

# Why is the US silent on 'double genocide'?

Sunday 21 October 2018, by [KATZ Dovid](#) (Date first published: 10 December 2010).

## **While European countries have condemned the new Holocaust revisionism in the Baltics, America shows no moral leadership**

Some years ago, the then American ambassador here in Vilnius, [Lithuania](#), said to me with a brotherly wink over lunch:

*"Looks to me, Dovid, that you're the old New York liberal type. Well, it so happens I'm a lifelong Republican. And I want you to know this. I've been tough on communism, the Soviet Union and Russia all my life, so I have no problem telling our new partners here in the Baltics where to get off when they try to use Soviet crimes as an excuse for [Holocaust](#) denial or antisemitism or whacky nationalism."*

Fast forward to here and now. A weird set of rumours has been making the diplomatic rounds. It goes something like this. When the new Obama administration decided to cancel those missile interceptors in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic, a number of east European governments felt painfully betrayed (even though Russian president Dmitry Medvedev quickly responded with cancellation of his retaliatory plans for placing missiles in Kaliningrad, and you might have thought folks would be happier living without missiles on both sides). The feeling of betrayal has now reached a more feverish pitch with the US administration's ongoing efforts, aiming for a [climax this week in Washington, to pass the new Start treaty](#) with Russia, which would inevitably ease east-west tensions.

Well, that much, though somewhat curious, actually has its logic for countries that had been under Soviet domination for nearly half a century, and have developed a geostrategic policy of discouraging east-west rapprochement on the grounds that it would tacitly encourage Russia to make mischief in its former stomping grounds, especially the Baltics. These three states - Lithuania, Latvia and [Estonia](#) - are the crux of the matter, because they had actually been made part of the Soviet Union by force (not even allowed to maintain satellite status like Poland, Hungary and other east-central European states).

Then, in our own century, it was not a small blow to the Russian Bear's ego that countries that were actually part of the USSR joined Nato (some call it "loser's syndrome"), and this, in turn, has led to Baltic fears of renewed trouble on the eastern front. The smaller Nato states on Russia's periphery, whether formerly of the USSR or not, have every moral right to insist that [Nato](#) and the west stand by them firmly, and their history of occupation by large powers justifies both measured fear and prudent vigilance.

So, yes, one result of the fear has been the campaign by some new accession states in eastern Europe to prevent further normalisation of relations between the west and today's Russia. [The Economist](#), referring to one of many episodes in EU-Russian relations, put it this way back in 2008: "Whether it was brave or clumsy depends on your point of view. But Lithuania (population 3.5m) has nudged the European Union (population 500m) into a slightly tougher stance towards Russia."

But now comes the truly strange part, and the point where things lapse into the unjustifiable. Whether it's from the US or the EU, [one of the major "concessions" the Baltics want](#) from the west is acquiescence to a revised and falsified history of the second world war that would, in effect, write the Holocaust out of history as distinct category and concept (without denying a single death), replacing it with a new model of "double genocide" (a topic discussed, inter alia, here by [Timothy Snyder](#), [Efraim Zuroff](#) and [myself](#), among others). According to that model, Nazi and Soviet crimes were, in principle, "equal". This was a particularly attractive game for the Baltics, where the percentage of Jewish citizens killed was the highest in Holocaust-era Europe (around 95%). A new model that obfuscates it away with an array of tricks – from legal redefinition of "genocide" by Baltic parliaments to encompass virtually all Soviet crimes, to the kangaroo investigations by Lithuanian prosecutors against Holocaust survivors, for unknown and unstated "war crimes". The motive behind that one was to generate a paper trail of "equal investigation" to pave the way for what is known in Orwellian Eurospeak as the "equal evaluation of totalitarian regimes".

