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Jewish Warfare and the Participation of Jews in Combat in the Soviet Union as Reflected in Soviet and Western Historiography

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The dualist language of the title obliges us first of all to define the distinction between "Jewish warfare" and "the participation of Jews in combat." The fighting of Jews in the ghettos, in Jewish partisan units, in the Jewish Brigade, and the like is certainly to be understood as "Jewish warfare," since all the combatants in these units were Jews, their conduct stemmed from their identification as such, and it drew its impetus from the distinctive Jewish fate and the singular situation in which the Jewish communities found themselves during the Nazi occupation. The difficulty arises in attempting to categorize the actions of the hundreds of thousands of Jewish soldiers who engaged in combat alongside the masses of soldiers of other nationalities. Although the combatants in this case were likewise Jews, we must ask ourselves whether we can regard their fighting as a peculiarly Jewish endeavor. Can it be considered specifically *Jewish* warfare, or was it essentially the participation of Jews in combat?

In order to draw the thin line between these two categories, we must examine the motivation behind the fighting, for, in this context, motive was the decisive criterion. This same distinction must be applied not only to the Jews fighting in the ranks of the Red Army and partisan units in the Soviet Union, but also in examining Soviet and Western historiography on these topics. To

illustrate the essence of the distinction, let me cite one example of an act of valor credited to a Jew serving in the Red Army.

On April 25, 1945, in the bitter battle fought by the Red Army near Breslau (Wrocław, Poland) Josef Bumagin, a native of the Jewish town of Horodok and a resident of the city of Birobidzhan, blocked an embrasure of a German fort with his own body and, by his death, ensured a Russian victory in an important military action.¹ Bumagin took the motivation for his action with him to his grave, but for the historian there is significance to the question of whether his bold move derived from his Soviet education, his loyalty to the Communist Party (of which he had been a member since 1932), or from his Jewish education and a desire to avenge the deaths of his relatives who had been brutally murdered in the cities and towns of Belorussia. Then again, perhaps it was the attitude of contempt toward the Jews in his unit—as in so many other units—or the allegation that a Jew is incapable of self-sacrifice that drove Josef Bumagin and others like him to act as they did.

One's Jewish identity sometimes took pride of place in the constellation of factors to be weighed by junior officers and even individual enlisted men in making fateful decisions. Thus, we know of many cases, for example, in which a small unit found itself surrounded by the enemy and most of its soldiers saw no choice but to surrender and be taken prisoner. Often, it was the Jewish soldier who vigorously objected to this decision because he knew that as a Jew his fate would differ from that of the rest, especially since his comrades-in-arms might well inform their captors of his identity. To the degree that this and similar motives dictated the behavior of the Jewish fighter, his actions should be regarded as *Jewish warfare*. It goes without saying that many motives coexist in any given situation, but this does not release the historian from the duty to trace the motives peculiar to the Jewish fighter.

In turning to a review of Soviet and Western historiography we must adopt different criteria. For in Western countries, historiography can be viewed as the sum total of the studies and works written on the subject. Most of these studies are the product of the creative efforts of scholars. And while scholars obviously are not wholly detached from the worldview, mood, and outlook of the society in which they live, their first duty is to intellectual and scientific honesty. That, in turn, obliges them to contend with the material at hand in an honest attempt to breathe life into the information by viewing the historical event from a variety of standpoints and drawing conclusions based upon the facts.

These aims were not similarly incumbent upon Soviet historians, however. Soviet historiography was by definition Marxist historiography, that is, guided *a priori* by an immutable outlook that explains the events under examination, essentially the diametric opposite of what is acceptable in the West. Naturally, one can claim that there is nothing particularly remarkable about historians adopting a specific approach to their subject, but that is on condition that they strive to examine it as objectively as possible and that the writing of history

serves as a vehicle for grappling with competing worldviews, ideologies, and political outlooks. This was not the case in the Soviet Union.

Even more detrimental to Soviet historiography were the pragmatic demands made upon the historian. In describing the science of Soviet historiography, the *Soviet Historical Encyclopaedia* of the 1960s explicitly stated that "the science of history in the Soviet Union has assumed a respected place among the social sciences, which are called upon to serve as an instrument for communist education of the workers."² This statement unequivocally declares that all the social sciences, including the writing of history, must fulfill a socio-educational purpose.

If that is the aim of writing history, then it is not historical truth which must be the scholar's prime concern. Rather the scholar is enlisted in the service of educational objectives by means of writing history. And because educational objectives for the masses were determined by the Communist Party—or, to put it differently, by the regime—in serving educational demands, the historian was essentially serving the political aims of the regime at any given moment. Considering these circumstances, it is justified to regard Soviet historiography in general, and the historiography of World War II in particular, as political writing. And from this standpoint it seems equally appropriate to regard the attention to or avoidance of Jewish subjects in Soviet historiography as an expression of the regime's stance on the Jewish question. Because all historical writing in the Soviet Union was governed by the solitary aim noted above, there are substantive grounds—at least insofar as the present subject is concerned—for including in the category of historical writing not only classic research based upon archival material, attended by scientific apparatus, and written in the cautious and meticulous language demanded of the scholar, but also such "borderline" literature as semipopular works, memoirs, and articles of various kinds.

