

THE WARSAW RISING
OF 1944

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1

The Big Three and Poland: July 1943 – July 1944

1. The collapse of Poland and formation of the Polish Government in exile

The German attack on Poland, which precipitated the outbreak of the Second World War and finally led to the destruction of the Third Reich, began on 1 September 1939. Within a few weeks Polish regular resistance collapsed, in spite of the heroism of the Polish Army, and Poland found herself once again under foreign domination.¹ At the end of September 1939 Poland was once more partitioned by Germany and Russia. The Red Army entered eastern Poland on 17 September in accordance with the Nazi-Soviet Pact concluded on 23 August 1939, which provided for the partition of Poland in the event of war.² In August 1939 Hitler and Stalin decided to co-operate in the destruction of Poland as her frontiers were unacceptable to them both. Germany was not reconciled to the terms of the Versailles settlement in Eastern Europe, while Russia resented the loss of territories ceded to Poland by the Treaty of Riga. Stalin tried later on to justify his pact with Hitler in terms of political and strategic expediency.³ But, to the Poles the Red Army's entry into Poland appeared as an act of treachery, a 'stab in the back'.⁴

The defeat of Poland began for the Polish nation a period of oppression, terror and destruction, which lasted for almost six

¹ For a comprehensive account in English of Polish political life in the inter-war period and causes of the Polish defeat see: A. Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939* (Oxford, 1972); A. Gieysztor et al., *History of Poland* (Warsaw, 1968), pp. 637ff; and H. Roos, *A History of Modern Poland* (London, 1966), pp. 98ff.

² For the text of this treaty see: *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations, 1939-1945*, vol. 1, 1939-1943, edited by the General Sikorski Historical Institute (London, 1961), Doc. No. 31 and Doc. No. 32, pp. 38-40 - hereafter to be referred to as *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*.

³ Cf. H. Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin* (Rev. ed., New Jersey, 1966), p. 5 (hereafter to be referred to as Feis).

⁴ Cf. T. Bor-Komorowski, *Armia Podziemna* (3rd ed., London, 1966), pp. 17-18.

years and in its magnitude and ferocity surpassed anything that the Poles, in their eventful and often tragic history, had had to endure.¹ But, it was also a period of great Polish military, political and diplomatic activity.

On 30 September, while the remnants of the Polish Army were still resisting the Germans in Poland, a new Polish Government was formed in Paris, under the Premiership of Gen Wladyslaw Sikorski, the old Government having been interned in Rumania. The members of the new Government had crossed into Rumania after the Red Army's entry into Poland.

In this way the continuation and constitutional legality of the highest Polish authorities – the President, Cabinet and Supreme Command – were safeguarded, and occupied Poland acquired a new leadership uncompromised by the autocratic tendencies of the pre-war regime, or by the stigma of swift military defeat.

Sikorski had, since 1908, been connected with the Polish struggle for independence.² In Poland he was regarded as a staunch and resolute democrat and opponent of the *Sanacja*.³ In Switzerland, in 1936, he tried with Ignacy Paderewski to create a common opposition front to the *Sanacja*.⁴ On 30 September he was commissioned by W. Raczkiewicz, the new President of Poland, to form a Polish Government in exile, in which the pre-war Opposition Parties were represented. On 7 November he was appointed the C-in-C of the Polish Armed Forces.⁵ By combining these two offices – of both political and military head of the Government – Sikorski became

¹ For a comprehensive and detailed account of the German occupation policy in Poland see: C. Madajczyk, *Polityka Trzeciej Rzeszy w Okupowanej Polsce*, II, vols (Warsaw, 1970). For an account of developments in the Polish territories occupied by the U.S.S.R. and the treatment of the Poles by the Soviets see: E. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy: A Pattern in Poland* (New York, 1958), pp. 37–50 (hereafter referred to as Rozek).

