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BRITISH ATTEMPTS TO MAKE THE POLISH  
GOVERNMENT CAPITULATE IN FACE OF SOVIET  
CLAIMS (JANUARY–FEBRUARY 1944)

The first two months of 1944 were witness of an unprecedented action taken by the top British political bodies to force the Polish authorities in exile to submit to the demands of the Soviet Union. In the last quarter of 1943 the British suffered serious diplomatic setbacks, and slid into a policy of appeasement with regard to the USSR. During the conference of the foreign ministers of Great Britain, Soviet Union and United States held in Moscow from October 19–30, 1943, the British minister Anthony Eden was forced by the Soviet commissar Vyacheslav Molotov on October 24 to express his consent to a political agreement between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia that facilitated Soviet political penetration into Central–Eastern Europe. This took place with the tacit consent of the American Secretary of State Cardell Hull. On October 29 Eden, finding insufficient support from Hull, failed to obtain Molotov's approval of the initiative to induce the Soviet government to re-establish its diplomatic relations, broken on April 25, with the legal authorities of the Republic of Poland. This was the prime objective of Stanisław Mikołajczyk's new Polish Government as established after the mysterious death in an air-crash over Gibraltar on July 4, of the previous Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief Gen. Władysław Sikorski. On October 30 Eden, faced with the resistance of Molotov and Hull, also failed to effect his proposal for a declaration by the Three European Powers of their common responsibility. According to his proposal, they would renounce their wish to create in Europe their "separate spheres of responsibility" that is spheres of influence.

During the conference of the chiefs of government of the Three Powers and the foreign ministers of Great Britain and the Soviet Union held in Teheran from November 28 to December 1, 1943, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill together with American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt accepted without any conditions Soviet claims to the eastern lands of the Republic of Poland. However, Churchill not only failed to achieve the signing of a formal agreement between the Three Powers over the shifting to the west of Poland's eastern and western borders, but he did not even obtain Stalin's acceptance of a general written statement on the subject of territorial compensation to Poland for her lost eastern districts. This recompense would entail the transfer to Poland of East Prussia, Oppeln Silesia and areas between the pre-war western frontier of the Republic of Poland and the Oder River. In case the agreement was accepted, Churchill wanted to use it as a means to put pressure on premier Mikołajczyk, and make him take up talks with the Soviet side aimed at territorial concessions towards the USSR, which, in Churchill's opinion, would lead to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the Soviets and Poland. On the other hand Stalin succeeded in obtaining from the representatives of the Anglo-Saxon Powers consent to annex to the Soviet Union the northern part of East Prussia with Königsberg and Tilsit. This was to be done in return for renouncing the claim to retaining the Ribbentrop-Molotov line from September 1939 as the post-war western frontier of the Soviet Union in favour of accepting the Curzon Line, which left on the Polish side Łomża and Białystok. Stalin positively rejected Roosevelt's proposal to start negotiations on the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the Polish and Soviet governments.

At the end of the first decade of December foreign minister Eden returned to London while Prime Minister Churchill remained in Africa until mid-January 1944, to cure his pneumonia. In a telegram from December 20 Churchill categorically demanded that Eden overcome the inflexible attitude of the Polish side on the matter of the Polish-Soviet frontier<sup>1</sup>. However, Eden could not achieve his aims in talks with Polish politicians as they retained the steadfast position that Poland should emerge from

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<sup>1</sup> W. S. Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, Boston 1951, pp. 450-451.

the war a victorious state, undiminished in the East and enlarged in the West. Thus Churchill impatiently awaited at Marrakesh his return to London in order personally to wring from Poland her concessions to the Soviet Union<sup>2</sup>.

Meanwhile on the night of January 3/4, 1944, the Red Army crossed the Polish eastern frontier, moving in the direction of Sarny in Northern Volhynia. At that time Stalin was not interested in any talks with the Polish authorities, since he did not oppose the initiative of Polish communists to create in Poland a new political body — as a diversion from the underground state — under the name of Home National Council, which for the benefit of public opinion would pretend to be an underground parliament. This happened on the night of December 31, 1943/January 1, 1944. The day after the Soviet Army marched into the territory of the Republic of Poland, on January 5, 1944, the Polish Government issued a declaration where they recorded this fact and supported the offer of a Polish–Soviet agreement. In their reply on January 11, in a TASS communiqué, the USSR authorities brutally rejected the Polish proposal. However, on January 14 the Polish Government issued a declaration with an appeal to the Anglo–Saxon Powers for mediation in negotiations between the Polish and Soviet Governments in which the British and American Governments would also take part. A TASS announcement of January 17 documented again the ill-will of the Soviet side and its negative attitude to the Polish offer of starting negotiations, under the pretext that “The Soviet Government cannot enter into official negotiations with a government with which diplomatic relations have been interrupted”<sup>3</sup>.

On January 20 the long-awaited meeting of Churchill and Mikołajczyk took place, Churchill was accompanied by Eden and Undersecretary of State Alexander Cadogan, while Mikołajczyk had with him Minister of Foreign Affairs Tadeusz Romer and Ambassador Edward Raczynski. Churchill demanded that Mi-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 452.