Soviet historians, publicists, and memoirists had been raised on the precept that their writings must serve political-educational ends. In the course of writing, therefore, the material was sifted through a filter of self-censorship, a winnowing of the facts and events that were best ignored—in keeping with the general line pursued by the regime at any one time. Major works of scholarship—primarily collective ones—were deliberated once or more by the scholarly institutions that sponsored and produced them. During this process scholars and writers were told to avoid certain subjects and stress others. The final stage at which each publication was examined was that of official censorship, which followed the regime's explicit and secret directives. Hence, every work that reached us from the Soviet Union had undergone a series of inspections, from the writer's initial selection of subject (often no less important than the others) through official censorship. All these filters sharpened the political character of the historical works and "borderline cases" that we have included in our discussion. The earliest Soviet historiography on the fighting in World War II, in its broadest sense, dates to the war itself, when pamphlets and arti-

cles were published to extol the heroic acts of the Red Army and partisan fighters. Publications of this kind continued to appear during the latter half of the 1940s, and the subsequent period of the "thaw" saw a new wave of writing about World War II that touched on subjects and issues that had been taboo at the end of the Stalinist era.

The historical treatment of combat during World War II continued to expand in the subsequent decades to such an extent that it is difficult to survey it. Suffice it to say that by the middle of the 1970s, more than 9,000 books and pamphlets and some 6,000 articles in scholarly journals had been published about World War II in the Soviet Union—and that does not include belles lettres on the subject.³ Obviously it is all but impossible to address the full range of material, but it appears that we can classify it into six main categories.

1. Collections of documents (published in the form of special books or in historical journals) that generally comprised the directives of the Communist Party or other arms of the regime.⁴ This type of material, covering either the country as a whole or specific geographical areas, did not, and essentially could not, make direct or indirect reference to the Jews.

2. Collections of documents that included reports of combat units, whether of the Red Army or of the partisan movement. An example of this type of publication is the three volumes of documents of the partisan movement in Belorussia published in Minsk (in 10,000 copies) from 1967 to 1982.⁵ These collections make reference to at least 150 partisans whose names clearly indicate that they were Jewish. Although the nationality of the partisans is not explicitly stated, publications of this sort can certainly be regarded as primary evidence and a source for determining the exact dates of events. However, due to the biased attitude of many scholars who are convinced that Soviet publications contained no material relating to the Jews, this type of literature has not been sufficiently exploited—even though it is sometimes the only evidence available about specific events. Take, for example, the case of the following report by the commander of the Kirov Company of partisans dated June 16, 1943:

At three in the morning on June 9, 1943, Germans surrounded the village Vulka (7 kilometers from Luninets), removed 156 families, and transferred them to the Luninets ghetto. . . . On the evening of June 11, 1943, a group of partisans under the command of the political commissar A. Svitzov was sent to the city of Luninets to make contact with the members of the police . . . who were in touch with the [partisan] company and would liberate 150 families from the ghetto. The mission was carried out on the night of June 11/12, 1943; 127 families escaped and 28 remained in the ghetto.⁶

Although there is no question whatsoever that these families were Jewish, the officer who wrote the report did not identify them as such, for reasons best known to him. In the same way, the editors of the collection did not see fit to

cite this fact, so as not to highlight that the purpose of the partisan action was to rescue Jews. Hence we see how the Jewish element has been muted in publications of this sort, though it is not absent altogether.

3. Specific studies that focus on military, economic, and social analyses of the warfare of the Red Army and partisan units during the various stages of the Soviet-German war. These works all but ignored the Jews completely, though from time to time the names of outstanding Jewish officers received mention.

4. General works on the history of the Soviet Union or of certain geographic or administrative districts during World War II. The best-known of these works is a five-volume study entitled *The History of the Great Patriotic War*. Similar books exist for various republics; it is sufficient to cite the three-volume history, *The Ukrainian Soviet Republic in the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*. Publications of this type, which were of what the Soviets called a "popular-scientific" character, tried to recreate and explain the broader canvas of events in the country, or in a specific area, during a difficult or decisive period of the war.

The works that fall into the third and fourth categories are marked by a clear tendency to play down, though not entirely disregard, the role of Jews in the war against the Nazis. Thus, for example, the general history of the Ukraine during World War II notes that the Jew Yefim Fomin took part in the heroic defense of the fortress of Brest.⁷ In most cases, however, the names of the fighters are given without citing their nationality. Moreover, in order to obscure the role of Jews in the fighting, their first names and patronymics are given as initials—a system used by the tsarist authorities during World War I whenever Jews were mentioned in dispatches.

5. The prolific memoir literature, which includes reminiscences about World War II published by senior officers—commanders of fronts, armies, and the like—junior officers, and even enlisted men in both the army and partisan movement. Many Jewish fighters are cited in these works, although usually only in passing and without any emphasis on their distinctly Jewish character. In an Uzbek, Ukrainian, or Tartar account, for instance, the author usually hints at the nationality of his character (when he does not note it explicitly) by describing his house, his family, the foods he likes, and similar traits that point to a specific ethnic background. But in most of the memoirs, the Jew is devoid of any ethnic characteristics, and if his name does not specifically indicate his origin, it is difficult to draw that conclusion on the basis of any other evidence.