² During the First World War he served in Pilsudski's Legions. In the Russo-Polish war of 1920 he commanded the Fifth Army which contributed to the Polish victory on the Vistula. After the war he served as Chief of the General Staff. In 1922 he was for six months Prime Minister of Poland and later, in the years 1924–5, he was the Minister of Military Affairs. From 1926 until 1928 he served as the Commander of the Lwow Military Area. In 1928 he was suspended from active duties and devoted himself to historical writings and journalism. M. Kukiel, *General Sikorski* (London, 1970), pp. 8ff.

³ The term *Sanacja* was used to describe the regime which ruled Poland in the years 1926–39.

⁴ M. Kukiel, *op. cit.*, pp. 76ff.

⁵ The Diary of Gen Sikorski's activities in the Archives of the General Sikorski Historical Institute in London (hereafter referred to as the GSHI).

the dominant figure of the Cabinet. In Poland he was regarded as the country's war-time leader.

Sikorski's Government tried to create the Polish Army in exile and the resistance movement in Poland,¹ to direct the struggle against the occupiers, and to represent the Polish cause and Polish interests abroad.

After the fall of France in June 1940 the Polish Government and the remnants of the Polish Army which had been created in France, about 17,000 men, were evacuated to Great Britain. A period of close Anglo–Polish political and military co-operation ensued which continued until the end of the war.² Great Britain assumed special responsibility for the fate of Poland, while the Polish Armed Forces under British Command and the Polish resistance movement rendered great services to the common cause.

2. *Russo–Polish Relations 1941–3*

Apart from being one of the most decisive events of the Second World War, the German attack on Russia, which began on 22 June 1941, opened new possibilities with regard to Russo–Polish relations, which for centuries had been unhappy and strained. The fact that both the Russians and the Poles were fighting against a common enemy made for a temporary Russo–Polish understanding. The British Government, interested in promoting harmony in the Allied Camp, played an important part in bringing about a Russo–Polish *rapprochement*.³

On 30 July a Soviet–Polish pact was signed in London. The treaty provided for the restoration of Russo–Polish diplomatic relations, military co-operation, the creation of the Polish Army in the U.S.S.R., and an amnesty for all Polish citizens detained in the Soviet Union. It failed to settle conclusively the issue of future boundaries between the two countries, although Moscow recognised that the Soviet–German agreements of 1939 with regard to Poland had 'lost their validity'.⁴ During the negotiations leading to the conclusion of the Soviet–Polish treaty it became obvious that each side laid claim to pre-war eastern Poland. The Poles stood by their

¹ For details see pp. 80ff of this study.

² On this, see: J. Garlinski, *Poland, SOE and the Allies* (London, 1969).

³ L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* (London, 1962), p. 200 – hereafter to be referred to as Woodward.

⁴ For the text of this treaty see: *Documents on Polish–Soviet Relations*, vol. 1, Doc. No. 106, pp. 141–2.

Riga frontiers, while the Russians, who in November 1939 had incorporated Polish territories occupied by them into the Soviet Union, considered them as now belonging to the Soviet Ukraine and Byelorussia. The large towns in these regions were Polish, especially Wilno, Lwow and Bialystok, but the majority of the population was Ukrainian and Byelorussian. Out of the total population of some 13 millions about 5 millions were Polish.¹

Sikorski's failure to settle the frontier problem in 1941² left open and undecided the whole question of the future of Russo-Polish relations, especially in the event of a decisive Soviet victory; in view of the conflicting Russian and Polish claims to the disputed territories the Russo-Polish pact of 1941 was a diplomatic anomaly made possible because these areas were under German occupation.³ This lack of Russo-Polish understanding with regard to the territorial question made co-operation between the Russians and the Poles difficult and led to a split in the Polish Cabinet.⁴

A number of important problems bedevilled Russo-Polish co-operation. First, there were arguments connected with the size, equipment and deployment of the Polish Army in Russia, which finally led to its withdrawal to the Middle East in the summer of 1942, in an atmosphere of mutual recrimination.⁵ Secondly, there was the question of about 8,000 missing Polish officers, captured by the Russians in September 1939,⁶ whose disappearance Stalin could not explain satisfactorily.⁷ Finally, there were constant Russo-Polish disputes about the citizenship of all persons who resided in the Polish territories annexed by the Soviet Union.⁸

The main bone of contention was, however, the unresolved frontier dispute, which intensified at the beginning of 1943, when the Red Army began to regain the initiative on the Eastern Front, and its eventual return to Poland appeared likely.⁹

At the end of February 1943, the Polish Government again stated that they stood by the pre-war frontiers.¹⁰ In reply Moscow accused

¹ *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, Note 67, p. 572.

