

28.01.2009

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In re: Your article about Raoul Wallenberg  
in "Vremya" of January 19, 2009

Dear Vasily Stepanovich,

All of us, as former members and consultants to the Russian-Swedish Working Group, were very pleased to read your thorough and very interesting article about the many puzzling questions that still remain in the case of the missing Swedish diplomat Raoul Gustaf Wallenberg. We believe your outline of some of the key issues that remain unresolved will help researchers such as ourselves to formulate incisive questions that can be followed up further in Russian archives. We welcome your article also because it provides an opportunity for a more direct exchange of views.

One of the central problems in establishing all the facts of Wallenberg's imprisonment in the Soviet Union, including the main question 'What happened to him?' once his trail breaks off in the Spring of 1947, is, as you stress, the problem of missing documents. But your article also helps us to identify areas of research where progress may well be possible.

For example, you raise the as yet unresolved question of why Raoul Wallenberg held such great interest for Stalin. You describe in some detail the prevailing conditions in Budapest in 1944/45, the time of Raoul Wallenberg's arrest. Some years ago, Igor Prelin, a leading official in the KGB Press Office in the 1990's and one-time spokesperson for former KGB Chief Vladimir Kryuchkov, stated in an interview with German Television (ZDF, 1997) that he and his colleagues conducted a thorough review of Russian intelligence files, especially as they concerned the activities and reports of Soviet agents in Hungary, before the Russian-Swedish Working Group began its work in 1991. As you point out, this is some of the material that remains classified in Russian archives. One of the best examples is the file for NKGB agent Mikhail Tolstoy-Kutusov, who worked at the Swedish Legation in Budapest in 1944. This documentation would not only provide factual information about the work and associations of Raoul Wallenberg and of the Swedish Legation but would give researchers important insights into why exactly Soviet intelligence scrutinized Wallenberg so closely. Similar reports should exist from the Soviet security agents who operated in Stockholm before and after Raoul Wallenberg's disappearance. All these reports took their path through the Soviet administrative system, with detailed notations about their distribution written on the pages. These notations could provide important clues about how and by whom the Wallenberg case was handled at different times. So far, researchers have not been allowed to review any of this documentation.

Another example is the genesis of one of the most important documents in the Raoul Wallenberg case, the so-called Gromyko Memorandum, in which former Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko on February 6, 1957, announced to the world that Wallenberg was dead. This assertion was based on a single document, a note presumed to have been written by Lubyanka's prison doctor, A.L. Smoltsov, stating that Raoul Wallenberg succumbed to a heart attack in Moscow on July 17, 1947. However, important questions persist about the health and employment status of Dr. Smoltsov in 1947. It has been noted that he was in fact on medical leave from his post in the summer of 1947. This issue needs to be clarified through Soviet administrative records.

Also, you show in some detail that there were several versions of the Gromyko memorandum under consideration by Soviet officials before they settled on the format released in February 1957. The two year period of preparation of this document is important in many ways. Parallel to the discussions, there were secret, behind-the-scenes contacts between Russian and Swedish officials, conducted through the KGB Chief in Ankara, Pavel Erzine (later head of Lumumba University) and a Finnish diplomat with close ties to the Swedish Foreign Office, Åke Frey. Boris Podtserob, head of Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov's Secretariat, also played an important role. These talks spanned the time from 1955-1957 and were broken off only days before the release of the Gromyko memorandum. The Swedish Working Group tried to address this issue repeatedly with its Russian counterparts. Yet, only a few documents about these talks have been released, and none from Soviet intelligence archives. It could be most helpful for researchers to review this documentation, because it would help clarify the intentions and thinking of the Soviet leadership during this crucial period. Of considerable concern in this regard is the attempted silencing in the year 1956 of a man named "Shiryagin" who wrote to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID), claiming to possess important information about Raoul Wallenberg. Documentation from MID shows that it sent a request to the KGB in order to prevent word of the witness leaking out to Swedish authorities. Despite repeated requests, no documentation concerning either the man or his testimony has been released by Russian archives.

When it comes to the question of what happened to Raoul Wallenberg after the Spring of 1947, you write that "archival documents show that Raoul Wallenberg died in 1947." Aside from the still controversial Gromyko memorandum, on what other "archival documentation" do you base this statement? You also write that while Soviet drafts of the Gromyko memorandum claim that Raoul Wallenberg may have been held in Butyrka prison, he was never imprisoned there. Can it be proven that he was never there, under his own name, a number or a pseudonym? Or, that Wallenberg was never sent to Butyrka for medical reasons? Several witnesses have testified that they knew of Wallenberg's transfer to Butyrka in 1950/51 and others reported that Soviet guards in Butyrka spoke of the presence of "a Swedish diplomat". We have repeatedly requested copies of prisoner transfer registers for Butyrka, particularly for March 31 and April 1, 1950, but have not received a satisfactory answer.

