

# Russia's Twitter Propaganda

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**Could a kitchen chair and electric chair be similar pieces of equipment just because they have similar names? Although such a comparison is unlikely to convince anyone, historical manipulations based on similar tricks are harder to recognize, a fact employed by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in spreading a falsified history of Poland on Twitter.**

## Social media as a manipulation tool

Twitter has some particular characteristics when compared to many other forms of social media. As the news posted there is public in principle, reading it requires no prior registration. The limit of 280 characters per tweet requires precision, while questions and comments must also be equally brief. This fosters disciplined discussion and saves considerable time. Additionally, Twitter is much liked by politicians and journalists, the former seeing it as an opportunity to share their position with the public quickly and the latter to reach their audience with the latest political news or comments. The platform is also used intensely by public institutions, including those involved in diplomacy, with ministers and ambassadors having official Twitter profiles, and ministries of foreign affairs and diplomatic posts having accounts as well. In some cases, states have begun to resort to tweets to communicate messages that previously would have taken the form of diplomatic letters, that is, notes or press articles.

**Twitter's popularity, however, has begun to tempt some to use it as a disinformation tool.** After all, tweets featuring lies or manipulations do not have to be approved by anyone. Before other Twitter users are able to unmask them, they can reach millions of people. Unfortunately, certain diplomats or even states are engaged in manipulation.

**A good case study of how one country disseminates manipulated news about another on Twitter involves tweets by Russian diplomats about Poland.** Relations between both countries, long marked by distrust, turned particularly icy after March 2014 with Russia's aggression on Poland's other neighbour, Ukraine, and the passing of a bill in Poland in 2016 ordering that public monuments erected in praise of the Red Army during the communist period be taken down. This can be measured by the fact that most of the 137 tweets about Poland posted by Russian diplomats on the ministry's English-language Twitter account after March 2014 relate to history.

Let us then analyse some of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs tweets to reveal the manipulations and lies.

## False analogy and apparent alternative

Russian diplomacy claims that the Soviet Union should not be blamed for having signed a non-aggression pact with the Third Reich on 23 August 1939, since other European countries, including Poland, also concluded such treaties with Germany. Consequently, there is no difference between the [Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact](#) and the Polish–German non-aggression declaration signed on 26 January 1934.

Is this so? The conclusion about their similarity was reached by juxtaposing the contents of the Polish–German declaration, which did not have any additional secret protocols attached to it, with the public part of the German–Soviet pact. However, it ignored the secret protocol attached to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact delineating a border between the 'spheres of interest' of both powers in Central and Eastern Europe. This border was to be respected by both governments in case of the 'territorial transformation' of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania as a result of German or Soviet attacks on these countries. The protocol thus ensured the benevolent neutrality of the counterparty toward the aggressor. **The comparison is then incomplete** – by focusing on apparent external similarities and failing to take the secret protocol into account, **it ignores a major difference between the two pacts. The former was a non-aggression pact, while the latter was quite the opposite.** That kind of manipulative argumentation is called a false analogy.

MFA Russia @mfa\_russia, Today attempts are... | September 2019 [accessed 14 December 2020]. Available on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/mfa\\_russia/status/1168198139691589633](https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1168198139691589633)

**MFA Russia** @mfa\_russia  
Russia government account

! Today attempts are being made in a number of western countries to equally blame both Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union for the II World War breakout. Many of these countries are turning a blind eye to number of facts.

#WWII #History #Commemoration #USSR #Germany #Poland

Przetłumacz Tweeta



**The text of the Non-aggression treaty between Germany and USSR (1939) is identical to that of the German-Polish treaty (1934).**

6:25 PM · 1 wrz 2019 · Twitter Web App

44 Tweety podane dalej 24 Cytaty z Tweetów 65 Polubień

**MFA Russia** @mfa\_russia  
Russia government account

! On January 26, 1934, Germany's Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath and Polish Ambassador to Germany Jozef Lipski signed a non-aggression pact between Germany and Poland known as the Pilsudski-Hitler Pact. [is.gd/gZuj0l](https://is.gd/gZuj0l) #Poland #Germany #Czechoslovakia #WWII