² On this, see p. 134 of this study.

³ Woodward, p. 201.

⁴ M. Kukiel, *op. cit.*, pp. 172ff.

⁵ For this, see: W. Anders, *An Army in Exile* (London, 1951); S. Kot, *Conversations with the Kremlin and Dispatches from Russia* (Oxford, 1963); M. Kukiel, *op. cit.*, pp. 182ff; and Rozek, pp. 111ff.

⁶ Rozek, pp. 123ff.

⁷ *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, Doc. No. 159, pp. 232ff.

⁸ Rozek, pp. 105ff.

⁹ Cf. Woodward, p. 203.

¹⁰ *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, Doc. No. 294, pp. 488-9.

the Poles of refusing to recognise the 'historic rights' of the Ukrainians and Byelorussians to national unity.¹

Further, Stalin informed the British Government that he wanted the Curzon Line,² with some adjustments, as a new frontier with Poland, and that Russo–Polish relations 'would depend on the character of the Polish Government'.³ This prompted London to try to bring about, with the help of Washington,⁴ a 'general settlement of the Russian frontier', in spite of 'insuperable' difficulties involved in such an undertaking.⁵

It became obvious that Russo–Polish relations were again entering a new and dangerous stage; they were approaching a breaking point.⁶

The final break occurred on 26 April 1943, soon after the German announcement of the discovery, at Katyn Woods, near Smolensk, Soviet territory occupied by the *Wehrmacht* of the mass graves of thousands of Polish officers captured by the Red Army in September 1939. This discovery was followed by Polish and German requests to the International Red Cross in Geneva for an investigation of the whole affair.⁷ In response to this tactically unfortunate Polish move the Russians accused the Polish Government of co-operating with the Nazis in slandering them and of putting pressure upon them in order to gain territorial concessions. They argued that this made relations between Moscow and the Polish Government impossible.⁸

Thus a wide chasm opened between the Soviet and Polish authorities, at a time when close understanding was needed. Churchill tried to prevent this, but to no avail.⁹ He was determined, however, to heal the breach between Russia and Poland, in the interests of Allied Unity.

¹ *Ibid.*, Doc. No. 296, pp. 501–2.

² For a clear exposition of the significance of the Curzon Line see: Woodward, p. 201; and *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1943*, vol. III, *The British Commonwealth and Europe* (Washington, 1963), p. 1220, f. 15.

³ Woodward, p. 203.

⁴ The United States of America entered the war in December 1941.

⁵ Woodward, p. 203.

⁶ *Documents on Polish–Soviet Relations*, vol. I, Doc. Nos 299–300, pp. 504ff.

⁷ For details concerning the Katyn affair, see: *Documents on Polish–Soviet Relations*, vol. I, Doc. Nos. 305–12, pp. 523–33; and J. K. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest* (London, 1971).

⁸ *Documents on Polish–Soviet Relations*, vol. I, Doc. No. 313, pp. 533–4.

⁹ On this, see: Woodward, pp. 203–5.

3. The Anglo-Polish Talks in London

In the autumn of 1943, while Bor-Komorowski and his Staff were finally trying to formulate a Home Army attitude to the Russians, high-level Anglo-Polish diplomatic talks were being held in London, on the future of Poland and on ways of ending the Russo-Polish political and territorial *impasse*.