And that takes us to the confluence of three powerful motivating factors that help explain why, of all things, the Baltic states, where young people are tolerantly looking outward and forward and have little interest in falsifying history, would be so geostrategically interested in western "concessions" on a point that you would think is of interest only to historians and others who actually specialise in the past. Factor number one is ultra-nationalism, which includes the hallucination of a perfect history of sainthood and victimhood, and leaves no room for acknowledgment that stains actually sully all our countries' past.

Second is the idea that "double genocide" thesis can become an effective tool against today's and tomorrow's Russia. If, indeed, Soviet crimes were the same as Hitler's, and if, indeed, Russia is the sole unilinear successor state, well, then two plus two equals four: today's [Russia](#) should start dishing out reparations, doing longtime national penance as a pariah, and spend the next half-century eschewing any kind of assertive global stance.

The third factor is good old antisemitism and racism. The sophisticated new double genocide theory has its roots in the Holocaust-era canard that the Jews are all communists and get what they deserve. Communism is thought of as a Jewish plot, Russian people considered inherently evil, and the age-old human device of simply turning the tables comes into play, fortified by high-grade Euro-terminology. Nowhere is this more evident than in the east European museums, monuments and textbooks that glorify local Holocaust collaborators and actual killers (in the Baltics, most of the actual killing was carried out by local volunteers who were also "anti-Soviet").

Of course, it is inherently disturbing that the west could silently stand by as the noble resistance of the wartime allies against Nazism is slowly but surely rubbished into part of a mushy "two equal genocides" scenario, which is frankly a coverup for east European collaboration with the Nazis in their successful plan to exterminate the Jewish citizenry in their countries. Beyond the need for America and its allies to remain forever proud of the fight against Hitler, to combat racism and antisemitism wherever they rear their ugly heads, there are some tangible red lines worth fighting for.

First, democracy. If certain east European states that are part of the western alliance continue their slide away from democracy and toward a new rightwing extremism, then the whole purpose of Nato is undermined, and the peoples of these countries are, in fact, betrayed. In both Hungary and Lithuania, rightwing governments have, in 2010, passed laws that criminalise and threaten imprisonment (two years in Lithuania, three in Hungary) for anyone who, in effect, disagrees with double genocide and thinks the Holocaust was the unique genocide in this part of the world. The laws are framed in terms of denial or mitigation of either "genocide" warranting prosecution and imprisonment. Even if nobody is ever prosecuted, the intimidation of free debate is already woefully

evident. The peoples of Nato's "far east" deserve the same democratic standards as those anywhere else.

A second, wider concern is state-sponsored export of the revisionist double genocide history that seeks to make it the standard in the west. It has made some inroads, because even small states that decide to invest national treasure in "changing history" can toss budgets in that direction, give royal welcomes and honours to naive westerners, sponsor biased research and cleverly push through resolutions abroad when people are busy with many other things and looking the other way.

Hardly anybody noticed when [the Prague Declaration was proclaimed](#) by nationalist politicians from the eastern EU in June 2008. It insisted that Nazism and Communism be accepted by Europe as a "common legacy", demanded a Nuremberg grade trial for communists, a single day of commemoration for victims of both (which would inevitably replace Holocaust Remembrance Day), and, last but not least, the "overhaul" of European textbooks to reflect the far right's version of second world war history. The movement received a major boost in April 2009, with a European Parliament resolution favouring the proposed single day of joint red-and-brown remembrance. At least the [European Commission now seems alert](#) to the dangers inherent in such moves.

That brings us to the unfortunate shift in American foreign policy that has, for one reason or another, coincided with the shift in administrations in Washington. Whether or not the series of rumours reported at the outset is accurate or not, facts speak louder than rumours.

Back in 2008, the United States was still the loyal ally of Holocaust survivors everywhere, including Lithuania. When accusations began to surface that year here in Vilnius against a survivor in her late 80s, Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky, who is alive because she escaped the Vilna Ghetto to join the anti-Nazi partisans in the forests, the American ambassador of the day was quick to [issue her a certificate of appreciation](#), on 30 April 2008, in a deeply moving show of solidarity. It was probably the first time in eastern Europe, since Soviet days, that a western embassy had so honoured a person whose good name was, at the same time, being trashed by the state, national media and prosecutors. Later that year, in the same spirit, the US embassy was one of nine [to send a letter of support to Dr Rachel Margolis](#), the second anti-Nazi heroine targeted by Lithuanian prosecutors, who still feels unable to return to Lithuania for fear of harassment by authorities.

