroes defamed by prosecutors and afraid to go back for a last farewell to her beloved Vilna, Ambassador Apter came specially to join the event, and gave a speech that countered Double Genocide in simple, stark, elegant terms, one that will go down in history. The Jews of Vilnius continue to lovingly and loyally cherish his memory.

UYNITED STATES POLICY regarding the Double Genocide theory began to change markedly around 2009 (I have written about this in considerable detail at the [Jewish Currents website](#).) As one American diplomat put it to me some years ago, off the record: “Look, these guys will stand up to the Russians, not like England, France and Germany. And if all they want is some changes in the history, and it’s changes that hit Putin in the face, then why the hell not?!” American embassies in the region have thus organized one-sided Holocaust conferences closed to a diversity of views. When in 2012 the Lithuanian government repatriated from Putnam, Connecticut, the remains of the 1941 Nazi puppet prime minister who signed papers ordering the Jews of his city, Kaunas, to a murder camp and the rest to the Kovno Ghetto, the American Embassy, instead of politely speaking up in the spirit of American values, covered for the sham with “balanced statements” and the organization of a cover-up conference featuring Yale professor Timothy Snyder as well as the director of YIVO. Nobody at the conference even mentioned the reburial with full honors underway. When the East European countries inserted Double Genocide language, blaming both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, equally, for “genocide,” into a declaration of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2009, the United States voted for it.

For the record, I think it is vital that the West continues to support unstintingly the democratic states of the eastern NATO and EU region against Putin’s ever-more dictatorial, dangerous, and revanchist regime. Also for the record, Holocaust revisionism and Double Genocide politics are the wrong way to do that, from the viewpoint of American values and American heritage. These values include telling the truth about the Holocaust — which should extend to rejecting ultra-nationalistic campaigns to obfuscate that truth (just as we should tell the truth about America’s own worst calamity, slavery, and oppose campaigns to obfuscate its reality.)

American values also include the commitment to freedom of speech. But strange to tell, freedom of speech has not been the rule for issues involving Double Genocide: Eastern European states have been passing laws effectively criminalizing the opinion that there was but one genocide in the region. The punishments now enshrined in law range from imprisonment for two years in Lithuania to ten years in Ukraine. As for the American heritage issue, it a gross betrayal of American pride to consign to oblivion America's huge sacrifices in the anti-Nazi war, in alliance with Great Britain and the Soviet Union, among others, because a few of our allies don't like this or that chapter of history.

The Holocaust is not referred to simply as the "Nazi genocide," but has its own names — Yiddish, *der Khurbn*, Hebrew, *ha-Shoah*, English, the Holocaust — to signify a unique event. It is more than a linguistic curiosity that postwar attempts by some Jewish groups to subsume the Holocaust as one of the historic massacres endured by the Jews that are mourned on Tíshebov (Tisha b'Av) failed, because of the virtually unanimous feeling among survivors that this one, in 20th-century Europe, was so very different, and intrinsically incomparable with even the primary ancient national catastrophes of destruction and exile.

The Holocaust cannot, must not, be subsumed — but that is precisely what the Double Genocide theory seeks to do. It is the primary new mainstream form of Holocaust Denial, and should be treated with at least as much outrage as President Trump's invocation of supposed moral equivalence between people who came to Charlottesville, Virginia in Nazi-style torch-lit processions to chant, "Jews will not replace us" and the Nazis' "Blood and Soil" in English translation (they had to make their connection to Hitler-era Nazism), and those who came to protest them. Infinitely, infinitely less can the Holocaust itself be considered as a moral equal of some other "bad thing" from its period in history — other than for the proponents of Bogus moral equivalence, who use it as a tool of discourse, sophistry, casuistry, to talk the Holocaust out of history without denying a single death.

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