The British Government was anxious to solve the Russo-Polish conflict – because it presented a threat both to the proper functioning of the war-time coalition and to the prospect of post-war co-operation with the U.S.S.R. – and to ensure Stalin's collaboration in the restoration of Poland. The British authorities were also anxious to convince the London Poles of the need to adopt a realistic attitude to Russia, even if that meant curtailing some of their political and territorial ambitions. Eden was very disturbed by the fact that the Poles were 'very difficult about their aspirations', which to him seemed to be 'completely unrealistic'.¹

The Polish Government, on their part, tried to secure British support for their post-war plans and their stand against Soviet territorial demands; they felt that any suggestion of compromise, on their part, in the dispute over Poland's eastern frontiers would lose them the support of the Polish people and army.²

The British attitude to the Polish question was summarised by Churchill during a conversation with the Polish President in July 1943. He said that, while Britain had, undeniably, acted in defence of her own interests in declaring war on Germany, the fact remained that this action had also been one of direct defence of Poland. Great Britain's loyalty to her ally would continue unchanged and Churchill, personally, was prepared to 'take grave risks' in keeping his country's pledge.³ But he 'had never wanted and was still unwilling to assume any obligations in regard to the Polish frontiers. Frontiers were not a 'taboo' and could be changed, perhaps by population exchange . . .'⁴ He realised, however, that Great Britain was under an obligation to restore a strong and independent

¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1943*, Vol. III, *The British Commonwealth and Europe* (Washington, 1963). p. 14 (hereafter to be referred to as the *FRUS*).

² Despatch from the Prime Minister to the Government Delegate, 25–6 January 1944, Ldz. K519/44. GSHI–11.

³ Notes on the talk between Premier Churchill and the President of the Republic held on 26 July 1943. GSHI–A.II/49/SOW/6.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Poland, 'capable of playing a responsible part in post-war Europe'.¹ Further, he 'did not deny the Polish Government the right to defend the integrity of their state – he realised that this was their duty. But, for his part, he did not wish to conceal his views . . .'²

Churchill had earlier urged the Poles to adopt a realistic attitude to Russia because of her 'potentialities' and her 'importance'. He warned them that 'a policy which would provoke the Soviets would be harmful and dangerous' to Poland as she could not hope to exist without coming to terms with the Russians, although they were, as he put it, 'odd people' and at times it was 'difficult to understand fully their motives . . .'³

Briefly, then, while accepting that it was his duty to restore a strong and independent Poland, he felt that it would have to be a Poland within frontiers acceptable to the Soviet Union. He was therefore trying to persuade the Polish Government to come to terms with Moscow, even at the expense of great territorial concessions. This was to remain his position until the outbreak of the Warsaw Rising.

Churchill's approach to the Polish problem, was conditioned by his attitude to Russia: he recognised that she was of cardinal importance in the struggle against Germany. While believing that the Soviet Government was capable of being consistent to the point of inhumanity, and of pursuing its end regardless of any moral considerations, unmoved by simple compassion for suffering, he nevertheless rejected as inadmissible the idea of an Allied policy based on shocked outrage.⁴ He tried to impress it upon the Poles that the Red Army was playing a crucial role in the liberation of Europe and that this must be taken into account by them all, even though Moscow was using 'ruthless methods and language not customary among friendly states'.

He was thinking about the likely direction of Russia's evolution in the future. He believed that because of the war Russia was changing much more quickly than had been anticipated by the Soviet leadership. He felt unable, however, to predict the final outcome of these changes, 'whether they would lead to more individual freedom and the progress of democracy, or, rather, lend impetus to aggressive imperialism . . .'⁵ To Churchill this was the most crucial question.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ Notes on the talk between Premier Mikolajczyk and Premier Churchill held on 21 July 1943. GSHI-PRM, L46.

⁴ Notes on the talk between Premier Churchill and the President of the Republic held on 26 July 1943. GSHI-A.II/49/SOW/6.

⁵ *Ibid.*

His attitude to Russia was not yet a fixed one. He was mildly hopeful that, in the course of close collaboration with Stalin, for whom he had a certain liking and even admiration, he would be able to shape the future of post-war Europe.¹

He expected the Poles to co-operate in his work for better and closer relations with the U.S.S.R., for their own and the common benefit.² His plan for the solution of the Polish question was simple; by advising and encouraging the Poles to make territorial concessions to the Russians he intended to bring about a *rapprochement* between the two and to persuade Stalin to allow the exiled Government to assume power in liberated Warsaw.