<sup>3</sup> E. Raczynski, *W sojuszniczym Londynie. Dziennik ambasadora 1939–1945* (In *Allied London. An Ambassador's Diary 1939–1945*), Londyn 1960, pp. 220–225; *Sprawa polska w czasie drugiej wojny światowej na arenie międzynarodowej. Zbiór dokumentów* (The *Polish Question During the Second World War in the International Arena. A Collection of Documents*) (further on: *Sprawa polska*), Warszawa 1965 (on manuscript principle), pp. 452–458; *Documents on Polish–Soviet Relations 1939–1945* (further on: *DPSR*), vol. II, 1943–1945, London, Melbourne, Toronto 1961, pp. 123–134, 132–134, 138–139, 142–143.

kołajczyk accept the Curzon Line as a basis for negotiations with the Soviet authorities, which would "deprive Poland of Lwów, in return for compensation in the form of East Prussia, Gdańsk, Opoln Silesia and an extension of the Polish western territories to the Oder line". Churchill explained that if Poland did not get the lands in the West and North, she would not be obliged by the agreement referring to her eastern lands, which were to fall to the Soviet Union. Both these questions were to be closely linked and to find reflection in a single agreement. He did not reveal that during the Teheran conference Stalin demanded for the Soviet Union the northern part of Eastern Prussia with Königsberg and Tilsit. He stated that he was "obliged to defend the independence of Poland, not her frontiers", and that "Great Britain will not start war with Russia to defend the Polish eastern frontier", and "America will not do it either". He threatened that he would make his opinion public in a Parliamentary statement. "At present I tell it to you confidentially", Churchill emphasized his good will, "for I think it better to do so..." The British Prime Minister wanted to mollify as much as possible the attitude of his guests<sup>4</sup>.

By way of consolation, however, he defined the last Soviet reply of January 17 as "brutal in its expression and unconvincing in its argumentation, which I intend personally to point out to the Soviet Union". He promised a guarantee of the Great Powers for the new frontiers of the Republic of Poland. He also promised to send a telegram to Stalin and protest against the Soviet dictator's meddling in the personal structure of the Polish Government, since "one government has no right to dictate who should belong to another and meddle in its internal affairs". However, he pointed out that he would like "to add in this telegram that the Polish Government has agreed to accept the Curzon Line as the point of departure for a discussion". "I would also personally prefer to postpone the settlement of territorial questions till we sit at the peace negotiations table", said Churchill. "But what will happen meanwhile", he asked, and answered this question himself: "the Russians will occupy the whole of Poland and perhaps they will march to Berlin", and "in Warsaw

<sup>4</sup> A report on Churchill, Eden and Cadogan's talk with Mikołajczyk, Romer and Raczynski, Jan. 20, 1944, Polish Institute and Gen. Sikorski Museum Archives in London (further on PIGSMA), PRM-L. 47; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 144-149; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 459-461; E. Raczynski, *op. cit.*, p. 229; L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, London 1971, vol. III, pp. 161-162.

they will create a puppet government, made up of communists". The British Prime Minister also planned to draw Stalin's attention to the necessity of concluding a Soviet-Polish understanding concerning military co-operation in the country<sup>5</sup>.

For the representatives of Polish authorities the discussion could not have been nice. However, it was not free of humorous points. When Churchill, probably partly indoctrinated by pro-Soviet Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš, said that "Russia is undergoing a profound evolution", "Stalin distributes thousands of prizes", and "after the war Russians will become more conservative", those present at the conference burst out laughing, although the tenor of the British Prime Minister's speech was not optimistic. Mikołajczyk tried to withstand Churchill's pressure, although the enunciations of the Polish premier showed that the Polish Government-in-Exile was very close to the point of stepping onto the slippery slope of concessions. Premier Mikołajczyk admitted that the Polish declaration of January 14 allowed the possibility of discussion on the Polish-Soviet frontier within the framework of an exchange of opinions referring to "all outstanding questions". He stated clearly that "a discussion on the revision of the Riga Treaty, which obliged us so far, is for us acceptable". However, he refused to acknowledge the so-called Curzon Line as the basis for negotiations with the Soviet side. "If I have spoken about the Riga Treaty line", he explained, "it was not because we consider it inviolable. It is for us the point of departure for a discussion, just as for the Russians it is the Curzon Line. The latter leaves on the Soviet side Lwów and Wilno, which to Polish hearts are invaluable". The Polish premier did not want to give up to Soviet dominion at least those two centres of Polish culture<sup>6</sup>.

Mikołajczyk asked Churchill "for the support of the British Government for the Polish cause more in the national sense of an exchange of populations than territorial changes" and expressed his belief that Churchill "would help in not allowing the Curzon Line to be accepted as a point of departure in negotia-

<sup>5</sup> A report on Churchill, Eden and Cadogan's talk with Mikołajczyk, Romer and Raczynski, Jan. 20, 1944, PIGSMA; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 144-149; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 459-461; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>6</sup> A report on Churchill, Eden and Cadogan's talk with Mikołajczyk, Romer and Raczynski, Jan. 20, 1944, PIGSMA; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 144-149; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 459-461; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.

tions". The British Prime Minister uncompromisingly rejected the appeals of his Polish colleague. In vain did Mikołajczyk protest that "Russia is interested not so much in frontiers or territory, of which it has enough, as in the possibility of exerting actual control over post-war Poland, even without its formal incorporation" and that "Russia wants first to make us renounce half of our country and then to subjugate the rest". Churchill was inflexible. Mikołajczyk then alleged he could not give an answer without presenting the matter to the Polish Cabinet. On his part he declared that the Riga frontier should be accepted as a point of departure in negotiations, that Poland must not emerge from the war with a diminished area, that the solution of controversial questions should be rather sought in the regulation of population problems than in territorial changes, that guarantees should be obtained from the Anglo-Saxon powers and the principle of non-interference of one state in the internal affairs of another should be observed. In reply Churchill expressed his conviction that Mikołajczyk would bring him "possibly the fullest consent of the Polish Government" to the claims with which it was presented<sup>7</sup>.

