

1ST PLENUM OF THE U.S.-RUSSIA JOINT COMMISSION ON POW/MIAS MOSCOW, RUSSIA

MARCH 26-27, 1992

Summary: the opening meeting of the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission on POW/MIAs saw agreement on the urgent humanitarian nature of the task. The Commission established four working groups: World War II, Korea, Cold War, and Vietnam. Formation of an Afghanistan working group was deferred to a future session. Russian Chairman Volkogonov pledged maximum cooperation, but warned that access to the KGB Archives would pose the greatest difficulty.

The U.S.-Russian Joint Commission on POW/MIAs opened on the morning of March 26, 1992, with introductory remarks by Ambassador Strauss, who underscored the importance of the issue to President Bush, Secretary Baker, and the American people. The Commission Co-chairmen, Ambassador Malcolm Toon and Colonel-General Dmitri Volkogonov, then convened the first Plenary Session. The U.S. side was represented by the following Commission members:

Ambassador Toon (Chairman, U.S. side)

Congressman Pete Peterson (D-FL)

Congressman John Miller (R-WA)

Richard Kauzlarich, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (EUR)

Kenneth Quinn, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (EAP)

Alan Ptak, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (POW/MIA)

Dennis Clift, Chief of Staff, DIA

Trudy Peterson, Assistant National Archivist

[Note: Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) and Sen. Bob Smith (R-NH) were unable to attend the meetings in Moscow]

In addition, personnel of State, OSD, DIA, House and Senate staff, and Embassy Moscow attended the session and served as expert backup to the Commission.

Russian Commission members were as follows:

Col-Gen Dmitri Volkogonov, Presidential Advisor on Military Issues (Chairman, Russian side)

Vladimir Kozlov, Deputy Chairman, Russian Archives Commission (Deputy Chairman of Russian Side)

Ion Andronov, Deputy Chairman, Foreign Affairs/Intl. Economic Relations Committee, Supreme Soviet (and assistant to Russian VP Rutskoy)

Nikolai Arzhannikov, Deputy Chairman, Supreme Soviet Human Rights Committee

Igor Venkov, Director, Historical and Memorial Center General Staff

Yuriy Kalinin, Director, General Enforcement Directorate, Ministry of Internal Affairs

Anatoliy Krayushkin, Section Chief, Ministry of Security

Gennadiy Lezhikov, Director, Ministry of Internal Affairs Information Center

Vyacheslav Mazurov, Senior Assistant to the Section Chief, External Intelligence Service

Rudolf Pikhoya, Chariman, Russian Archival Committee

Iosif Podrazhanets, Acting Director, USA and Canada, MFA

Yersenyi Ambartsumov (Acting Chairman, Committee on International Affairs, Supreme Soviet) and Sergey Kovalev (Chairman, Supreme Soviet Rights Committee) had been listed as Committee members but did not attend the Plenary. Backing up the Russian side was a variety of experts from the MFA, Ministry of Security, Ministry of External Affairs, and State Archives.

Regarding the Commission agenda, Volkogonov and Toon agreed to create four working groups: World War II, Korea, Cold War, and Vietnam. At that point, Adrianov intervened and called for a fifth group to be formed on Afghanistan: "We have again forgotten about our own POWs." Adrianov noted the attention given to U.S. POWs over the past few months and pledged future cooperation with the U.S. but, "the American side is obliged to help us." Toon confirmed U.S. willingness to cooperate to the maximum possible extent, although the U.S. cannot force the Mujahidin to cooperate. He conveyed Ambassador Peter Tomsen's readiness to travel to Moscow and brief Commission members, and suggested that it made more sense to defer an Afghanistan working group until after the Tomsen visit. Volkogonov agreed and the Commission kept the number of working groups at four.

Opening substantive discussion of the issue, Ambassador Toon stressed the importance of this humanitarian effort and noted as well the political implications of the joint endeavor: significant progress on the issue would further reinforce the cooperative spirit in the U.S. Russian relations. He listed U.S. objectives as A) pursuing all reports of POW/MIAs in the Former Soviet Union and facilitating return of any personnel; and B) establishing a mechanism to guide the Commission's work between formal sessions. This mechanism would be designed to obtain access to relevant archives and allow remains of any U.S. personnel to be returned to the U.S.

