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Russia Claims Soviet Army 'Liberated,' Not Invaded, Poland During WWII

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Soviet Red Army entering the Polish city of Wilno (Vilnius). **Imperial War Museums**

Russia's Foreign Ministry claimed Friday that the Soviet invasion of Poland during World War II was an act of liberation, reanimating a years-old debate over a secret Hitler-Stalin pact to carve up Eastern Europe between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

"On Sept. 17, 1939, the Red Army began a liberation campaign on the territory of Poland," it tweeted, noting that it prevented Nazi forces from invading Soviet Belarus.

"The peoples of western Belarus and western Ukraine greeted the Soviet soldiers with jubilation," the ministry said, eliciting angry responses from users.

The claim echoes Moscow's stance over the Soviet occupation of Polish territory two weeks after the Nazi invasion of Poland and mutual recriminations with Warsaw over who started World War II.

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Russia disagrees with its former satellite states over Stalin's role in World War II for signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Hitler, which divided Eastern Europe into the powers' spheres of influence.

President Vladimir Putin has in recent years blamed Poland for the outbreak of the war, which is referred to as the Great Patriotic War in Russia, and rejected assertions that Stalin and Hitler were equally to blame for the war.

Addressing the European Parliament's resolution blaming the 1939 Soviet-Nazi Molotov-Ribbentrop pact for the outbreak of war, Putin has claimed that Western powers' own dealings with Hitler had led to the war.

Amid accusations that Russia is downplaying Stalin's crimes while promoting his legacy under Putin's 20-year rule, lawmakers passed legislation this year banning Soviet-Nazi comparisons.

The Soviet Union claimed responsibility in 1990 for the 1940 murders of nearly 22,000 Polish officers in what became known as the Katyn massacre.

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