Of course, it can be argued that Soviet Jews, particularly the young men who fought in the ranks of the Red Army or in the German rear, no longer exhibited any uniquely Jewish traits, conduct, or responses, and therefore these did not find expression in the memoirs. But it is highly doubtful that a young Jew from Moscow or Leningrad was wanting in these differentiating ethnic traits, while any Jew who had recently left his *shtetl*—and there was no lack of such Jews in the ranks of the Red Army, to say nothing of the partisan movement—

was certainly distinguished by them. It would therefore appear that avoiding identifying Jews as such stemmed primarily from writers' understanding that it was best to play down the Jews as much as possible, and, as a result, they tried to steer clear of introducing "too many" Jewish characters into their works.

Within the context of this general approach, there were, of course, different interpretations of how far one could, and should, go in making reference to Jews. And where writers left off, censors often added their personal interpretations of what was permissible in these terms. Consequently, some memoirs feature more Jewish characters and others less, but the general trend is to mute this subject, though not shun it entirely.⁸

6. Collections about Heroes of the Soviet Union . . . that were published by almost all Soviet republics, many districts, and sometimes even by subdistricts. For the most part, these works are made up of short biographies and descriptions of the subjects' feats of heroism, usually composed by journalists or writers and occasionally by professional historians. They are based mostly on archival material and documents originally published in the press, but also on conversations and interviews with the fighters themselves or members of their families. These publications include entries on outstanding Jewish soldiers who were born or lived in the area covered by the work. Explicit reference to the subject's Jewish nationality is generally made—though this principle is not necessarily observed. The aim of these pieces is threefold: to honor the fighters, pay tribute to the residents of the area for their role in the war against the Nazis, and set an example for the younger generation. They provide a relatively large amount of information on outstanding Jewish soldiers.

Yet, here, too, little attention is paid to the specific motivations of the Jewish fighter, and the portrayal of his deeds is served up in classic Soviet clichés—a mixture of grandiloquent phrases and bombastic slogans. Other than the citation of his name and nationality, the Jewish fighter is usually devoid of any real national relationship or attachment—in contrast to the fighters of other peoples whose national origins often receive special emphasis.

Thus, an analysis of the basic categories of Soviet publications on the fighting in World War II indicates a clear tendency to play down the role of the Jews in the battles against the Nazis and to deliberately ignore the phenomenon of "Jewish warfare." The natural question is to what degree this trend was part of the general approach of the Soviet historiography of World War II, which tried to deemphasize nationalist aspects, and to what degree it was a qualification applied specifically to Jews.

The approach of Soviet historiography to the national background of fighters in the Red Army and the partisan movement during World War II is marked by a striking dichotomy. Out of a desire to stress the unity of all the peoples of the Soviet Union and the burden shared equally by the country's entire population, historians and other writers fell back on such phrases as the "warfare of the Soviet people," the "fighting of the Soviet people," the "fighters of the Soviet Union," and the like. Indeed, the reply of the Defense Min-

istry's Institute for Research on Military History to the approach of a group of Jews in September 1976 was entirely in keeping with this spirit. In the course of preparing for a symposium on Jewish culture, Soviet-Jewish activists turned to this official institution and asked whether it engaged in research on the role of the Jewish people in the war against fascist Germany. In response to this query, Nikolai Shekhovtsov, the deputy director of the institute, told the organizing group:

The Institute's publications bring the public information on the participation of the entire Soviet people in the Second World War without according a special role to any one people among the nationalities that populate the Soviet Union.⁹

This answer was not, in fact, incorrect, but it comprised only one facet of Soviet historiography. The other facet of that historiography, in the broadest sense of the term, was the desire to stoke the pride of the various Soviet peoples in their contribution to the war effort. In the service of this aim publications celebrating the role of the peoples of each republic, national district, and the like were produced. This division was not on a territorial, but rather on a national (ethnic) basis. One chapter of the three-volume history of Ukraine during World War II, for example, bears the title "The Contribution of the Ukrainian People to the Strengthening and Reinforcement of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union."¹⁰ More than a few scholarly articles were devoted to the contribution of various peoples to the war effort;¹¹ the roles of the Kirghiz,¹² the Belorussians,¹³ the Armenians,¹⁴ and other peoples even merited special books. The Georgian historians outdid themselves in publishing a work on the part played by the Georgian people in the liberation of Ukraine, in which a special chapter was devoted to the Georgians in the Ukrainian partisan movement and their participation in the liberation of the Crimea.¹⁵ All these publications related to the subjects on a national, not territorial, basis. All highlighted the second facet of the Soviet historiography of World War II, which stressed the contribution of the various peoples along essentially national lines.

Publications of this kind emphasized the fighters' loyalty not only to the Soviet Union but to their national groups. Thus, for example, Ukrainian fighters are portrayed as excelling in battle in order to avenge the damage done by the Nazis to Ukrainian cultural treasures. Yet, particularist explanations of this sort are completely lacking when it came to Jewish fighters. The deemphasis of the Jewish role in the war against the Nazis is all the more conspicuous against the background of this dichotomy in the Soviet historiography. For the most part, Jewish warfare per se was disregarded altogether.