The British design assumed more concrete form in August 1943, when Eden came to the conclusion that 'the Poles should recognise the Curzon Line (including Lwow) as their eastern frontier and should receive as compensation Danzig, East Prussia, and the Oppeln district of Upper Silesia'.³ In March 1943 Eden found that Roosevelt was willing, privately at least, to accept the Curzon Line as the future Russo-Polish frontier.⁴ The British knew that, by agreeing to the imposition on Poland of territorial changes, they would be acting in a way contrary to the Atlantic Charter, but they felt that this was the only way of securing Anglo-Soviet collaboration after the war and of improving Polish-Soviet relations. In September 1943 therefore Eden asked the Polish Premier whether he would consider the re-shaping of the Polish Eastern frontiers as a necessary step towards a Russo-Polish *detente*. Eden advised Mikolajczyk⁵ to accept the Curzon Line, extended to give Lwow to Poland, in return for East Prussia and parts of Silesia in the West. Mikolajczyk replied that 'no Polish Government abroad would be able to discuss the question of the reduction of Polish territory'.⁶

It was obvious that the Polish Government was not prepared to discuss the problem of territorial concessions to the U.S.S.R., although any improvement in Polish-Soviet relations demanded this. The Polish Cabinet believed that by refusing to accept the

¹ Cf. Lord Moran, *Winston Churchill, The Struggle for Survival 1940-1965* (London, 1966), pp. 190-1.

² Notes on the talk between Premier Churchill and the President of the Republic held on 26 July 1943, GSHI-A.11/49/SOW/6.

³ Woodward, p. 250.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 203; and *FRUS 1943*, vol. III, p. 14.

⁵ For details of changes in the Polish leadership see pp. 149ff. of this study.

⁶ Report of Ambassador Raczynski on a conversation between Premier Mikolajczyk and Mr A. Eden held on 9 September 1943. GSHI-A11.

Curzon Line they were defending their country's right to existence as a national entity.¹ They were determined that Russo–Polish relations should be restored on the basis of the pre-1939 territorial arrangements.

On 5 October 1943 Mikolajczyk informed Eden that he considered the resumption of Russo–Polish diplomatic relations to be the most important and urgent issue, but was opposed to any discussions about Poland's eastern frontiers; he insisted that, on liberation the entire country should be placed under Polish jurisdiction.² He was also opposed to Soviet troops alone occupying territories; he asked that 'the military forces of our Anglo-Saxon allies and friends should enter Poland together with the Soviet troops'.³ Further, he stated that his Government had to decide what the Polish resistance was to do in the event of Russian entry into Poland during the course of military operations; should the underground army be ordered to assume control of the country, or to remain underground, in view of the threat of possible Soviet repressions? Indeed, Mikolajczyk asserted that, if the Russians employed repressive measures against the underground, it would be obliged to resort to self-defence'.⁴ Hence, he argued, it would be essential to conclude a Russo–Polish military understanding after the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries. He asked Eden to convey these views to the Russians.

Eden seemed embarrassed and dismayed by the Polish position, which he regarded as unrealistic. He maintained that the Poles could not demand the exercise of their rights in Poland without Moscow's interference while at the same time refusing to discuss territorial problems, especially in view of the well-advertised Soviet claims to some of Poland's eastern provinces. He expected the Soviet Union to adhere 'more or less' to the Curzon Line, with some corrections favourable to Poland which might allow her to retain Lwow. In exchange, the Poles were to obtain East Prussia and the valuable territories of Upper Silesia.