Przetłumacz Tweeta

**Winston Churchill on the annexation of Těšín by Poland in 1938:**



**"Poland with hyena appetite <...> joined in the pillage and destruction of the Czechoslovak State".**

Russian Embassy, PL i 9 innych użytkowników

10:44 AM · 26 sty 2020 · Twitter Web App

81 Tweetów podanych dalej 18 Cytatów z Tweetów 124 Polubienia

MFA Russia @mfa\_russia, On January 26, 1934, ... | 26 January 2020 [accessed 14 December 2020]. Available on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/mfa\\_russia/status/1221368246496047105](https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1221368246496047105)

Russian Mission OSCE, @RF\_OSCE, #ПравдаВторойМировой: 26 янв. 1934 г. ... 20 August 2019 [accessed 14 December 2020]. Available on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/RF\\_OSCE/status/116372131258503872](https://twitter.com/RF_OSCE/status/116372131258503872)



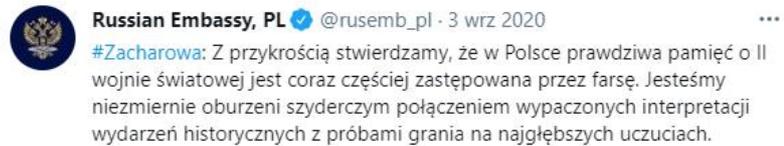
**Tweet's translation:**

*#TheTruthabouttheSecond World War. On 26 January 1934 the Piłsudski–Hitler Pact was concluded between #Poland and Nazi #Germany, which assumed a joint attack on the #USSR. It was this agreement that allowed Germany to prepare for the war without fearing an attack from the East #TrueHistory*



**Tweet's translation:**

*Regretfully we conclude that in Poland the true memory of the Second World War is increasingly replaced by a farce. We are extremely dismayed by the derisive combination of distorted interpretations of historical events with attempts to play on the audience's heartstrings.*



Russian Embassy, @rusemb\_pl, #Zacharowa: Z przykrością stwierdzamy, że w Polsce prawdziwa pamięć o II wojnie światowej jest coraz częściej zastępowana przez fałsz. Jesteśmy niezmiernie oburzeni szyderczym połączeniem wypaczonych interpretacji wydarzeń historycznych z próbami grania na najgłębszych uczuciach. [accessed 14 December 2020]. Available on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/rusemb\\_pl/status/1301538362365444096](https://twitter.com/rusemb_pl/status/1301538362365444096)

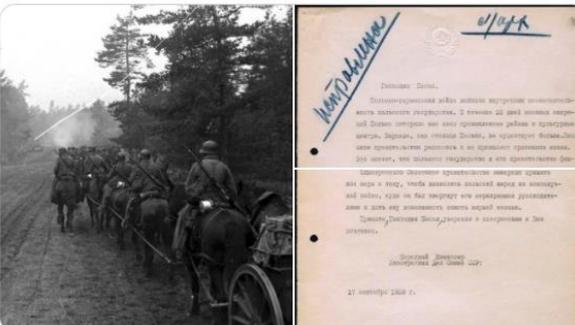
It is also worth pointing out that Russian diplomacy lied in one of its tweets by claiming that the Polish–German pact envisaged a joint assault on the USSR by both countries. It also used the term 'Piłsudski–Hitler Pact', evoking an association with the combination of surnames Molotov–Ribbentrop, and on many occasions posted a photograph showing Józef Piłsudski with Joseph Goebbels, which was not actually taken on the signing of this declaration, but several months later when the Third Reich's propaganda minister visited Warsaw on 13 June 1934. All of this was intended to further reinforce the impression that the Polish–German non-aggression declaration was no better than the Soviet–German pact and, moreover, that Poland's maintenance of diplomatic relations with Germany in 1934 was deplorable in itself. Obviously, there is no mention that such relations were also maintained by other countries, including the USSR itself.