Soviet historiography was designed to serve public and educational objectives. The idea of publishing documents and articles on the service of the Jews in the Red Army during World War II was first mooted publicly by Ilya Ehrenburg at the second session of the plenum of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in February 1943. Publications of this sort were conceived as a propaganda

instrument against antisemitic contentions that the Jews were evading service in combat units and found themselves more comfortable positions in the rear.¹⁶ But as early as mid-1944, the plan proved unfeasible, as we can see from Ehrenburg's remarks in his memoirs:

In the summer [of 1944] I was asked by the Sovinformburo¹⁷ to appeal to the Jews of America about the brutality of the Hitlerites and the need to defeat the Third Reich as quickly as possible. One of A. S. Scherbakov's aides—Kondakov—rejected my wording on the grounds that the heroic deeds of Jews, soldiers of the Red Army, must not be mentioned [because] "That is arrogance."¹⁸

Considering this policy, there was obviously no point in discussing the publication of a special book, in Russian, on the part played by Jews in the Red Army.

Yet despite the difficulties, Jewish public figures did their best to bring some information about the valor of the Jewish fighters at least to the attention of Jewish readers. In 1943, three pamphlets dedicated to the Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union were published in Yiddish: one by the Russian military correspondent and later poet Semyon Gudzenko on Leyzer Papernik, who fought to the last bullet and, after running out of ammunition, blew himself up with his Nazi prisoners;¹⁹ one by the Yiddish writer A. Khashtshevatski on Chaim Diskin, who, with a single cannon, stopped an assault of German tanks;²⁰ and one by R. Kovnator on Yoysef Makovski, an outstanding tankist in the war against Finland.²¹ Nineteen forty-four saw the publication of a pamphlet by the Russian writer of Jewish origin V. Kaverin about the submarine captain Yisrael Fisanovich, who was awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union medal in 1944 for his deeds of valor.²² In 1946, the Yiddish writer Shmuel Persov published a pamphlet about Moshe Khokhlov, who was awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union for his outstanding performance in the crossing of the Dnieper, and in 1947 a Yiddish translation was published of the pamphlet about David Dragunski by A. Bezymenski.²³ Just before the liquidation of all Jewish culture in the Soviet Union in 1948, a pamphlet was published by R. Kovnator about the celebrated Jewish woman pilot, Polina Gelman.²⁴

These seven pamphlets were constructed along much the same lines and included a brief biography of the subject, his or her outstanding performance in combat, and the heroism for which he or she was awarded the medal of "Hero of the Soviet Union." Most of the pamphlets were written by non-Jews, and in those cases where the motives for such heroism were addressed at all, they were usually generalized in the accepted Soviet phrasing, such as in response to the Hitlerite barbarism or loyalty to the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. Some of the pamphlets are likewise peppered with popular Soviet catch phrases of the time, such as "a loyal son of the Soviet people and the Jewish people."

The pamphlets published in Yiddish and meant exclusively for Jews tried to

convey the message that the Jews, too, had their war heroes, just like any other people—though these pamphlets are similarly weak in their analysis of the motives for the hero's conduct. Even so, years later, when some of these articles were published in Russian for the benefit of the non-Jewish reader, the few passages that might possibly have hinted at the special motives of the Jewish fighter were carefully expurgated.

Shmuel Persov's pamphlet on Moshe Khokhlov contains the following description of his subject's chance meeting in one of the liberated settlements:

In one of the villages, as the mortar-men were sitting in a peasant's hut hungrily lapping up borscht, a Jew walked in. Looking around him he slowly whispered: "Are there any Jews among you?"

"Members of all peoples," said Geynutdinov, and Khokhlov added, "I am a Jew."

The guest was as delighted as if he had met his own son. "I am from here," he began in Yiddish. "The Jews have been living here since time immemorial, but now I am the only one left of the Jewish town. I literally escaped from the grave."

"Speak so everyone can understand," one of the fighters spat.

Khokhlov briefly reported what the Jew had said, and Yefim Ivanov added: "So why are you standing? Sit down and use my spoon." Geynutdinov pushed a piece of bread toward the Jew and then the bowl of borscht. As the Jew ate the borscht, tears fell from his eyes and dripped onto his beard. Wiping them away with his hand, like a child, he addressed Khokhlov again:

"Where are you from and what is your name?"

"My name is Khokhlov."

"A Jew, and your name is Khokhlov?"

"Yes, yes," Khokhlov said defensively. "I am from Dubrovna."

"Yes, Dubrovna," the Jew turned and lapsed back into Yiddish. "They used to make wonderful *taleisim* there."

Before leaving, the Jew shook hands with each of the fighters.

"Don't forget, my son, make them pay for the innocent blood that has been shed. . . ."²⁵

This passage, which may have intimated the special feeling of the Jewish fighter, was omitted from the Russian translation published in 1959. Yet this tendency to edit the Jewish aspect out of the Russian translation, was not a phenomenon of the late 1950s and thereafter, but was already widespread in the 1940s.