However, Mikolajczyk once again rejected this idea.⁵ Asking for increased British supplies of military materials to the Home Army, the Polish Premier said that hitherto he had warned that army

¹ *Ibid.*

² Note on the talk between Premier Mikolajczyk and Mr A. Eden held on 5 October 1943. GSHI-PRM, L46/9.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

against a premature rising, but now they were approaching a point 'when a rising in Poland might have considerable importance from the military point of view', for, if synchronised with the Anglo-American invasion of the continent, it could interrupt for some time the lines of communication between the Eastern and Western Fronts. Nevertheless, he knew that the Poles would have to pay a 'very heavy price' for this advantage, though he considered it was worth it in view of the anticipated results. 'Such an action . . . would require, however, a detailed understanding with the Russians and, therefore, the prompt re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union was imperative.'¹

Thus, Mikolajczyk was prepared to try to reach a diplomatic *rapprochement* with the Russians by offering them the prospect of military collaboration; the Home Army and its potentially large-scale anti-German military operations were to break the dangerous deadlock.

Eden welcomed the Polish plan with great interest, as it 'provided an argument which might induce Stalin to re-establish relations with Poland. This would largely depend on the value Stalin attached to the Polish action at the rear of the German armies . . .'² The Home Army's operations, then, were regarded as being of political as well as military importance.

Eden promised to explain the Polish position at the forthcoming Moscow Conference.³ On 7 October 1943, before his departure for Moscow, he was told by the Poles that they were ready to re-establish diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. but that there should be no discussion of the frontier question. Further, they opposed even temporary occupation of Poland, or any other East European State by the Soviets. The Poles proposed that an Inter-Allied Commission be established to supervise the liberation of the German-occupied territories.⁴

In addition, Edward Raczynski, the Polish Ambassador, explained to Eden that the Poles 'were afraid that the Russians would set up in Poland a puppet communist state . . . If they had such a plan, the surrender of territory would not stop them from carrying it out.

¹ Note on the talk between Premier Mikolajczyk and Mr A. Eden held on 5 October 1943. GSHI-PRM, L46/9.

² *Ibid.* My italics.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Memorandum from the Polish Government to the Foreign Office, 7 October 1943. GSHI-PRM, L46.

Hence the Poles regarded the resumption of Polish–Soviet relations as a test of Russian intentions'.¹

On 8 October the Polish problem which was becoming increasingly complicated, had been discussed by the British War Cabinet. At this meeting Eden suggested that at Moscow he should say that if the Poles accepted the British solution of the Russo–Polish frontier question, 'we should expect the Soviet Government to resume relations with the Poles, and to co-operate with them and with us in finding a satisfactory solution to questions concerning Polish Underground Resistance, and to the problems created by the Russian support of a rival Polish army and parties in the U.S.S.R. hostile to the Polish Government'. Eden stressed the urgency of the problems concerning the Home Army 'since, with the advance of the Russian armies, fighting might break out between the Polish guerillas and the Russians in eastern Poland'. The problem was especially urgent because the Poles were asking for more British arms for their Home Army; Eden predicted that if the British complied without consulting the Russians, 'they would say that we are equipping a force to be used against them'.² Eden thought that any Russian encroachment on Poland's pre-1939 frontiers would be resisted by the Home Army – for the Poles, their main army – but, on the other hand, that army might, if fully equipped, play 'a decisive part in the liberation of Poland and subsequent maintenance of order'.³ The British War Cabinet accepted Eden's suggested proposals for the solution of the Russo–Polish problem but, in view of the refusal of the Poles to agree to the frontier question being discussed in Moscow and of the American unwillingness to consider territorial frontiers until the end of the war, no progress towards a settlement was made at the Conference.⁴

4. *The Moscow Conference*

Eden was very anxious that a solution to the Russo–Polish difficulties should be found as soon as possible,⁵ for he feared that, once the

¹ Woodward, p. 252; see also E. Raczynski, *W Sojusznicy Londynie* (London, 1960), p. 207 (hereafter to be referred to as Raczynski).

² Woodward, p. 252.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The Rt Hon The Earl of Avon K.G., P.C., M.C., *The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning* (London, 1965), p. 403 (hereafter to be referred to as Avon).

Red Army had established itself in Poland, British negotiating power, 'slender as it was anyway, would amount to very little'.