For these issues, too, we see quite a number of opportunities to advance our inquiry, even when faced with many missing documents. For one, as you write, there were several members of the Soviet leadership who clearly had direct knowledge or some very detailed understanding of Raoul Wallenberg's fate, such as the former KGB Chief Ivan Serov and the Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. You mention Serov's possible central role in the destruction of documents during the mid-1950's. However, there are other indications that Serov in fact acted to set aside important records in the Wallenberg case. In his recent biography of the former KGB Director, historian Nikita Petrov relates his discovery of a document which shows that Serov specifically requested that the file of Wallenberg's long time cellmate in Lefortovo prison (from 1945-1947) Willi Rödel was not to be destroyed but to be preserved. Willi Rödel's file is of course of central importance to any inquiry about Raoul Wallenberg. The Russian Working Group presented copies of documents concerning Willi Rödel, such as his prisoner card, death certificate and autopsy report. The Swedish side was never allowed to review the documentation in its original form or study the file in which these documents had supposedly been discovered.

We have also not received any information about Vilmos Langfelder's cellmate, Sandor Katona. Even if his personal and investigative files cannot be located, some additional information about this man's imprisonment must exist among the meticulous records kept by the Soviet security services. Katona's name appears repeatedly in the prisoner interrogation and transfer registers of Lefortovo prison. On

July 23, 1947, he was moved together with Vilmos Langfelder from Lefortovo to the Lubyanka prison. Both men were then interrogated for 14 straight hours. July 22/23 marks the time when most of Raoul Wallenberg's former cellmates were questioned and subsequently placed in isolation, in many cases for years afterwards. Any information about Willi Rödel, Vilmos Langfelder and Sandor Katona would undoubtedly help researchers fill in important pieces of the puzzle of that most important time in the Wallenberg case.

There could be other helpful approaches. You mention the American Isaiah Oggins whose case bears some parallels to that of Raoul Wallenberg. MGB Minister Viktor Abakumov suggested to Stalin on July 17, 1947 - the day of Raoul Wallenberg's alleged death - that Oggins be liquidated and the U.S government be informed that he had died of tuberculosis in Norilsk. Yet, researchers have been told by Russian authorities that Oggins was actually transferred from Moscow in late 1946 to the Internal Prison in Penza. His death certificate indicates that he died there in January, 1948. It would be most helpful for researchers to review all documentation regarding Oggins' transfer to Penza as well as all documentation about the cause and date of death, because of the alleged analogy Russian authorities have tried to establish with the Wallenberg case.

Similarly, it should be possible for researchers to review a number of prisoner files, some of which we began to review in the Russian-Swedish Working Group. Many, however, have remained off limits. This includes the investigative file and other still classified documents for a Latvian prisoner named Zigurds Ernestovich Kruminsh who was held in Vladimir prison from 1956-1963. Kruminsh is the source of several reports of an as yet unidentified, secret Swedish prisoner in Vladimir during that time. A full and unhindered review of Kruminsh's file would allow researchers the opportunity to establish with whom Kruminsh had contact during his captivity in Vladimir. Even simpler, Russian authorities could identify the prisoners held in severe isolation, as reported not only by Kruminsh but also by two former employees of the Vladimir prison, Varvara Ivanovna Larina and Alexander Timofeyevich Kukin. Just as important is that Russian authorities finally provide the identity of all sentenced numbered prisoners in Vladimir for critical times. This request has been pending since 2001. Researchers also urgently require access to transportation records for prisoner transfers in and out of Vladimir for the years from 1950 and beyond that remain currently classified, including any special lists that exist for transports to psychiatric hospitals. We also need to review the so-called "Korpus cards" as well as the registers of the "Korpus Warden" for each of the separate sections of Vladimir prison (Korpus I, II, III, and IV) that would help establish the presence of specific individuals for different years.

In this connection, it would also be enormously helpful if Russia released a complete list of all Swedish prisoners held in Vladimir prison in the period of 1947-1975. MGB/KGB and MVD kept detailed records about all prisoners, especially foreign nationals. Such a list could in and of itself address the very important question of whether testimonies about a Swedish diplomat in Vladimir prison refer indeed to Raoul Wallenberg or whether they could possibly refer to another Swede.

In 1961, Swedish physician Professor Nanna Svartz reported to Swedish authorities that a Soviet colleague, the renowned heart specialist Professor Alexander Myasnikov, had told her that he not only was familiar with Raoul Wallenberg but that he knew him to be alive at that moment. Professor Myasnikov later stated that Dr. Svartz had misconstrued or simply misunderstood his remarks. The Svartz/Myasnikov controversy festered until 1965 (when Professor Myasnikov died) and was repeatedly discussed at the highest levels of the Soviet Union's decision making bodies, the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Politburo. The full documentation on this issue has never been presented by Russian authorities. With this documentation it should be fairly easy to establish

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whether Professor Svartz was indeed mistaken or not. It would help lay to rest a major controversy in the case.

Since the end of the Russian-Swedish Working Group in January 2001, we have presented a number of follow-up questions to the Russian side, as they have emerged from continuing research. We have received some very helpful answers, although often with long delays. Over time, we have been able to outline a precise, concrete set of questions. Answers to these questions could undoubtedly move the Wallenberg case significantly forward. As you state in your article, the question of Raoul Wallenberg's fate is not yet a closed chapter, and we should try to explore all reasonable options to establish what happened to this truly exceptional man.

We look forward to our continued dialogue.

Yours sincerely,

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and maternal half-brother of Raoul Wallenberg

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