After the session of the Polish Cabinet on the afternoon of January 20, the official position of Poland was specified, and it more or less agreed with what Mikołajczyk, while recapitulating his point of view, said to Churchill. The particular points were presented more precisely. Poland would have to obtain a full guarantee of Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union of her future statehood in a treaty which would include their obligation not to interfere in her internal affairs. Assuming that the Riga Treaty, on whose settlements the negotiations with the Soviet Union should be based, would be revised, the Polish side did not agree to the loss of Polish citizens of Polish descent and Polish citizens from national minorities who would opt to belong to the Polish state. The Three Powers should also pledge themselves to remove and help to remove the German population from the territory of Poland. A certain novelty was the postulate to change the content of the Polish-British alliance by introducing in its prolongation the principle of "lending Poland a helping

<sup>7</sup> A report on Churchill, Eden and Cadogan's talk with Mikołajczyk, Romer and Raczyński, Jan. 20, 1944, PIGSMA; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 144-149; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 459-461; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.

hand in any case of infringement of her territory by any of her neighbours", i.e. not only by Germany but also by the Soviet Union<sup>8</sup>.

On January 21 Raczyński visited Cadogan and in accordance with Romer's instruction expressed a wish that "the position of the British Government communicated to the Polish side orally by Prime Minister Churchill on January 20 should be communicated in writing". The Undersecretary of State agreed to provide co-ordinated minutes of the mentioned meeting. The Ambassador explained that the official formulation of the British stand "is all the more necessary to premier Mikołajczyk and the Polish Government as they deem it indispensable to ask the advice of the vicepremier, Home Government Delegate and to inform the government of the United States about the situation, before taking a binding decision as to the British proposal". The latter information was accepted by Cadogan without enthusiasm, since the British wanted to inform the Americans about their initiative at a moment suitable to themselves. Raczyński also said that the Polish side would on the same day address the British in writing with concrete questions concerning the commitment of Great Britain to ensure Poland's security in case she accepted Churchill's proposal with regard to the agreement with the Soviet Union; he would also expect an answer in writing. The Ambassador explained that the Polish Government decided on such a procedure, since "it must consider deeply whether it can or has the right to take such a risky decision as that put forward by Prime Minister Churchill". Without mincing words Raczyński pointed out that "the calculation lacked one crucial element, i.e. a well-grounded presumption of Soviet good will". "On the contrary, there are too many elements that make us fear ill-will on the part of the Soviets", he continued. "The character of the whole recent 'crisis'", the Ambassador estimated, "is artificial inasmuch as it results from Soviet pretensions, threats and disclosed intentions to interfere in our internal affairs"<sup>9</sup>. The tactics adopted by Polish diplomacy was marked by great caution and showed that the leaders of Polish foreign policy, realising the risk

<sup>8</sup> Mikołajczyk to Romer: Points for discussion with Churchill, Jan. 21, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM-L. 47; A report on Churchill, Eden and Cadogan's talk with Mikołajczyk, Romer and Raczyński, Jan. 20, 1944, PIGSMA; *DPSR*, vol. II, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> Raczyński's talk with Cadogan, Jan. 21, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM-L. 47.

they undertook, wanted to secure as much as possible the interests of the Republic of Poland in a game in which the independence of their country after the war was at stake.

No sooner than January 24 did Raczyński hand in to Cado- gan the promised document, addressed to Eden with the date of January 23. After acquainting himself with its content Cadogan grew uneasy about the question concerning British and American, or exclusively British formal guarantees "of the territorial integrity of Poland within her new frontiers, of her political independence and non-interference in her internal affairs against attempts from any quarter whatsoever". In the Undersecretary of State's opinion this postulate was neither "attainable nor practically feasible". As Raczyński recorded "even in the case of an agreement embracing Great Britain, the Soviets, Poland and Czechoslovakia Cadogan would not contemplate a guarantee to Poland against 'everybody' and especially against the participants in such a pact". In other words British politicians did not intend to undertake an obligation to help Poland in case of a threat from the Soviet Union. On the other hand Cadogan did not react to one of the major questions, namely whether "Poland's new Western frontiers will be definitely fixed at the same time as Poland's Eastern frontiers and embodied in one international document enacted on the same basis with the participation and consent of the British, the Soviet and the American governments". He was only interested in the issue whether the Polish Government wanted some acquisitions at the cost of Germany up to the Oder River line<sup>10</sup>. The British in fact were growing uneasy about the perspective of, in their opinion, too great a reduction of Germany upon the defeat of the Third Reich.

Eden's official reply of February 1, addressed to Raczyński, contained a statement that "the questions included in your letter, however, concern problems whose solution will in the nature of things not lie in the hands of His Majesty's Government alone, but will be a matter for agreed settlement between this country and other powers concerned including, of course, Poland herself". So before working out a common stand with other interested governments His Majesty's Government is not "in a position to

<sup>10</sup> A report on Raczyński's talk with Cadogan, Jan. 24, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM-L. 47; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 150-151; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 462-464; E. Raczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 229; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, p. 162.



return any final answer to the detailed questions contained in your letter", wrote Eden<sup>11</sup>. The British wanted to escape any responsibility for the consequences of the steps taken at their instigation by the Polish authorities.