Three books that hold a special place in Soviet-Jewish historiography belong by definition to the realm of Jewish warfare: Avraham Sutzkever's book on the Vilna ghetto, which devotes an entire chapter to the fighting in the ghetto and the forests; M. Yellin and D. Galpern's book on the partisans from the Kovno ghetto; and H. Smolar's book on the Minsk ghetto, in which many sections

describe the resistance in the ghetto and within the ranks of the partisan movement.²⁶

In 1947, Smolar's book was published in Russian translation under the title *Avengers of the Ghetto*.²⁷ A cursory comparison of the two editions is sufficient to show that passages were deleted and cuts were made in the Russian edition—some stemmed from the translation itself, but others were deliberate. Thus, for example, the Yiddish text notes that, with the approval of the partisans, the Underground in the ghetto decided to establish independent units—Jewish units—but in the Russian edition the words referring explicitly to the Jewish units have been omitted, and all that remains is a vague reference to independent units.²⁸ In another place the author speaks of the attempt to establish a joint partisan unit of forty armed fighters from the ghetto and thirty railroad workers. But there was a hitch in the course of founding the unit, and the Belorussians returned to the city. "But what would the Jews do?" the author asks, stressing the fact that they did not have the option of returning to the ghetto.²⁹ That is how the author implied the special circumstances in which the Jewish fighter, as distinguished from his Belorussian comrades, lived and operated. But this implication was deleted from the Russian edition, so that the accent on the uniqueness of Jewish warfare was blunted. In another place Smolar quotes a commander of the Soviet partisan unit as saying, "The Jews of the ghetto are now the ones in my unit who excel in their bravery in battle,"³⁰ but these words were deleted from the Russian translation for fear that they would be taken by the non-Jewish reader as "Jewish arrogance."

Examples of such differences between the Yiddish and Russian versions of Smolar's book signify that, as early as the 1940s, there was a tendency to soft-pedal certain aspects of Jewish warfare, particularly in publications that were also destined for a non-Jewish readership. This policy was followed scrupulously in the last book on the subject of Jewish fighting against the Nazis (published in Russian just prior to the liquidation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee): *The Partisan Brotherhood: Reminiscences of the Combat Activities of the Jewish Partisans of the Great Patriotic War*.³¹ Most of the pieces in the collection were penned by non-Jews, and in no case are special motives ascribed to the Jewish partisans. On the contrary, emphasis is placed upon the sense of brotherhood that was achieved between the Jewish and non-Jewish fighters in the partisan units. Yet, despite the limitations and constraints reflected in this work, it was an expression of the desire to prove that Jews, too, fought in the war—at least to the same degree as the members of the other Soviet peoples—and may have served as a rebuttal to the many antisemitic contentions to the contrary. But even this Soviet-Jewish historiography—poor in content, limited in quantity, and pale in its Jewish character though it was—ceased to appear after the liquidation of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union at the end of 1948.

Nevertheless, the discounting of Jewish warfare continued to trouble many Jews in the Soviet Union, particularly in light of the relentless claims that the Jews had evaded service during the war. Some sought an answer to their sense

of distress, and among the outlets we can cite the article by Yaakov Kantor published in the Warsaw Yiddish paper *Folks-Shtime* and the piece by A. Pribluda and Y. Bergman published in *Sovietish heymland*, which is virtually brimming with Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union.³²

The emotional need to prove to non-Jews—and perhaps first and foremost to the Jews of the Soviet Union themselves—that the Jews played just as great, and perhaps an even greater, role in the war against the Nazis as all other Soviet peoples was also evident among Jewish-nationalist circles in the Soviet Union. It is therefore not surprising that the quasi-legal Jewish publications (the *samizdat*) devote considerable space to the role played by the Jews in the Red Army during World War II.³³ The overwhelming majority of material on this subject in Jewish *samizdat* comes from Soviet publications and therefore bears the stamp of their classic spirit and style. Comprising articles from official Jewish sources such as *Sovietish heymland*, these works were designed to commemorate and highlight the role of the Jews in combat as a response to the downgrading of this subject in the official Soviet historiography. They cannot, however, be counted as analytical works of scholarship.

It is therefore possible to say that the Soviet-Jewish historiography on the subject of Jewish warfare never advanced beyond the incipient stage, even within the framework of general Soviet historiography. The first manifestations of writing on the subject were immediately nipped in the bud with the liquidation of Jewish culture. What remained intact was an enormous need in the Jewish community to know more about the subject, especially in light of the many Soviet publications extolling heroism during the war that deliberately play down the Jewish factor.

The earliest historiography on Jewish warfare in the Soviet Union published in the West—and this is particularly true of the writing on the partisan units in the annexed territories—is credited to combatants who had recently laid down their arms. Their writing was based on personal experience and random testimonies and is certainly not free of political coloration. The most outstanding effort in this genre is Moshe Kaganovich's book *The Participation of the Jews in the Partisan Movement of the Soviet Union*, published in Rome in 1948 by the Historical Committee of the Union of Jewish Partisans. For purely political reasons, the author included a quote from an order supposedly issued by the president of the Soviet Union stating, *inter alia*, that:

Because the enemy is behaving savagely and brutally and is totally liquidating the Soviet citizens of Jewish nationality, I hereby order that they are to receive priority in evacuation to the distant regions of the Soviet Union.³⁴

This order, which—his quote notwithstanding—the author never actually saw (as he himself testified in later editions of the book),³⁵ was almost certainly a figment of the mood of the period and underscores the caution that historians must observe in relying on material of this kind.