MFA Russia @mfa\_russia, The Soviet Union's decision..., 17 September 2019 [accessed 14 December 2020]. Available on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/mfa\\_russia/status/1173949271047069698](https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1173949271047069698)

**MFA Russia** @mfa\_russia  
Russia government account

The Soviet Union's decision was primarily dictated by national security concerns. There were two options: either German troops reach what used to be USSR's border with Poland, or they are stopped at a considerable distance from it. Read more [▶](https://bit.ly/2kh0fLc) [bit.ly/2kh0fLc](https://bit.ly/2kh0fLc) #TruthAboutWWII

Przetłumacz Tweets



Russian Embassy, PL i 9 innych użytkowników  
3:18 PM · 17 wrz 2019 · Twitter Web App

24 Tweety podane dalej 7 Cytatów z Tweetów 47 Polubień

MFA Russia @mfa\_russia, The #USSR was not in a state..., 17 September 2019 [accessed 14 December 2020]. Available on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/mfa\\_russia/status/1174052087744872449](https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1174052087744872449)

**MFA Russia** @mfa\_russia  
Russia government account

👉 The #USSR was not in a state of war with #Poland, something that was recognised by the Western countries and the Polish government-in-exile. Neither #London nor #Paris qualified Soviet interference as an "aggression" and made no official protests. [bit.ly/2kIEDgL](https://bit.ly/2kIEDgL)

Przetłumacz Tweets



Estonian MFA i 9 innych użytkowników  
10:06 PM · 17 wrz 2019 · Twitter Web App

61 Tweetów podanych dalej 73 Cytaty z Tweetów 91 Polubień

MFA Russia @mfa\_russia, A Reminder of Actual... 17 September 2020 [accessed 14 December 2020]. Available on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/mfa\\_russia/status/1306516128643721152](https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1306516128643721152)



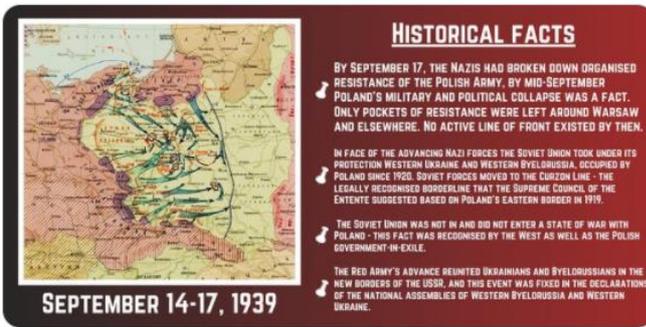
! A Reminder of Actual Historical Facts.

👉 By Sept 17, 1939 #Poland was defeated by the Nazis, only pockets of resistance left.

👉 The USSR took Western Byelorussia & Western Ukraine under its protection (occupied by Poland since 1920).

Read in detail: [is.gd/z6iOa5](https://is.gd/z6iOa5)

Przetłumacz Tweeta



Ministry of Foreign Affairs i 9 innych użytkowników

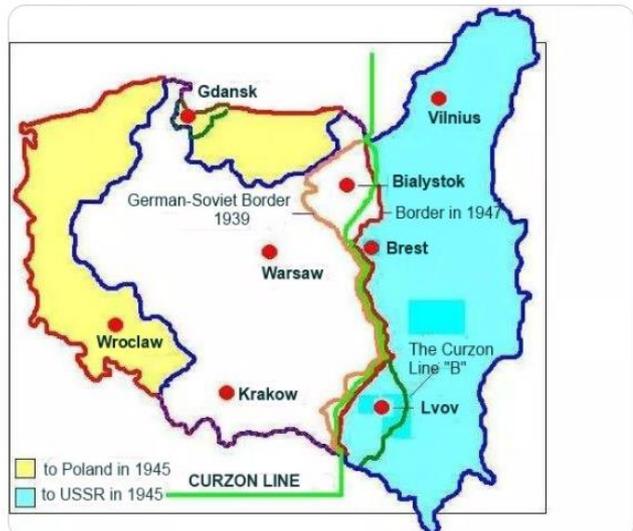
10:51 AM · 17 wrz 2020 · Twitter Web App

164 Tweety podane dalej 534 Cytaty z Tweetów 414 Polubień



On Sept.17, 1939, #RedArmy crossed the border with Polish Republic. This event has been subject of scientific debate [goo.gl/ZxM3G2](https://goo.gl/ZxM3G2)

Przetłumacz Tweeta



MFA Russia @mfa\_russia, On Sept.17, 1939... #RedArmy, 18 September 2017 [accessed 14 December 2020]. Available on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/mfa\\_russia/status/909766440730931201](https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/909766440730931201)