Ambassador Toon suggested an informal, cooperative approach to the tasks and noted that the information developed in the course of the Commission work should be made public as soon as possible. He proposed that Commission members and staff agree to:

-Exchange information on POW/MIAs;

- Facilitate access to persons with knowledge of POW/MIA cases and access to prisons or crash sites which might hold relevant information;
- Help research appropriate archives;
- Participate in working-level talks after the Commission session ends; and
- Facilitate transfer of live Americans or remains.

Volkogonov noted in his opening remarks that he had seen President Yeltsin the day before and the President had instructed him to leave nothing unresolved. Volkogonov said that the Russian side was determined to do everything possible to answer the questions posed by the United States. A few years ago, such a group would have been unthinkable; now, however, Russia has already started work and has instructed Chiefs of all archives – including archives of the KGB, MVD, MFA, Defense Ministry, and October Revolution – to search for documentary evidence.

Volkogonov frankly admitted that the most difficult aspect will be access to the KGB archives. Primakov and other intelligence officials assured him that they will do everything possible to help on the POW/MIA issue. Other archives, though, will present a much easier job. The Russian side will consider the issue of site visits and agreed that it would be useful to talk to officials who may have held positions relevant to our search, i.e., officials who worked on Korea and Vietnam. Volkogonov underscored that Russian authority over other nations – Korea, Vietnam, and also those of the Former Soviet Union – is limited. Thus he cautioned against overly high expectations. He concluded by reaffirming Russia's sincere willingness to cooperate; he pledged to share with the United States any information whatsoever on POW/MIAs that exists in the territory of Russia.

Congressman Miller pointed out the unique nature of the Commission: he knew of no other group in recent history in which two nations have addressed such difficult and long standing problems – dating back as far as four decades after the fact. He emphasized that it is important to resolve these issues for the sake of the Russian and American families which have never learned of their relatives' fate. The Congressman also told the Commission that this is an exceptionally important issue for the U.S. Congress. He found the broad composition of the Russian delegation to be very encouraging, and he looked forward to closing this chapter in U.S.-Russian relations by disclosing the fullest possible amount of information.

Congressman Peterson shared his personal perspective on the issue – six-and-a-half years as a Vietnam POW – and reaffirmed how important it is to resolve the fate of lost personnel. He discussed his high (but realistic) expectations for the Commission and called the meeting a historic first step toward a new level of cooperation and understanding between the U.S. and Russia. He noted that progress on this issue would undeniably have a positive impact on the entire spectrum of bilateral relations.

Russian Commission members continued the discussion, with a number of noteworthy remarks. Professor Pikhoya said that the Commission must give definite answers to the outstanding questions and “dispel all propaganda veils which impede progress.” Podrazhanets discussed a recent meeting with

Ambassador Lukin in which Lukin lauded the goodwill of the U.S. in providing four photos of Russian POWs in Afghanistan. Russia had not known that two of the POWs were alive and in captivity. Adrionov reentered the discussion with a forceful plea for American help. He described the political pressures on Russian Parliamentarians, especially after the Russian public saw how quickly America freed its POWs in Iraq. He conceded that U.S. influence with the Mujahadin was limited, but said that U.S. intervention with Saudi Arabia would be effective. He also asked the U.S. to support an upcoming initiative on POWs that Russia would unveil next week in the U.N. Adrionov also pressured again for an Afghanistan working group. (FYI- in a side conversation Adrionov said he did not know whether there had been contacts between Russian and U.S. delegates in New York on this U.N. initiative. End FYI.)

Ambassador Toon expressed U.S. willingness in principle to an Afghanistan working group, but suggested again that the Commission defer creating one. Other U.S. delegation members addressed the Commission. DIA Chief of Staff Clift underscored the importance of the issue to DIA and pledged DIA support for the Commission's work. DAS Quinn outlined the positive experiences he had had in working Indochina issues with the Russian MFA; he expressed his hope that the Commission would build on these positive contacts. DAS Ptak described U.S. efforts to gain the return of POWs in Iraq and reaffirmed the humanitarian need for progress on this POW issue. Ms. Peterson discussed archival contributions to the issue.

To underscore the spirit of cooperation with which the U.S. approached this issue, she noted that the U.S. was prepared to return the Smolensk archive to Russia.

The meeting concluded with an agreement on the following schedule:

March 26

0900-1230	Plenary
1230-1400	Break
1400-1600	Working groups on World War II and Vietnam
1600	Tour of Special Archives
1800	U.S. reception

March 27

0930-1230	Working groups on Cold War and Korea
1230-1400	Break
1400-1500	Additional working group time (if needed)
1500-1600	Concluding Plenary

1600	Press conference
1830	Russian social event