On January 26 Polish Ambassador in Washington, Jan Ciechanowski, handed in to the American Secretary of State, Hull, the note from the Polish Government informing him about the content of talks between Mikołajczyk and Churchill six days before. The note also included three questions that the Polish premier wanted to submit to President Roosevelt. They asked whether the Government of the United States "considers it advisable to enter already now upon the final settlement of territorial problems of Europe"; whether it is "prepared in principle to participate in bringing about such agreements and to guarantee them"; and whether it thinks possible "to lend its support to Prime Minister Churchill's plan and to its realization". In the reply of February 1 handed in to Ciechanowski and on the next day sent to Mikołajczyk through ambassador Rudolf Schoenfeld, the American Government acknowledged that "certain complex and vital considerations may render it desirable for the Government of Poland to endeavour to reach without delay a solution with regard to its territory". Although it offered its assistance "through the offer of good offices to the Polish and to the Soviet Governments", but it declined to give its guarantee of a possible Polish-Soviet agreement. It expressed its readiness to support Churchill's endeavours to re-establish diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union, but it made it clear that "there can be no question of guarantees, as far as the United States Government is concerned"<sup>12</sup>. Thus the Polish authorities in exile conclusively established that neither Great Britain nor the United States was going to pay for Polish concessions to the Soviet Union with a guarantee of Poland's safety.

In his telegram of January 26 premier Mikołajczyk informed the Home Government Delegate, Jan Stanisław Jankowski, about

<sup>11</sup> Eden's note to Raczyński, Feb. 1, 1944, N<sup>o</sup> C. 1059-8-G, PIGSMA, PRM-L. 47; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 158-159; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>12</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States* (further on: *FRUS*), *Diplomatic Papers*, 1944, vol. III, *The British Commonwealth and Europe*, Washington 1965, pp. 1236-1237, 1248-1249; Schoenfeld's note to Mikołajczyk, Feb. 2, 1944, together with Hull's note to Ciechanowski, Feb. 1, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM-L. 47; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 159-160.

the pressure exerted by Churchill on the Polish authorities during their meeting on January 20. He also asked "for a concrete answer, whether it is possible to accept the proposal of taking the Curzon Line as the point of departure for talks" with the Soviet authorities. He said that he was waiting not only for an answer from the Home Government Delegate but also from the American Government. He warned that "because of the difficult internal political situation in America and her war with Japan — America wants to leave the settlement of Polish questions in the hands of Churchill and therefore", he added "I do not expect a more favourable answer". He rather counted on his meeting with Roosevelt the next month. On January 27 Mikołajczyk informed Poland about the content of the questions posed in writing to the British Government. In the next telegram, of February 8, to the Home Government Delegate and the Council of National Unity, constituted on January 9 to replace the Home Political Representation, and bringing together representatives of the four main political parties that formed the foundation of the Polish underground state, premier Mikołajczyk informed them about the replies of the British and American Governments. He also insisted that the home authorities immediately take a stand on Churchill's proposal. Mikołajczyk had to wait for a shortened answer from Poland until March 1, and for a detailed one till March 20, which was much too late to use it in his talks with the British. The Home Government Delegate and the Council of National Unity categorically opposed having any discussions with the Soviets on the subject of the revision of Poland's eastern frontiers<sup>13</sup>. In February the Polish Government had to take decisions on its own.

The January exchange of declarations between the Polish and Soviet sides, which brought the Stalin-provoked conflict to the public forum and endowed it with a propaganda dimension, perturbed the Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš. Ambassador Raczyński, invited by him on January 27, recorded that "Mr. Beneš was unpleasantly surprised by the brutality of the last

<sup>13</sup> Mikołajczyk's telegram to Jankowski, Jan. 26, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM-L. 47; Mikołajczyk's telegram to Jankowski and the Council of National Unity, Feb. 8, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM-L. 47; *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939-1945 (The Home Army in Documents 1939-1945)* (further on: AK), vol. III, April 1943 — July 1944, Londyn 1976, pp. 231-234, 288, 294-295; AK, vol. VI, *Uzupelnienia (Supplement)*, Londyn 1989, pp. 367-368.

Soviet communiqué". The President declared that "Soviet postulates had been known to him, however they had not been presented to him in such a drastic form" and that "at any rate, he did not suppose that they would be announced in public". It seems that Beneš realised that his role as a mediator — after signing the Czechoslovak–Soviet treaty of alliance in Moscow on December 12, 1943, formally open to include Poland — had finished and the prospect of any profits arising from this had become questionable. At the same time he was clearly apprehensive of being censured by Poles, as he told Raczyński that he expected "us (i.e. Poles) not to criticise Czech policy unilaterally". It is true that Beneš continued to protest that "between Czechoslovakia and the USSR there is an element of mutual trust", and "in Polish–Soviet relations there is none", however, he added pessimistically that "each of the parties separately will in future bear the responsibility for the path it chooses". "It is possible", said Beneš, "that I am leading my country to its doom. Personally, I don't believe it to be true". The President must have probably understood that Stalin would not admit the Polish side to the Soviet–Czechoslovak treaty and that he would have to look the Soviet dictator face to face on his own. Raczyński observed that Beneš was "less sure of himself than he had appeared to be so far"<sup>14</sup>. There was no doubt that Beneš was excluded from Stalin's and Churchill's game over Poland, since he was no longer useful: to the Soviet dictator as an instrument for undermining the position of the Polish Government in the eyes of Anglo–Saxon Powers and in the public opinion of those states, and to the British Prime Minister for exerting pressure on the Polish Government to capitulate in face of Soviet territorial claims. Now Churchill took the matter in hand himself to overcome the resistance of the representatives of the Polish authorities.