How does Russia justify its aggression of 17 September 1939 on Twitter? It cannot deny the fact that the Red Army entered Poland and occupied one-half of the country as the latter fought the Germans. It also cannot question the unlawful incorporation of eastern provinces controlled by the Red Army into the USSR and the crimes committed against their inhabitants. It chooses a strategy based on several points:

The first is the **presentation of extremely controversial interpretations of the past as facts, that is, something that objectively happened and requires no further verification. These interpretations have generally been rejected, except by Russia.**

In order to better understand the difference between a fact and an interpretation, let us compare the following statements:

- the Soviet Union was led by Joseph Stalin during the Second World War;
- the Soviet Union was led by the criminal Joseph Stalin during the Second World War;
- the Soviet Union was led by Joseph Stalin, the leader of a progressive people, during the Second World War.

In the first case, it is a fact, whereas the second is an interpretation generally shared by researchers and the public of democratic European states and by most decent people. The third sentence is also an interpretation, but is propaganda promoted by a totalitarian state.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also uses terminology suggesting the peaceful nature of Soviet activity. Consequently, there is no mention of an assault or aggression, preferring to use such phrases as 'crossing the border', 'military operation' and 'counteracting German troops'. It is suggested that there is some serious debate in academia on about the Red Army's activity. Last but not least, propaganda photographs have been published to have a strong impact on the imagination, implying that the local population was grateful to Red Army soldiers.

Then, another trick is applied in the form of a '**false alternative**'. Here, the USSR supposedly had only two choices: to watch how the *Wehrmacht* (German troops) took over all Polish territory, or to thwart the *Wehrmacht's* offensive far from its borders. This manipulation stems from the fact that in reality there were more

options. The USSR could, for instance, have helped Poland stop the German troop offensive and maintained benevolent neutrality in the hope that the Polish army would manage to control at least some of the country's territory and that such a defence would have accelerated the Western Allies' offensive on the Western front. In the worst-case scenario, the Soviet Union could have hoped that the Allies would defeat Hitler in the spring. After all, Stalin had no idea in September 1939 that Hitler would defeat France in 1940, lengthening the war by several years.

In order to convince the reader that Soviet actions were peaceful, Russia has also propagated another lie: even the Polish government acknowledged that Poland and the USSR were not at war. In fact, no formal declaration is needed for a war with another country to break out. Poland did not declare war on Germany – the conflict began as a *fait accompli*: the Germans crossed the border into Poland. Acknowledging an aggression is something different. In his address on 17 September 1939, President Ignacy Mościcki announced that Poland had fallen victim to a Soviet assault. On 1 March 1940 Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief General Władysław Sikorski only confirmed the position of the Polish state. 'Russia's betrayal consisted of its armed march in aid of Germany, stabbing us in the back at a time previously agreed with the Germans. Since then, we have been at war with the Soviets as much as with the Germans,' stated Sikorski in his radio address to the Poles. Incidentally, the USSR's authorities also acknowledged in their internal documents that a war was raging. After all, they ordered the execution on 5 March 1940 of Polish officers held captive as prisoners of war.

**The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses emotive arguments**, as evidenced by its statement that 'The Red Army's military offensive saved the inhabitants of Eastern Poland – Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Poles – from genocide.' This is a manipulation, and likewise the Holocaust memory has been treated in similar manner. Notably, the decision of Soviet leaders to take control of the eastern part of the Polish state in collaboration with Germany was taken before 17 September 1939, that is, when Germany had not yet embarked on the Holocaust. That took place two years later. At the same time, the best illustration of the Soviet leadership's views at the time is a speech to the Soviet parliament by Vyacheslav Molotov, chairman of

the Council of People's Commissars, namely the prime minister, on 31 October 1939. He criticized the war waged by France and Great Britain against Germany:

One can accept or reject the ideology of Hitlerism or any other ideological system, as that is a matter of political opinion. However, everyone should understand that an ideology cannot be destroyed by force or be eliminated by war. It is, therefore, not only senseless but criminal to wage such a war whereby the 'destruction of Hitlerism' was camouflaged as a fight for 'democracy'.

Let us add, as proved by the historic events that followed, that the Soviet occupation of the eastern part of Poland did not ultimately save the Jewish population living in these territories from genocide, because Germany took control of them in the summer of 1941 and began its murderous campaign.

When some facts cannot be defended such as the Katyn Massacre, the tweets of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs overlook them entirely.