A generation was to pass before a scholarly historiography on this subject began to crystallize in the West, yet here, too, it dealt mostly with the territories that had been annexed to the Soviet Union during the war. The Jewish communities in these territories more closely resembled their counterparts in Poland and Romania than traditional Soviet Jewry. To a large extent, Jewish political movements and organizations survived there despite the fact that they had been formally disbanded during the brief period of Soviet rule. Moreover, the independent scholar had access to a relatively large body of material on the Jewish fighters in these territories, in contrast to the areas which had been part of the Soviet Union longer.

It is therefore not surprising that the earliest research on Jewish warfare and the participation of Jews in combat in the Soviet Union focused on these annexed territories. Worthy of mention in this context is Dov Levin's work on the Jews of the Baltic countries,³⁶ Yitzhak Arad's work on the Jews of Vilna,³⁷ Shalom Cholawski's work on the Jews of western Belorussia,³⁸ and Shmuel Spector's on the Jewish community in Volhynia.³⁹ In all of these studies, the authors address the focal subject of Jewish warfare and combat by examining the features unique to each area. Their research is based on a large and varied corpus of material, which they have tried to corroborate and analyze by using the finest tools of critical research. It can therefore be said that at least insofar as many sectors of the territories annexed to the Soviet Union are concerned, there is a body of historical writing on the role played by the Jews in the war against the Nazis. The same cannot be said regarding the Jews of the Soviet Union in its prewar borders.

Considering the paucity of material at the writer's disposal, many scholars were loath to approach this subject. The first to rise to the challenge was Yosef Guri, who made a serious and systematic attempt to summarize the information about the Jews who were awarded the medal of Hero of the Soviet Union and Jews in high positions of command. He was followed by Dov Levin, who engaged in an even deeper analysis of the data collected by Guri.⁴⁰

The wave of immigration to Israel from the Soviet Union in the 1970s prompted a revival of interest in the participation of Soviet Jews in the fighting against the Nazis. It is thanks to this interest that we have been rewarded with two very detailed, thick tomes about Jews in the Red Army. One is Gershon Shapiro's book *Under Fire: Stories of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union*;⁴¹ the other is Aharon Abramovich's work *The Decisive Battle: The Participation and Role of the Jews of the Soviet Union in the War against Nazism*.⁴²

Both works serve the dual aim of commemoration and education. But other than their common objectives, they are distinctly different in structure and content. Shapiro's book is a collection of pieces culled from Soviet sources on Jews who were awarded the medal of Hero of the Soviet Union (some of these had previously appeared in quasi-legal publications in the Soviet Union). From many standpoints these articles hardly differ from the style of writing common

in the Soviet Union. The book discusses the Jews who distinguished themselves in battle, but the author is not always successful in capturing the element of Jewish warfare, even when intimations to that effect could be perceived in the Soviet publications on which he based himself. These failings notwithstanding, the collection is a noteworthy contribution to the subject by virtue of its concentration of the material.

Abramovich's book, which is the initial volume of a larger publication, is the first attempt to draw a comprehensive picture of the role played by Jews in the Red Army. The author has invested tireless effort in poring over dozens of memoirs and hundreds of articles that appeared in the Soviet Union, as well as in collecting every piece of information on the distinguished conduct of Jews in battle. He has brought together information about the Jews in the broader framework of the fighting on the various fronts during different stages of the war. Abramovich has made every effort to identify names of Jews and to be meticulous about military details and factual circumstances. His book cites hundreds of acts of valor by Jewish fighters and the names of hundreds of Jews who were scattered throughout the length and breadth of the rapidly shifting front. That his sources were primarily Soviet has left its mark on the book's style and limitations. But despite its shortcomings, this work certainly serves as an impetus to further research.

From a review of the Soviet, Soviet-Jewish, and extra-Soviet historiography, it emerges that the matter of Jewish warfare in the Soviet Union during the war against the Nazis has still not been the object of thorough—to say nothing of exhaustive—research. Most of the works published to date tackle the subject of Jews in combat in one way or another, meaning a description of Jewish participation in the fighting in some sector of the struggle against the Nazis. But the cardinal question of whether and to what degree this fighting stemmed from specifically Jewish conditions, factors, and motives—or, phrased differently, whether and to what degree this was “Jewish warfare”—remains open, awaiting the kind of scholarly inquiry that will exploit not only the Soviet publications but also the thousands of witnesses who may well shed new light on the full array of issues.

Notes

An earlier version of this essay was published in Yisrael Gutman and Gideon Greif, eds., *The Historiography of the Holocaust Period: Proceedings of the Fifth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988).

1. *Eynikayt*, May 1, 1946. I. Davidovitch, “Baym keyver fun undzer folks held” (“At the Grave of our National Hero”), *Folks-Shtime*, December 13, 1959. M. Bruzh, “25 Yor nokh der bafreyung fun Vaysrusland” (Twenty-Five Years after the Liberation of Belorussia), *ibid.*, September 13, 1969.