February 6 saw another meeting between Churchill and Mikołajczyk, accompanied on the Polish side by Romer and Raczyński and on the British by Eden, the Prime Minister's personal assistant Frederick Cherwell and Ambassador Owen O'Malley. Churchill informed Mikołajczyk about the content of his correspondence with Stalin. The Soviet dictator's reply from February 4 to Churchill's letter from February 1 contained a claim

<sup>14</sup> Raczyński's talk with Beneš, Jan. 27, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM–L. 47; DPSR, vol. II, pp. 156–157.

that the Polish Government should officially declare that "the boundary-line established by the Riga Treaty shall be revised and that the Curzon-Line is the new boundary-line between the USSR and Poland". Stalin also drew attention to the fact that at the Conference in Teheran he had proposed the annexation of the north-eastern part of East Prussia with Königsberg to the Soviet Union, which Churchill had not disclosed to Polish politicians so far and which was a condition *sine qua non* of the Soviets' dropping the idea of designating the frontier along the Ribbentrop-Molotov line, less advantageous to Poland. The Soviet dictator declared that "we cannot re-establish [diplomatic] relations with the present Polish Government". At the same time he reminded Churchill that in May last year "you wrote to me saying that the composition of the Polish Government could be improved and that you would work towards that end". "You did not at that time think this would be interference in Poland's internal sovereignty" said Stalin, not without malice. Churchill's reply from May 12, 1943, to Stalin's letter from May 4, 1943, seemed to have confirmed the words of the Soviet leader<sup>15</sup>.

Mikołajczyk must have been surprised by the revelation concerning Soviet claims to Königsberg and by the British consent from May 1943 to Stalin's questioning the membership of the Polish Government. He drew Churchill's attention to the fact that the scale of Soviet claims was continually increasing: "they started asking for the Curzon Line, then for the change in the Polish Government, and now for half of East Prussia". Mikołajczyk expressed his suspicion that "the Russians were purposefully trying to make the Polish Government refuse their terms in advance". He expressed his conviction that "the acceptance of the Curzon Line as a starting point of any discussion would, in fact, constitute dictated terms and would preclude any real negotiations". He added that "such a course could only undermine the Polish Government's authority with the Polish nation and also

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<sup>15</sup> *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 165-171, 160-164, 2-3, 13; *FRUS*, 1944, vol. III, pp. 1249-1257; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 467-471, 369-370, 380-381; *AK*, vol. III, pp. 273-276; E. Raczyński, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-231; *The Great Powers and the Polish Question 1941-1945. A Documentary Study in Cold War Origins*, ed. A. Polonsky, London 1976, pp. 177-182; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165, 167-168; Polonsky and Woodward date Churchill's letter to Stalin from January 28. This date also figures in the report on Churchill's talk with Mikołajczyk on February 6 (*DPSR*, vol. II, p. 165).

disrupt the latter's unique solidarity". He also pointed out the unsatisfactory character of the British and American replies to the questions posed. Mikołajczyk emphasized that Anglo-Saxons did not offer to the Polish Government any "guarantees which would protect Poland against imminent dangers and safeguard her independence and sovereignty as well as the life and property of her inhabitants". He pointed out that the Polish Government went very far in accepting negotiations concerning frontier changes during the war and in consenting to reveal the civil and military administration of the underground state in this country, although Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations were not previously re-established. On February 2, 1944, the Cabinet accepted the decision, adopted on November 20, 1943, by the Polish authorities at home, on the Home Army leader's order, to lift the government instruction of October 27, which envisaged keeping the civil and military administration at home secret in the case of no diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union<sup>16</sup>.

Mikołajczyk, having no reply from the Home Government Delegate to his telegram of January 26, 1944, could only refer to the telegram from the Home Political Representation and the Home Government Delegate from January 8, which contained the statement that "Polish society is steadfast and in any conditions will be steadfast as to the inviolability of Poland's eastern frontier". Finally he said that he could not accept the so-called Curzon Line as the basis for discussion, and he soon informed the home authorities to this effect in his telegram of February 10. On the other hand for the first time he put forward to Churchill a proposal for designating a demarcation line, west of which the Polish administration would start its activity right after the liberation of territories from the German occupation, while the establishment of the Polish-Soviet frontier would follow after the military operations ceased<sup>17</sup>.

Churchill spoke in a raised voice, which in Raczyński's opinion could have testified to his embarrassment. He informed his Polish guests that Stalin and Molotov in their talks on February 2 with the British Ambassador in Moscow, Archibald

<sup>16</sup> *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 165-171; *FRUS*, 1944, vol. III, pp. 1249-1257; *AK*, vol. III, pp. 273-279, 270-271, 209-213; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>17</sup> *AK*, vol. III, pp. 273-276, 238-239; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 165-171; *FRUS*, 1944, vol. III, pp. 1249-1257; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168.