## 'Whataboutism'?

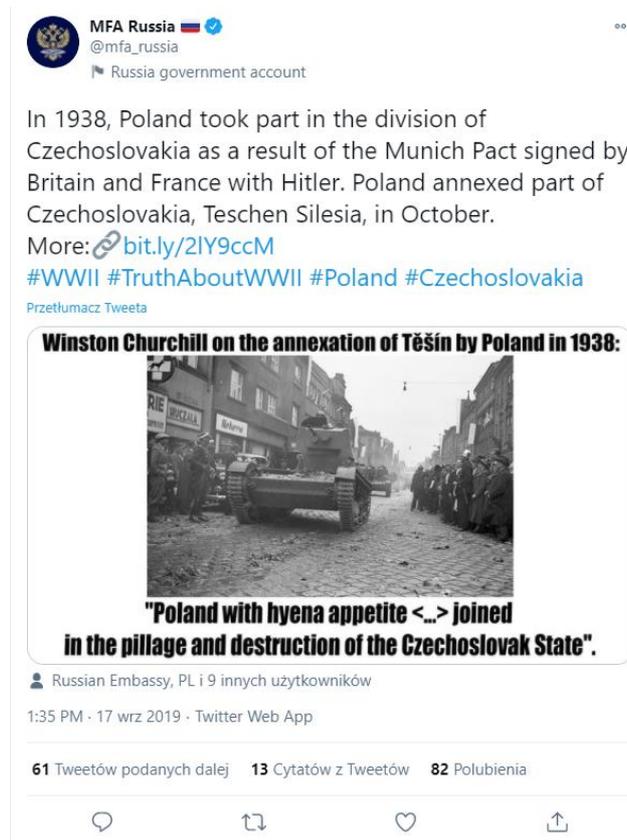
Another manipulative technique frequently employed by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is '**whataboutism**'. It aims to convince recipients that the opponent's arguments are unreliable, as it continues to behave in the same way. **Russia propagates three points of view in seeking to weaken the conviction that the USSR committed crimes against Poland and the Polish people:**

- a) Poland 'assaulted' the USSR in 1920;
- b) Poland 'occupied' Ukrainian and Belarussian territories;
- c) and during the division of Czechoslovakia, Poland annexed part of it known as Zaolzie (Těšín).

Russian Mission in Geneva, @mission\_russian  
#Pompeo coincided his visit... 17 August 2020  
[accessed 14 December 2020]. Available on Twitter:  
[https://twitter.com/mission\\_russian/status/12954207291444598528](https://twitter.com/mission_russian/status/12954207291444598528)



MFA Russia @mfa\_russia, In 1938, Poland took part... 17 September 2019 [accessed 14 December 2020].  
Available on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/mfa\\_russia/status/1173923474278158336](https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1173923474278158336)



Proving manipulation requires some historical and legal knowledge. In the light of international law already in force in the 1930s, a state could not extend its territory by seizing that of another state other than with the latter's consent. Annexation – that is, the unilateral incorporation into a state of a territory controlled during wartime

operations – was unlawful. In legal terms such territory still remained part of the state to which it belonged before being temporarily occupied.

Realizing that incorporation of the eastern part of the Second Polish Republic into the USSR was illegal, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that on 17 September 1939, the Red Army took control of 'Western Ukraine' and 'Western Byelorussia'. As it sometimes conflicts with the official position of the Soviet Union itself, the ministry points out Poland 'occupied' these lands after an 'assault on Russia' in 1920.

It glosses over the fact that in 1919 and 1920 Polish troops did not take an inch of Russian land, while Russia itself had already waived its right to territories where war with the Bolsheviks had been waged, not just in Poland, but also in what is now Ukraine and Belarus. This was decided in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk concluded by Russia with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1918. Subsequently, Lenin's government considered Byelorussia (now Belarus) and Ukraine to be independent states albeit, just like Russia, governed by soviets (councils). Only three Soviet states, Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia, signed a peace treaty with Poland in Riga in March 1921, thus confirming that territories called 'Western Byelorussia' and 'Western Ukraine' by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs actually belonged to the Polish state. They are now the western part of Ukraine and Belarus, respectively, yet this border change took place in 1945 and not before 17 September 1939.