2. *Sovetskaia istoricheskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 6, Moscow, 1965, p. 476.
3. *Sovetskii tyl v velikoi otechestvennoi voine* (The Soviet Rear in the Great Patriotic War), vol. 1, Moscow, 1974, p. 190.
4. See, for example, *Kommunisticheskaia partiia v velikoi otechestvennoi voine* (The Communist Party in the Great Patriotic War), Moscow, 1970.
5. *Vsenarodnoe partizanskoe dvizhenie v Belorussii v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny* (The Popular Partisan Movement in Belorussia during the Great Patriotic War), Minsk, 1967-1982.
6. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, book one, p. 456.
7. *Ukrainska Rsr u velikii vintchizniani viini Radians'kogo Soiuzu 1941-1945rr* (Ukraine in the Great Patriotic War), vol. 1, Kiev, 1967, p. 64.
8. We are able to apprehend the personal influence of the writer on the degree to which Jews are mentioned in memoirs from a comparison of I. Satsunkevich's book with V. Agadzhanian's book. The former concentrates on the area of Minsk; the latter on the vicinity of Mogilev. While Satsunkevich's book almost totally ignores the role played by the Jews, Agadzhanian's work does make reference to it. I. Satsunkevich, *Surovata byl'* (A Difficult Story), Minsk, 1969; V. Agadzhanian, *Dorogi partizanski* (The Ways of the Partisans), Minsk, 1979. Worthy of note is A. Okorokov's memoir, in which he pays affectionate tribute to many Jewish fighters: A. Okorokov, *Slovo vedushchee v boi* (A Word that Leads to Battle), Moscow, 1980.
9. *Evreiskii samizdat*, vol. 15, Jerusalem, 1978, p. 36.
10. See note 7 above, pp. 95-105.
11. See, for example, Ia. Pavlav, "Pomoshch Belorusskogo naroda frontu, letom, 1941" (The Support Given by the Belorussian Nation to the Front, Summer 1941), *Vestnik An BSSR*, no. 5, 1970, pp. 114-23.
12. A. Kazanskii, *Kirgizskii narod v velikoi otechestvennoi voine Sovetskogo Soiuzza, 1941-1945* (The Kirgizian People in the Great Patriotic War), Frunze, 1954.
13. I. Kravchenko, A. Zalesskii, *Belorusskii narod v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny* (The Belorussian People during the Great Patriotic War), Minsk, 1959.
14. A. Mnatskanian, *Armianskii narod v velikoi otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945* (The Armenian People during the Great Patriotic War), Erevan, 1954.
15. I. Babalishvili, *Voiny-gruziny v boiakh za Ukrainu v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny* (Georgian Fighters in the Battles for Ukraine during the Great Patriotic War), Tbilisi, 1969.
16. "Tsveyter plenum fun Yidishn antifashistishn komitet in FSSR" (The Second Plenum of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee of the USSR), *Eynikayt*, March 15, 1943.
17. The Soviet Information Office, established at the start of the war handled the distribution of official information on the war activities and the organization of all propaganda within and beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. The office was evidently disbanded in 1948.
18. I. Ehrenburg, "Liudi, gody, zhizn" (People, Years, Life), *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 9, Moscow, pp. 376-77.

19. S. Gudzenko, *Held fun Sovetnfarband—Leyzer Papernik* (Leyzer Papernik, Hero of the Soviet Union), Moscow, 1943.
20. M. Khashtshevatski, *Khaim Diskin—der held fun Sovetnfarband* (Khaim Diskin, Hero of the Soviet Union), Moscow, 1941.
21. R. Kovnator, *Der held fun Sovetnfarband—Yosef Makovski* (Yosef Makovski, Hero of the Soviet Union), Moscow, 1943.
22. V. Kaverin, *Der held fun Sovetnfarband—Israel Fisanovitsh* (Israel Fisanovitsh, Hero of the Soviet Union), Moscow, 1944.
23. Sh. Persov, *Moshe Khakhlov—Der held fun Sovetnfarband* (Moshe Khakhlov, Hero of the Soviet Union), Moscow, 1946. A. Bezimenski, *David Dragunsky*, Moscow, 1947.
24. R. Kovnator, *Held fun Sovetnfarband—Polina Gelman* (Polina Gelman, Hero of the Soviet Union), Moscow, 1948.
25. See Persov, op. cit., pp. 21-23, and cf. S. Persov, *Ocherki o geroiakh* (Vignettes of Heroes), Moscow, 1959.
26. A. Sutskever, *Fun Vilner geto* (From the Vilna Ghetto), Moscow, 1946. M. Ielin, D. Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser geto* (Partisans from the Kovno Ghetto), Moscow, 1948. H. Smoliar, *Fun Minsker geto* (From the Minsk Ghetto), Moscow, 1946.
27. H. Smolar, *Mstiteli Getta* (Avengers of the Ghetto), Moscow, 1947.
28. Cf. p. 73 of the Yiddish version, p. 56 of the Russian translation.
29. Yiddish original, p. 73.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
31. *Partizanskaia druzhba; vospominaniia o boevykh delakh partizan evreev uchastnikov velikoi otechestvennoi voiny* (The Partisan Brotherhood: Reminiscences of the Combat Activities of the Jewish Partisans of the Great Patriotic War), Moscow, 1948. A Hebrew translation with slight cuts is found in B. West, ed., *Hem hayu rabim* (They Were Many), Tel Aviv, 1968.
32. Y. Kantor, "Yidn oyf dem grestn un vikhtikstn front" (Jews on the Greatest and Most Important Front), *Folks-Shtime*, April 18, 1963; see also *idem.*, "Zay zaynen der shtoltz fun undzer folk" (They Are the Pride of Our People), *ibid.*, May 5-6, 1965; "Undzer haymland hot zay g'kroynt mit rum" (Our Fatherland Crowned Them with Glory), *Sovietish heymland*, vol. 5, 1970, pp. 43-47. See also *ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 40.
33. The publications of the Jewish *samizdat* in the Soviet Union were copied and published in Israel and included the following items: "Evrei v voine protiv Hitlerovskoi Germanii" (Jews in the War against Hitler's Germany), *Evreiskii samizdat*, vol. 9, Jerusalem, 1975; G. Shapiro, "Ocherki o Evreiah-geroiakh Sovetskogo Soiuzza" (Vignettes of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union), *ibid.*, vol. 14, 1989; V. Vagner, "Evrei v voine, 1941-1945 GG" (Jews in the War, 1941-1945), *ibid.*, vol. 18; "Evrei na Maloi Zemle," *ibid.*, vol. 19, 1979.
34. M. Kaganovich, *Der Yidisher ontayl in der partizaner bevegung fun Sovet-Rusland* (The Participation of Jews in the Partisan Movement in the Soviet Union), 1948, p. 188.
35. Solomon Schwarz called the existence of such an order into question as far back