Clark-Kerr, attacked the Polish Commander-in-Chief Gen. Sosnkowski, Minister of National Defence Gen. Kukiel and Minister of Information and Documentation Kot, accusing them of anti-Soviet action. However, Churchill started to make light of the Soviet claims regarding the so-called reconstruction of the Polish Government, calling this problem "trifles compared with the frontier question" which "would fade away if the latter were settled". Contrary to what he asserted in his letter to Stalin of February 1, he declared that "if M. Mikołajczyk made changes in his Government, they would not be dictated but would be decisions taken in consultation with Poland's friends and Allies". Churchill, however, did not confine himself to attempts at obscuring the very difficult situation in which the Polish authorities in exile found themselves. He threatened them with a possibility of concluding over their heads a British-Soviet agreement concerning the Polish-Soviet frontier. In Eden's opinion this kind of solution would bar the way of the Polish Government back to Warsaw. Churchill also threatened that he would make his policy public in Parliament, where he would say among other things that the Polish Government had no ground for complaints. However, he did not mollify Mikołajczyk. The British Prime Minister, realising he would not achieve anything along these lines, said he would present the Polish authorities with the draft of a British note, which accepted by the Polish side would then be addressed to the Soviet Government and constitute proposals for negotiations. "If the Polish Government finally refused to join in this approach to Marshall Stalin he [i.e. Churchill] would, with Cabinet concurrence take necessary action himself"<sup>18</sup>.

Churchill was really afraid and expressed his fear at the session of the British Government on January 25, i.e. still before his second meeting with Mikołajczyk, that if the Polish-Soviet agreement was not concluded, Stalin would probably install in Warsaw a puppet government the moment the Red Army seized the city. Warning Mikołajczyk against such a threat he insisted that he accept the terms of the Soviet dictator and issue a declaration that would undermine the binding force of the Riga Treaty. However, Churchill was wrong in counting on the possi-

<sup>18</sup> AK, vol. III, pp. 273-276; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 165-171; *FRUS*, 1944, vol. III, pp. 1249-1257; E. Raczynski, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-231; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-168.

bility of softening the impetus of the Soviet expansion at the cost of vital Polish interests, and Mikołajczyk was right in suspecting that Stalin did not intend the Polish–Soviet talks to take place at all. At the above-mentioned session of the War-time Cabinet Churchill did not conceal his opinion that the British Government found itself faced with a problem “of the extreme difficulty”<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless he continued the line of action announced on February 6 during his talks with Polish politicians, although he could have tried to go deeper into the reasons why Poles thought his attempts to find a solution to the question of Polish–Soviet relations futile.

Mikołajczyk, knowing the reluctant attitude of the British towards his plan of a visit to the USA, nevertheless declared to the American chargé d'affaires Rudolf Schoenfeld on February 7 that he intended to go immediately to the United States. He disclosed he would give a negative answer to the British proposal of a note informing Stalin about the capitulation of the Polish Government in face of the Soviet dictator's claims. To justify his haste he said that after the rejection of British postulates by the Polish side there would — in his opinion — ensue “a general Soviet attack, if not a creation of some other Polish Government”. “In such a situation”, said Mikołajczyk, “I think that the only suitable moment for leaving is immediately after giving the British Government a reply, since later it will be much more embarrassing for President Roosevelt to receive me”. “On the other hand, a complete postponement of this departure will be used by the Germans in their propaganda, which has already announced that Britain does not allow this departure to take place and America does not want to see the Polish Premier”. Mikołajczyk also warned that the American refusal to invite him may arouse among Polish Americans a resentment against Roosevelt, who intended to run for the Presidency in 1944 again. Schoenfeld promised him to ask Roosevelt about his attitude to “next week's announced departure of the Polish Premier for the USA”<sup>20</sup>.

On February 14 Schoenfeld declared to Mikołajczyk that — as the Polish Premier recorded — “Mr. President would be very willing to see me personally, however he thinks that my visit to

<sup>19</sup> *The Great Powers*, pp. 175–177; *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 165–171; *FRUS*, 1944, vol. III, pp. 1249–1257; cf. L. Woodward, vol. III, pp. 163–164.

<sup>20</sup> Mikołajczyk's note on his trip to America, Feb. 15, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM–L. 47.

the United States in the near future must be postponed, since at the present moment it could be misunderstood and could do more harm than good to both sides". In other words Roosevelt did not intend to strengthen the position of the Polish Government in face of British pressure on the Polish authorities to accept the Soviet *diktat*. Nor did he want to complicate his relations with Stalin. He also wanted to keep secret the fact that he personally refused his consent to Mikołajczyk's arrival in the USA. Schoenfeld asked the Polish Premier not to make known in his communiqué that the visit was postponed at President Roosevelt's request, but to inform that important duties detained him in London<sup>21</sup>.

Mikołajczyk's reaction to the American decision was bitter. He declared to Schoenfeld that the reaction of Poles at home would be very bad. The American diplomat tried to explain that "perhaps the situation will soon change and then it will be possible for the meeting to take place"<sup>22</sup>. The Polish side had another cause for anxiety. On January 22 the American Ambassador, favourable to Poland, Anthony J. Drexel Biddle resigned from his post in the Polish Government. Realising the essence of the American policy towards Poland, he probably did not want to take part in diplomatic dealings that would weaken the position of the Polish Government in the international arena. Meanwhile the American authorities, eagerly accepting Biddle's resignation, delayed the appointment of a new ambassador, which could testify to their deliberate lowering of the rank of Polish-American relations. On February 10 Ambassador Ciechanowski intervened with the Department of State in this matter<sup>23</sup>. It was becoming increasingly less probable that the United States would accept the role of a defender of Polish interests in the face of Soviet claims.