In defending its stance expressed, among other things, in tweets, Russian diplomacy mentions the ethnic composition of the population living in the territories seized by the Red Army. You may well ask why the ethnic criterion should matter more than, for instance, the legal status of these territories as part of Poland or the will of that population who did not wish to be incorporated into the USSR? Moreover, according to official data for 1939, in the provinces annexed by the USSR as 'Western Byelorussia', starting from the town of Łomża, 23% were Byelorussians and 49% were Polish. In turn, inhabitants of 'Western Ukraine' were 56% Ukrainian and 32% Polish. Finally, the Vilnius Region unlawfully transferred to Lithuania comprised 11% Lithuanians and 69% Polish people. Although contemporary researchers typically assume that such official estimates based on the 1931 census slightly inflate the number of Poles at the expense of national minorities, it is clear, even when revised downwards by several percentage

points, that Polish people were the majority in the north-eastern provinces of the Second Polish Republic and a considerable minority in what is now Western Ukraine.

Intent on showing that Poland's record is not clean, Russia promotes the notion of the Polish 'annexation' of Zaolzie (Těšín). Until 1918 part of the Duchy of Těšín, a territory covering approximately 900 square kilometres, was mostly populated by the Poles. When Austria collapsed in November 1918, Zaolzie was claimed by both Poland and Czechoslovakia, the latter invoking the fact that this part of Silesia had been part of the Kingdom of Bohemia for centuries. In January 1919 a local several-day-long Polish-Czechoslovak war broke out that was stopped by the great powers – Great Britain, France and the Russian Empire. The dispute was to be resolved through a plebiscite. Yet it never took place as the very same great powers granted Zaolzie (Těšín) to Czechoslovakia in 1920.

When it turned out that France, Italy, Great Britain and Germany forced Czechoslovakia to cede some of its territory to Germany at the Munich Conference in 1938, Poland successfully demanded the Czechoslovak government transfer Zaolzie (Těšín) back to Poland. In announcing the incorporation of that border region into the Polish state on 11 October 1938, President Ignacy Mościcki had the agreement of the Czechoslovak government. This was an act of assignment (territorial transfer), and not annexation. However, given the circumstances of Poland forcing Czechoslovakia to make that assignment directly after being abandoned by its allies in Munich, in 2009 Polish President Lech Kaczyński, incidentally in the presence of Vladimir Putin, apologized to the Czechs for that act by calling it a 'sin'. Historians typically criticize this action for being politically short-sighted and morally deplorable. Obviously, Russia makes no mention of any of that, while intentionally creating the impression that Poland has failed to come to terms with its past.

## What is Russia's intention?

Given all of the above, you might well ask why Russia is so intent to defend the behaviour of the Soviet totalitarian state. Many Russians are proud of the accomplishments of the USSR, particularly its role during the [Second World War](#). As the cult of a 'victory' unifies the overwhelming majority of Russians, authorities

seek to prove that they defend the good name of the USSR, which is identified with Russia, the ancestral land. Incidentally, it is also a way for President Vladimir Putin and most members of his inner circle, often coming from Soviet special services, to defend their own life choices. By intensely promoting knowledge about Soviet crimes and highlighting the aggressive imperialist nature of Soviet foreign policy during the Second World War, **Poland dismantles the key historical myth of Putin's Russia.**

As for the international dimension, Russia feeds on its 'great power' status acquired through the USSR's role during the Second World War. The Kremlin also seeks to consolidate its influence in such countries as Belarus and the Russified regions of Ukraine by invoking a shared past with the rest of the USSR. The Kremlin considers the dissemination of knowledge about Soviet crimes by Poland and Central European countries to have already led to a major change in how the USSR and its role during the Second World War are perceived in western European societies. These countries also hamper Russia's policy towards former Soviet republics, particularly Ukraine and Belarus.

Significantly, tweets of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs are not actually addressed to Poles, as the latter know about Polish history and Soviet crimes. The principal objective of Russian diplomacy has been to convince other countries and global public opinion that Russia's interpretation of history is true. These tweets, however, serve only to spread doubt. **The Kremlin is eager for other countries, including Poland's allies, to doubt the reliability of historical arguments presented by Poland and other countries harmed by Soviet totalitarianism.** That is why it is so vital to be able to identify and dissect such statements by Russian diplomacy and prove their manipulative nature.

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