But something changed in 2009. When the eastern European "double genociders" slipped in lines about Nazi and Soviet genocide, and the single "Europe-wide day of remembrance for victims of Stalinism and Nazism", into the [OSCE's Vilnius Declaration](#) of 3 July 2009, the United States, alas, signed on, too. Had the US state department consulted with local Jewish and other minority communities in the region, it would have known that this is the new code for double genocide, Holocaust obfuscation and the special brand of east European antisemitism. This US signature was all the more disappointing when the outrageous "investigations" against Holocaust survivors were not dropped.

Again in 2009, the American embassy in Vilnius began to plan for a Holocaust studies conference, whose [funding application](#) indicated wide and inclusive participation. But when the funding came through, and the conference was actually held, less than one month ago, the Jewish community and potential foreign partners who would present critical evaluations of Baltic educational policies on the Holocaust were shut out. The de facto local partners were state-sponsored organisations that support the double genocide model, not only locally, but in international organisations. Objections were voiced by [Lithuanian Holocaust survivors](#) and the [Simon Wiesenthal Centre](#). (My report on the conference [here](#).)

Both the [American embassy in Vilnius](#) and President Obama's [special envoy on antisemitism](#) have

been taken to task in 2010 by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre for praising Lithuanian politicians for fighting antisemitism – during an actual upturn in state-sponsored antisemitism – as if there were two parallel planets, one a mirror opposite of the true one.

The eerie American silence throughout a vintage year for antisemitism is disquieting: 2010 is not quite over, and already there has been [in Lithuania a neo-Nazi parade](#), the permit for which was taken out by a member of parliament; a [court ruling permitting public swastikas](#) on the grounds they are “Lithuania’s historical heritage rather than symbols of Nazi Germany”; an incredible [antisemitic outburst by the foreign minister](#), claiming that the Jews are secretly behind proposals in parliament to reform citizenship laws (he is still the foreign minister). The US’ public silence contrasted poignantly with [the courageous statement](#) issued by the tiny remnant Jewish community of Lithuania.

After an Lithuanian interior ministry “specialist” published an article proclaiming the Holocaust to be a “legend” (he, at least, has since resigned), [seven European ambassadors](#), from Britain, Estonia (this one a truly delightful surprise!), Finland, France, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden issued a bold letter of protest. The next day, the [Polish ambassador published his own rejoinder](#) in the very magazine where the offending article had appeared. But from America, total silence – excruciatingly painful for the tiny survivor community, as if there was some secret geostrategic reason why American cannot join those nations of Europe who still speak out against antisemitism and Holocaust revisionism.

That letter from the seven European ambassadors, issued last month, included a historic sentence:

*“Spurious attempts are made to equate the uniquely evil genocide of the Jews with Soviet crimes against Lithuania, which, though great in magnitude, cannot be regarded as equivalent in either their intention or result.”*

Last week, came another assault on historic truth of the Holocaust. Six east European countries – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania – [signed a joint demand](#) that Europe’s new [“Stockholm Programme”](#) include not only sentiments of double genocide regarding the second world war, but also a demand for effective criminalisation of opposing points of view. The road from the Prague Declaration to the Stockholm Programme is being paved with crafty apologetics for the old fascism, in the face of an inexplicable and unaccustomed silence from Washington.

The force of America’s moral voice is more necessary than ever in these times and places, when far-right revisionism, antisemitism and racism have learned to pose as centrist, and to abuse east-west politics to further their unholy agendas. Where on earth is the United States of America?

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**Dovid Katz**

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