At the same time the British continued to put pressure on the Polish Government. On February 10, during talks between Romer and Raczyński on the one hand, and Eden, Cadogan and O'Malley on the other, the British Foreign Minister wanted first to learn the Polish point of view on the planned note to Stalin, since in his opinion — as Raczyński recorded — "it would not make sense to draft such a document if the British knew that we

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> *FRUS*, 1944, vol. III, p. 1247.



would reject it in advance". Eden threatened that "this would have to have an unfavourable effect on the temperature of mutual Polish-British relations". However, the Polish diplomats did not disclose to their interlocutors that the Polish side was planning to give a negative reply to the British proposal. They protested, without knowing the American stand, that Mikołajczyk's departure for the United States "is necessary and should take place very soon", however, it would not be possible "before they give in London a reply awaited by the British Government". Eden took note of this "without satisfaction, but without protest"<sup>24</sup>.

Further discussion took a well-trodden path and did not finish with a rapprochement. According to Eden, if the Polish Government did not accept the British formula "the Polish cause will poison relations between the Great Powers for many years". On his part the Foreign Minister offered even Churchill's readiness "to show his teeth to Moscow", i.e. British participation in an armed conflict in defence of Poland's independence, however not the inviolability of her frontiers. This sounded improbable. The Polish diplomats, on the other hand, pointed out a tactical error to the British, i.e. bargaining for Poland's independence by territorial concessions. They pointed out that the talks in Teheran took place in "an unfavourable situation, because of the prevalence of Soviet military successes, unbalanced by similar successes of the Allies in Europe". After Eden confirmed that Stalin had insisted on removing from their offices Commander-in-Chief Gen. Sosnkowski and ministers Kot and Gen. Kukiel, they stated that "it is difficult to treat these claims as *bona fide* (i.e. dictated by a concern to remove the enemies of the Polish-Soviet understanding)". Romer and Raczyński were prone to suspect that "the real intention is: 1) to disrupt the army, whose coherence and discipline is inconvenient to Soviet plans; 2) to remove the ministers from 'crucial' political posts, in order to replace them with Soviets' own people". Both representatives of the Polish authorities, among other things drew attention to the *casus* of President Beneš, who "despite his flexibility and submissiveness, faces the Soviet threat of appointing Soviet favourites to the important posts in his Cabinet". They pointed out "the Soviet tactics of piling up difficulties" and concluded that "in such conditions it is

<sup>24</sup> Romer and Raczyński's talk with Eden, Cadogan and O'Malley, Feb. 10, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM-L. 47.

difficult to expect the Polish Government to show a 'minimum' of confidence in Soviet good will and the real intentions of Moscow"<sup>25</sup>.

Nevertheless the Polish negotiators, referring to the possibility of the Home Army's cooperation with the Red Army on Polish territory within the framework of an agreement previously proposed by the Polish side, pointed out that "such an agreement of necessity would have to entail an acceptance of some demarcation line defining the mutual relations of both factors in this country". They added that "if the Soviet Government really wished for an agreement — it would be possible on such a basis". Eden "emphasized several times that in the case of a break up of the present talks Prime Minister Churchill was determined to announce the British stand, point blank in the near future in the House of Commons". On the other hand Romer declared that "we shall expect a draft of the British note, which we shall consider with utmost good will"<sup>26</sup>.

Two days later, on February 12, Ambassador O'Malley handed in to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Romer a draft of Churchill's telegram to Stalin, prepared by the Foreign Office, which was to be sent after its approval by the Polish Government. He also conveyed Churchill's demand that the Polish side should take a stand by the evening of February 14, or the morning of February 15, which sounded like an ultimatum. Polish approval of the content of the British telegram would signify a resignation from the settlement of the Polish-Soviet frontier included in the Riga Treaty, the acceptance of the so-called Curzon Line as the basis for negotiations concerning the new frontier and a decomposition of the supreme authorities of the Republic of Poland as a result of the deposition of Commander-in-Chief Gen. Kazimierz Sosnkowski and also Minister of National Defence Gen. Marian Kukiel and Minister of Information and Documentation Stanisław Kot. "my view is that it is essential", Churchill wanted to say in his telegram to Stalin, "that these changes should appear to the public to be the result of a spontaneous decision of the Polish Government and not to bear the appearance of having been imposed upon them". "The Polish Government have given me a

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem.*

definite undertaking”, ran the text of the fourth paragraph of the draft of Churchill’s telegram to the Soviet dictator, “that the changes will be made once agreement has been reached between you and the Poles and diplomatic relations are to be resumed”. In the sixth paragraph we find a statement that “all these undertakings to each other on the part of Poland, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union [both these powers were among other things to oblige themselves to respect complete independence of Poland and «in due time» to ensure this country a territorial compensation at the cost of Germany, i.e. Gdańsk, Upper Silesia, area up to the line of the Oder River as well as East Prussia without Königsberg — note M.K.K.], except that in paragraph 4 above should in my [i.e. Churchill’s — M.K.K.] view be drawn up in such a form that they could be embodied in a single instrument or exchange of letters”<sup>27</sup>. Thus Soviet interference in the internal affairs of the Polish Government was to remain secret.