Therefore, during his stay in Moscow he tried to convince Cordell Hull, the American Secretary of State, of the need to make joint Anglo-American representation to the Russians on the Polish question but without much success.

On 29 October Eden and Hull told Molotov that they hoped for the restoration of Russo-Polish relations. Eden emphasised that Mikolajczyk desired good relations with Moscow, and raised the problem of sending arms to the Home Army. Molotov retorted that 'arms could only be given into safe hands and he doubted if there were any safe hands in Poland', and hinted that the question of Polish-Soviet relations was primarily the concern of those two countries.¹

On 12 November 1943, Eden reported to Mikolajczyk that Molotov was in favour of a 'strong and independent Poland', and wanted to see relations between Poland and the U.S.S.R. re-established but had expressed the view that progress towards such a *rapprochement* was being impeded by the absence of any manifestation of Polish goodwill towards the U.S.S.R. Finally, Eden tried to convince Mikolajczyk that Moscow had no intention of setting up a Polish puppet Government. Mikolajczyk was unimpressed and remained suspicious of Soviet intentions towards Poland. He was anxious to know who would administer Poland if the Red Army should enter the country, and asked whether this had been discussed in Moscow. Eden told him that the question would be relatively simple if only the territorial question were settled.²

The British Government saw little chance of Mikolajczyk's Cabinet assuming power in Poland unless they agreed to the revision of their frontiers with Russia.

On 17 November 1943 Raczynski delivered a memorandum to Eden in which the Polish Government spoke of the urgency of safeguarding their rights to assume the administration of the country as soon as it was liberated from the Germans, and asked for Churchill's intervention with Stalin. Raczynski explained that the memorandum was not Mikolajczyk's 'last word'. The Polish Government could not suggest concessions affecting the future of

¹ Avon, p. 416.

² Report on a conversation between Premier Mikolajczyk and Mr Eden held on 12 November 1943. GSHI-PRM, L46/23.

Poland while they were in exile and without the support of the Polish Parliament; the position would be different if 'the friends of Poland were to tell her that she must accept such and such a settlement in order to safeguard the future of the country.' This settlement would have to be guaranteed by London and Washington.

Eden explained to the Poles that at the Teheran Conference it might be possible to try to break the deadlock with the Russians;¹ but nevertheless, he told Mikolajczyk that he should not expect too much from the Conference.² Eden also asked the Poles to allow him to mention the frontier problem at Teheran. Mikolajczyk agreed, but wished any discussion about frontiers to include the question of Polish claims in the west. '*He also wanted the Polish Government to be given a chance of expressing their views after consulting their Underground Movement*'.³ Mikolajczyk was very anxious to see Churchill and Roosevelt before their departure for Teheran to explain his position to them. He was told, however, that such a move might be construed as an attempt to put pressure on the Russians or to prevent Churchill and Roosevelt from jeopardising Polish interests.⁴

Thus, at the end of November 1943 the Polish Government was slowly made to realise that, in order to return to Warsaw, it would have to agree to some territorial concessions. But it wished to make it clear that the acceptance of new frontier arrangements would depend on the existence of Anglo-American guarantees for Poland and on the attitude of the resistance leaders in Warsaw. Mikolajczyk felt that he and his colleagues were 'being subjected to a softening-up process, designed to induce us to make sacrifices for the sake of a compromise'.⁵

5. The Conference at Teheran: Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin and the Polish Question

The Polish problem was discussed during the Teheran Conference, on 28 November and 1 December 1943 and, as a result of these talks, a tentative provisional agreement was reached, between the leaders of the Three Big Powers, as to Poland's future frontiers with the U.S.S.R. This agreement was reached without prior consultation

¹ Woodward, pp. 252–3; Avon, pp. 421–2; and Raczynski, p. 212.

² Avon, p. 422.

³ Woodward, p. 253. My italics.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁵ Raczynski, p. 212.

with the Polish Government, in spite of Mikolajczyk's insistence to the contrary.

