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Nikołaj Iwanow [Nikolai Ivanov], *Powstanie Warszawskie widziane z Moskwy* [‘The Warsaw Uprising seen from Moscow’s perspective’], Znak, Kraków; 2010; 304pp.

This year has seen the sixty-sixth anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. This historic occurrence occupies a special place in the memory of Polish people, arousing numerous emotions and controversies till our very day. The disputes mainly revolve around the question: did the Uprising make any sense? Was it a thought-over decision, which consequently led to an almost complete destruction of the city, killing thousands of the Polish intelligentsia? It is certain that we shall never gain unambiguous answers to these questions. Let it be remarked that the literature devoted to the Warsaw Uprising is very rich and interesting; still, studies on this issue are published more or less regularly. Polish historians, understandably, are in the lead; let us enumerate Władysław Bartoszewski, Andrzej-Krzysztof Kunert, or Jan Ostaszewski. Foreign-language counterpart literary output is very meagre, though; the Uprising does not enjoy much interest among foreign historians. The reasons are partly political; moreover, the Uprising has been unsatisfactorily ‘promoted’ outside Poland. Some animation in this respect has been observable recently: Norman Davies had his monumental work on the Uprising published six years ago; the book won acclaim amongst Polish as well as foreign readers. More recently, Nikolai Ivanov’s book titled *The Warsaw Uprising seen from Moscow’s perspective* was issued.

Ivanov has been considering writing a book on the Polish effort for a number of years. His assumption was to prepare a monograph intended, as he admitted, “for Soviet people who had to have everything explained and clarified from the scratch [...], breaking the silence around the rising that is part of our shared history”. The Russian people’s knowledge on the 1944 incidents taking place in the Polish capital town is much unsatisfactory. The opinion on the Uprising formed in the Soviet times, whereby a German counteroffensive stopped in August 1944 the Red Army approaching Warsaw, and thus prevented it from supporting the Poles, has remained commonplace to date. What is more, responsibility for the defeat of the Uprising and for the killing of civilians has been charged against the Polish (London-based) Government-in-Exile and the Home Army.

Mr. Ivanov has resolved to challenge this myth, rooted very strongly in the Russian consciousness. In his opinion, the withholding of the Soviet troops' offensive on Warsaw was a well-calculated political manoeuvre; any alleged military 'difficulties' were of no decisive importance to it. This author has reached for hitherto-unknown documents of relevance, stored in Moscow archives, explaining on their basis why the 1st Belarusian Front commanded by Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky stopped at the foreground of Warsaw, refraining from marching into it when the fighting was going on. On the other hand, Ivanov clearly points out that the most important document – Stalin's written order for the Red Army to withhold its offensive on Warsaw – has not been found till present. Mr. Ivanov supposes that, in a probability, no such document has ever been made – and it actually would be awkward to disagree with him. An argument possibly speaking in favour of this hypothesis is the fact that Stalin's authority was so enormous at the time that he did not have to pass any single command or order in writing. One telephone call to the Front commander could indeed have sufficed to order him to withhold the troops on the bank of the Vistula.

The Russian historian starts his considerations from a presentation of the Polish-Soviet relations on the eve of World War 2. The Bolshevik propaganda defined Poland and the Poles as "instruments in the hands of international imperialism". In the USSR, warnings were expressed against a threat from Poland to knock down the communism, it was said. After the coup d'état in May 1926 and the seizure of power by the Józef Piłsudski fraction, Poland started being described in the Soviet Union as a fascist state. The 1930s saw Poles inhabiting the USSR territory being subject to persecutions and repressive measures – the fact clearly highlighted by Mr. Ivanov. Polish communists, daydreaming of having Poland turned into yet another Soviet republic, fell victims to those repressions and persecutions as well.

As we go on, the author quotes the arguments used to justify the Soviet aggression on Poland of 17th September 1939. On the part of USSR, this act meant a breach of the Polish-Soviet non-aggression treaty of 1932; moreover, no declaration of war was made prior thereto. Stalin said later on that "disappearance of Poland from the map of Europe is implied by a historical necessity, in which the Poles have proved incapable of self-determination". Polish people living in the eastern lands of the Second Republic, the territory whereto the Soviet occupation extended, were persecuted and deported deeper into the Soviet Union. The areas taken over by the USSR were de-Polonised: the Polish element was meant to disappear from those lands once for ever. The soldiers were treated with extreme ruthlessness: thousands of Polish army officers were shot in spring 1940 by Stalin's order.

As Ivanov emphasises, the lot of Red Army officers killed in 1937 as part of the so-called 'great cleansing' was similar. Stalin used this method to get rid of his internal opposition, but the side effect was depriving the Soviet army of an experienced commanding team.

The consequences of this crime surfaced very soon. In the summer of 1941, the Third Reich attacked the Soviet Union, thus breaching the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. The Red Army, decapitated, proved incapable of efficiently resisting the German warfare machinery. The Wehrmacht penetrated deeper and deeper into the enemy's territory, day by day, approaching Moscow inevitably. The Kremlin crew were looking for ways to reverse this adverse course of events. Ivanov suggests that in those critical moments, the Soviet leadership team decided to make use of the Poles. Lavrentiy Beria, head of the NKVD, was ordered by Stalin to renew Polish communist structures which would in a future join the USSR in its fight against the Third Reich. These structures would be staffed with members of the Communist Party of Poland who had survived the thirties' pogroms. Polish officers who avoided being shot in spring 1940 took the lead of the Polish army which was getting formed. The core of this army consisted of displaced Polish people who saw themselves within the USSR after 17th September 1939. As Ivanov remarks, the Kremlin absolutely did not take into account any option to enter into cooperation with the 'London Poland'. Stalin was namely willing to pursue his own concept of communising Poland, the Polish London-based government being a hindrance to the project.

