ARTICLES

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THE KIROV CRISIS: BREAKING THE COVENANT

Testing the authenticity of political material of great importance to scholars and the public is a task few researchers undertake in the course of their duties, though it is work done as a matter of course in intelligence agencies. Whoever undertakes a pragmatic task of this kind perforce devises rules and procedures that conform to the qualities of the materials under study in order to accurately assess their character.

This article, which was originally presented at a conference of the Rocky Mountain Slavic Association, in Denver, Colorado, in April 1998,1 sets down an exegesis we created to test the authenticity of a 136-word Soviet Politburo resolution dated December 4, 1934. The resolution concerns the assassination of one of the major figures in the Soviet pantheon of that day, Sergei M. Kirov, a follower of Joseph Stalin. He was genuinely popular, and he began to assert his independence in the 1930s. This document flashes a brilliant, almost miraculous light on the Politburo in the aftermath of his murder. Kirov was regarded highly by many in Bolshevik circles, and is so regarded still today by those who see him as a viable alternative to Stalin. Had Kirov replaced Stalin, they believe the purges and disregard of human life that occurred in the transformation of Soviet society would have been avoided: a major question debated fiercely today as more and more information on Stalin's rule is brought to light.

This resolution is part of a group of 242 Politburo resolutions, mostly on Soviet foreign policy, that German intelligence spirited away at the time, on a day-after-day basis, from the Soviet Embassy in Vienna. The resolutions were verified, then, by German intelligence, at the time, by a top Sovietologist, Dr. Georg Leibbrandt, using the world press and information from German intelligence sources. Hitler read and used them in policy creation.2

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1. Professor Mary Conroy of the History Department at the University of Colorado at Denver presided over this conference. Our panel judges were political scientist Al Evans (Fresno State University) and political scientist Joel Moses (Iowa State University). They concluded we had made the case for authenticity.

2. Milton Loventhal and Jennifer McDowell, "The Stalin Resolutions and the Road to World War II," Part one, San Jose Studies 6 (Nov. 1980), pp. 80-81, 84-90, 95-97; Milton Loventhal,
From these facts alone we know that they played a role in the history of their times. How much of a role has yet to be determined. And since the time in which they were born is very much alive today as people continue to come to grips with what the Nazis and Soviets did in the pre-World War II period, the Nazi-Soviet Pact period, World War II, and afterwards, they will play a new role on the world stage as their contents are revealed.

The Weimar government of Heinrich Brüning also had acquired Politburo resolutions from this same top level, though little is known about them. Josef Korbel, Czech diplomat, founder of the graduate school of international relations at Denver University, father of Madeleine Albright, and mentor of Condoleezza Rice, found two from 1931 in a German archive. He learned that they had been used by Chancellor Heinrich Brüning for information on Soviet policy. This earlier group of resolutions, thus, also had to have had an impact on world events.

Korbel and Milton Loventhal had a lengthy discussion about these two groups of resolutions in 1966 at the Far Western Slavic Conference at Stanford University, and they came to the conclusion that these two groups are from the same family of material, and that both groups are authentic. As such they are the most important cache of Soviet foreign policy documents ever to appear outside the Soviet Union. Full of terror of the outside world, full of paranoia, ideology, and Politburo refusal to give in or give up in the face of enormous obstacles, these resolutions provide an unforgettable look into the ardent minds of Soviet leaders.

The 1934-1936 group (90 percent in Russian) was captured by the American Army at the close of World War II, and sent to the National Archives and Hoover Institution. Handled quite unprofessionally by American scholars in the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) and at Rand Corporation, who named them forgeries, at Hoover they were rescued in 1952 by Witold Swora-


3. Josef Korbel, *Poland Between East and West: Soviet and German Diplomacy toward Poland, 1919-1933* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 270; Loventhal, "A Method for ...", pp. 23-25; Loventhal and McDowell, "The Stalin Resolutions ...", pt. one, p. 92. See also Michal Reiman, "Per una storia della politica sovietica negli anni 1932-1933. Le 'Informazioni Stoiko'" [Towards a history of Soviet policy in the years 1932-1933. "Stoiko Information"], *Studi Storici*, no. 3 (1985), pp. 581-609. Reiman notes that the 1932-1933 Politburo resolutions "show an astonishing knowledge of Soviet policy of those days, of the situation in the country, and of the facts of foreign policy ... one cannot fabricate such material especially in such detail. ... (p. 599) [Furthermore] the method of arrival of the [Stoiko Informationen] ... as well as the circumstance of their preservation in the archives, exclude the possibility of forgery." (p. 582) Reiman gives quite a bit of information on the top-level documents (resolutions, speeches, reports) from 1932, but only a small amount on those from 1933.

4. The Rand researchers did a better job than the OSS. Alexander Barmine at Rand stated they were authentic though his view did not prevail.