- as 1951 (Solomon M. Schwarz, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, Syracuse, 1951, p. 221). In an expanded edition of his book, published in Tel Aviv, in 1954, Kaganovich writes: "According to the testimony of Jews who were in Russia at the outbreak of the war, toward the end of 1941 the presidency of the Supreme Soviet issued an order regarding the preferential evacuation of the Jewish population from areas where it was endangered by the German invasion. According to these witnesses, the local authorities were ordered to provide special means of transport toward this end. However, no document has ever been found corroborating this evidence" (Moshe Kaganovich, *The War of the Jewish Partisans in Eastern Europe*, Tel Aviv, 1954, p. 202). The author repeats this exact wording in his Yiddish book, published in Buenos Aires in 1956 (vol. 1, p. 370).
36. Zvi A. Baron and Dov Levin, *The History of an Underground: The Fighting Organization of the Jews of Kovno in the Second World War*, Jerusalem, 1962; Dov Levin, *Fighting and Defending Themselves! The War of Lithuanian Jewry against the Nazis, 1941-1945*, Jerusalem, 1975; idem., *With Their Backs to the Wall: The Fight of the Jews of Latvia against the Nazis, 1941-1945*, Jerusalem, 1978.
 37. Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames, The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews of Vilna in the Holocaust*, Jerusalem, 1980.
 38. Shalom Cholawski, *On the Neman and Dnieper Rivers: The Jews of Western Belorussia in the Second World War*, Jerusalem, 1982.
 39. Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of the Jews of Volhynia, 1941-1944*, Jerusalem, 1982 (doctoral dissertation), pp. 229-317.
 40. Y. Guri, "The Jews in the Red Army in the Second World War"; Y. Slutzki and M. Kaplan, eds., *Jewish Soldiers in the Armies of Europe*, Tel Aviv, 1967, pp. 135-48; Guri, "The Jews of the Soviet Union in the War against Nazi Germany" in M. Mushkat, ed., *Jewish Fighters in the War against the Nazis*, Tel Aviv, 1971, pp. 20-75; Dov Levin, "Facts and Evaluations about the Jews in the Red Army during the Second World War," *Masuah*, vol. 10, 1982, pp. 79-105.
 41. G. Shapiro, *Under Fire: Stories of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union*, Jerusalem, 1988.
 42. A. Abramovich, *V reshaiushchei voine*, (In the Decisive War), Tel Aviv, 1982.

Jewish-Lithuanian Relations during World War II: History and Rhetoric

Sara Shmer-Neshamit

On the night of June 22/23, 1941, German planes bombed the cities of Lithuania. At 11:30 AM on the first day of the war, Radio Kaunas announced the Lithuanian revolt and the formation of a temporary government headed by J. Ambrazevicius, a member of the Christian-Democratic party. The Soviet government and its institutions were replaced, and along the joint Lithuanian-German border crowds of Lithuanians welcomed the invading Wehrmacht with bouquets of flowers.

While the Red Army soldiers were still retreating eastward along the roads of Lithuania, men with white armbands could already be spotted on the streets. These Lithuanians were the "partisans" who had revolted against Soviet rule. In the first days of the occupation, before the German Wehrmacht completed its takeover of Lithuania, the country was in the hands of "The Activists' Front of Lithuania"¹ and its murderous gangs. Jewish lives and property were at their mercy.

The Germans entered Kaunas on June 24; that very night a mass slaughter of Jews took place in the suburb of Slobodka (Viliampole). According to the report of Nazi General Franz Stahlecker, commander of *Einsatzgruppe A*, in Kaunas alone, 1,500 Jews were murdered that first night, and in the course of the following nights an additional 2,300 people were killed.² The Lithuanians grabbed Jews off the streets, broke into their homes, and slaughtered them with knives and axes.

The "partisans" arrested masses of Jews and incarcerated them in Fort VII, one of the fortresses on the outskirts of Kaunas dating from the tsarist period.