Further on, Ivanov explains why the Soviet dictator passed his death-penalty verdict on the officers shot in 1940 and subsequently, on those left to themselves in 1944, in their fight against a stronger enemy. In his opinion, the Poles shared the fate of the Russian intelligentsia and of all of those whose attitude towards the Bolsheviks was other than favourable. In Katyn and then, in Warsaw, foes of communism were eliminated, who otherwise would efficiently thwarted the imposition of a peer political system in Poland. It was on Kremlin's command that Poles were murdered by the 'Soviet *soldats*' in Katyn, Kharkov, and Mednoe, whereas in the summer and autumn of 1944, the Soviets were relieved to this end by the Germans.

Ivanov did not evade making a reference to how Kremlin-based rulers were impressed by the information of the outbreak of the 'Tempest' Action, triggered by the Polish Independence Underground. The Poles were then caught between Scylla and Charybdis: fighting with the Germans on the one hand, they wanted to avoid the rather real option of their country getting Sovietised, on the other.

A broad analysis has been offered regarding the Red Army's attitude toward the ongoing Warsaw Uprising. Basing on the archival resources, Ivanov argues that the Red Army's prevalence was sufficiently considerable to defeat the Germans and to liberate the Polish capital. The 1st Belarussian Front commanders prepared a plan for attacking the city. Although Stalin consented for an attack of the Polish 1st Army, General Zygmunt Berling's soldiers, with modest forces at their disposal, were shortly afterwards forced to retreat. The attack of Gen. Berling's troops was conceived as a propaganda, rather than military, action. The Western Allied Forces could no more charge the Red Army with remaining inactive, or indifferent, toward

the fighting city. The explanation was at hand whereby attempts at helping had been made but the enemy strongly resisted and the units hastening to rescue the insurgents had to be withdrawn.

Ivanov remarks that Polish communists affiliated to the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN), organising a government which was to take power in Poland, demanded from Stalin, with increasing strength, that assistance be provided for Warsaw. Polish Workers' Party (PPR) activists said that "rescuing the capital of Poland from annihilation shall enhance the prestige of the USSR and its army in the Polish society's perception, whilst weakening the influence of the London camp, responsible for the outbreak of the rising, and reinforcing the influence of PKWN". Yet, Stalin remained deaf to these appeals; his strife was to subject the Polish communists to himself to a largest extent possible, if not to incapacitate them.

The book's third section shows the Kremlin's attitude toward the occurrences taking place in Warsaw. Once it became preordained that Poland would be part of the Soviet influence zone when the war is over, the shape to be assumed by the future state became the object of consideration. The author presents several possible scenarios for the Polish political system, including a Finlandisation – the option to create a coalition government friendly to the USSR and only partly subservient to Moscow. To my mind, this is a utopian hypothesis. Anyone being well-versed in the history of the Polish-Russian and, later on, Polish-Soviet relations would keep a distance with respect to such a hypothesis; knowing the character of the Polish nation, a 'liberal' system of this sort would contribute to Poland coming into its own within a short time. Stalin placed a bet on something completely different, though. This question ought naturally to be subject to discussion, calling for a more widespread research.

The final part of the book presents the Russian and Soviet historiography devoted to the Warsaw Uprising. A single myth speaks out of these publications, repeated till this very day, claiming that the Uprising was provoked by a 'group of blusterers' who strove to achieve their political objectives at the expense of enormous casualties among the Warsaw population.

Ivanov goes on to state that "the entire contemporary Russian historiography has a shared trait in that it depreciates the role and importance of the Warsaw Uprising in the history of the Polish nation's combat with the Nazis and marginalises its military significance".

Ivanov concludes his book with the following statement: "The crime against the Warsaw Uprising was the crime against the Polish nation as well as against the Russian nation. There was no human court to judge this, but the tribunal of history judging Stalin and his milieu is inevitable." The author hopes that over the years to come, the Russians will make available the still-unknown archival resources which would

reveal new facts concerning Poland during WW2. The truth about the Warsaw Uprising, as well as the Katyn crime, will consequently be explained.

To recap, Nikolai Ivanov has admittedly posed a tough task for himself. To deliver his intent, he had to overcome the barriers caused by scarcity of sufficient sources; yet, he has successfully accomplished what he assumed in the introduction to be his goal. He has proved that the Warsaw Uprising came out as a 'gift' for Stalin, which enabled the Russian satrap to fulfil his daydream of subjecting Poland to himself and to communise it. In meeting this end, he manifested a great barbarism and cruelty. *The Warsaw Uprising seen from Moscow's perspective* is an absorbing and exciting piece of reading, bringing forth a number of hitherto-unknown facts related to the games Stalin carried out. The book shows how many questions or issues still remain unexplained.

N. Ivanov's work is enthralling; the judgements, opinions and facts it comes forth with are well thought-over and legitimate. The style of this book is very vivid and transparent. Still, the author has happened to make a few errors. The controversial order of Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły, telling his soldiers to refrain from fighting against the Soviets, was issued not in August (p. 68) but, in fact, as of 17th September 1939, after the Red Army invaded the eastern territory of 2nd Republic. Ivanov uses the title 'Generalissimus' while talking of year-1944 incidents (p. 77) – the fact being that Stalin began using this title in spring 1945. The book does not specify the bibliography the author used while preparing it, which should be considered a deficiency.

Still, these critical remarks do not at all diminish the value of the work under review, which is an interesting item in the extensive literature on the Warsaw Uprising – all the more significant that its author is Russian.