The most decisive step leading to this agreement was taken on the evening of 28 November 1943, during an after-dinner talk between Churchill and Stalin. Churchill himself suggested to Stalin that they should discuss the Polish question.¹ The British were anxious to solve the Polish problem as soon as possible. A difficulty was, however, writes Eden, that the Americans were terrified of the subject because they considered it 'political dynamite' for their Presidential elections in 1944.² But the British calculated that failure to reach a solution at Teheran would mean further deterioration in Russo-Polish relations in six months' time, when, they assumed, the Russian army would be in Poland and the American Presidential election certainly more imminent.³ Churchill told Stalin that the British Government was committed to the re-establishment of a strong and independent Poland but not to any specific Polish frontiers.⁴ Churchill assured Stalin that he personally 'had no attachment to any specific frontiers between Poland and the Soviet Union . . .' and 'felt that the consideration of Soviet security on their western frontiers was a governing factor'.⁵ He felt

that it would be very valuable if here in Teheran the representatives of the three governments could work out some agreed understanding on the question of the Polish frontiers which could then be taken up with the Polish Government . . . he would like to see Poland move westward in some manner as soldiers at drill execute the drill 'left close' and illustrated his point with three matches representing the Soviet Union, Poland and Germany.⁶

Stalin reacted cautiously, merely agreeing 'that it would be a good idea to reach an understanding on this question', but saying that the matter required further investigation.⁷ Roosevelt was absent during these exchanges.⁸

Roosevelt raised the Polish question on 1 December. In reply to

¹ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. v, *Closing the Ring* (London, 1952), p. 319 (hereafter to be referred to as Churchill).

² Avon, p. 427.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conference at Cairo and Teheran, 1943* (Washington, 1961), p. 512 (hereafter to be referred to as *Conference at Teheran*). For Churchill's personal account of the conference with Stalin on Poland see: Churchill, vol. v, pp. 319-20.

⁵ *Conference at Teheran*, p. 512.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Avon, p. 427.

his reference to the need for negotiations leading to the re-establishment of relations between the Polish and Soviet Governments, Stalin claimed that the Polish Government was closely connected with the Germans, and its agents in Poland were killing Soviet partisans. At the same time he pointed out that Russia's security depended on friendly relations with Poland. The Russians were in favour of Poland's reconstitution and expansion at German expense; however, they made a distinction between the Polish Government and Poland. The rift between Russia and Poland, he alleged, was the result, not of a whim, but of Polish involvement, with the Nazis, in slanderous anti-Soviet propaganda. He said that before entering into negotiations with the Poles he would like guarantees that the Polish Government would stop killing partisans, that it would urge the people to fight against the Germans, and would not indulge in intrigues.¹

Churchill, anxious to settle the territorial question as a prelude to a general improvement in Russo-Polish relations, asked for the Soviet views 'in regard to the frontier question', and said that 'if some reasonable formula could be devised, he was prepared to take it up with the Polish Government in exile, and, without telling them that the Soviet Government would accept such a solution, would offer it to them as probably the best they could obtain'.² Indeed, he stated that should the Polish Government refuse to accept this formula, 'then Great Britain would be through with them and certainly would not oppose the Soviet Government under any conditions at the peace table'.³ Poland must be 'strong and friendly to Russia'.⁴ Stalin agreed that this was 'desirable' but added that the only frontier acceptable to the Soviet Government was the 1939 line.⁵ Eden pointed out to him that this was the 'Ribbentrop-Molotov' line, but Stalin was unmoved.⁶

Roosevelt, no doubt anxious about the Polish vote in the United States, asked whether, in Stalin's opinion, the areas Poland was to gain from Germany were equal to those to be ceded by her to Russia; Stalin, apparently little interested in such subtleties, replied that he did not know. He wanted a solution based on ethnic considerations. Roosevelt seemed satisfied with this and asked whether a transfer

¹ *Conference at Teheran*, pp. 597–9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 599. For Churchill's personal account of the conference with Stalin and Roosevelt on Poland see: Churchill, vol. v, pp. 348–1.

³ *Conference at Teheran*, p. 599.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*