Furthermore, in paragraph seven Churchill considered it “impolitic to define publicly at present moment exactly what territories Germany is to lose”, i.e., he wanted the matter of territorial compensation not to find an exact reflection in this “single instrument or exchange of letters”. Also for this reason he thought that “the Poles could hardly be expected formally to recognize Soviet sovereignty over all territories to the east of the Curzon Line in advance of their own acquisition of the German territories to be transferred to them, which cannot be effected while hostilities with Germany are still continuing”. Thus the British Prime Minister recommended only “to lay down as accurately as possible the line of division in the liberated territory between districts to the east which will come under Soviet civil administration and districts to the west coming under the civil administration of the Polish Government re-established in Poland”. “This line”, Churchill intended to assure Stalin, “would in fact be the Curzon Line”, which was to become “the basis of the

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<sup>27</sup> The draft of Churchill’s telegram to Stalin, Feb. 12, 1944, PIGSMA, PRM-L. 47; W. Babiński, *Przyczynek historyczny do 1939–1945 (Historical Contributions to 1939–1945)*, Londyn 1967, pp. 227–231, 644–645; A. Ciołkosz, *Walka o prawdę. Wybór artykułów 1940–1978 (Fight for Truth. A Selection of Articles 1940–1978)*, Londyn 1983, pp. 167–175; DPSR, vol. II, pp. 173–176; AK, vol. III, pp. 280–282; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 473–474.

future frontier, subject only to ethnographical adjustments", running west of Lwów and leaving Przemyśl on the Polish side<sup>28</sup>.

Commander-in-Chief Gen. Sosnkowski said that paragraphs four and seven of the draft of the telegram "are especially cynical and amount to making the Polish Government consciously mislead its nation and its opinion". He thought that "Churchill's proposal can be either accepted or categorically refused". Gen. Sosnkowski took a stand that "the honour of the Nation and Government requires a categorical answer: no"<sup>29</sup>. Premier Miłkołajczyk was less categorical in his reaction, though he also rejected the British proposal.

At their session on evening February 15 the Polish Government passed two resolutions: N<sup>o</sup> 1 and N<sup>o</sup> 2. In the first one they admitted that in their declaration of January 14 they expressed their readiness to start talks with the Soviet Government also on the matter of frontiers, with one condition, however, that "the result of discussion on frontier questions can take effect only after the end of the war". This resolution also included the statement that "the Polish Government are unable to accept the demand, pressed by the USSR, that they should agree to the Curzon Line as the future Polish-Soviet boundary". On the other hand they agreed to co-ordinating during military operations, after previous consultation with the authorities of the Polish underground state, a demarcation line which would run east of Wilno and Lwów. The Polish authorities would take over the administration of areas west of the demarcation line, while areas east of the demarcation line "should be administered by the Soviet military authorities with the assistance of representatives of other United Powers". The Polish Government also expressed its protest against the plan to grant the Soviet Union a part of East Prussia with Königsberg, as contrary to the interests of the Polish state, since it restricted painfully its free access to the sea. Resolution N<sup>o</sup> 2 stated decisively that "personal changes in the composition of the Polish Government and the Supreme Command of the Polish Armed Forces cannot be made dependent on the demands of a foreign

<sup>28</sup> The draft of Churchill's telegram to Stalin, Feb. 12, 1944, PIGSMA; W. Babiniński, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-231; A. Ciołkosz, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-174; DPSR, vol. II, pp. 173-176; AK, vol. III, pp. 280-282; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 473-474.

<sup>29</sup> W. Babiniński, *op. cit.*, pp. 644-645.

State”<sup>30</sup>. In this case not only Soviet demands came into play, but also their British approval.

During Mikołajczyk’s meeting with Churchill on February 16 in the presence of Romer and Raczyński as well as Cadogan and O’Malley, the Polish side presented both resolutions, which despite Churchill’s expectations were not even a proposal of an alternative to the British draft of a telegram to Stalin, but only a written concise formulation of the Polish Government’s stand. Then Churchill came forward with a revised text of the telegram to the Soviet dictator, calling on Polish politicians to analyse the document and give an answer whether the Polish Government authorizes its content, till evening next day. Mikołajczyk, without rejecting this demand outright, gave to understand that the formal acceptance of Churchill’s letter to Stalin is impeded by the difficulties within the Cabinet, “which were based on the fact that the Poles saw no practical guarantee in return for their concessions”. The Polish Premier did not intend to return to this question again, even if it were presented differently, in the form of an authorization of British proposals made at the cost of the vital interests of Poland and presented to Stalin by Churchill in her name. However, the British Prime Minister decided to send two letters to Stalin on February 20. In the first one he referred to Mikołajczyk’s and Romer’s familiarity with the second telegram, which was a mixture of the Polish and British stand on the Polish–Soviet agreement. He added that both Polish politicians had consented to sending it. Indeed, Mikołajczyk, with the approval of Raczyński and Romer, accepted the British letter with a reservation that he did not do it on behalf of the Polish Government. He also declared that he attached much importance to the parallel action of that kind to be taken, prospectively, by President Roosevelt. Churchill’s second letter included, at any rate, a statement questioning in essence the purpose of starting any talks with the Soviet side. The British Prime Minister wrote that in his opinion the formal re-establishment of Polish–Soviet relations should be delayed till “the reconstitution of a Polish Government at the time of the liberation of Warsaw”. In his letter

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<sup>30</sup> W. Babiriski, *op. cit.*, pp. 231–232; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 474–475; *DPSR*, vol. II, p. 176.

to Stalin from February 28 Roosevelt supported Churchill's initiative<sup>31</sup>.

The British Prime Minister also decided to disclose in public in the House of Commons on February 22 the fact that Great Britain supported Soviet claims to the eastern lands of the Republic of Poland and that during the recent few weeks he, together with Eden, had conducted talks with representatives of the Polish Government on the subject of possibilities of reaching by Poland an understanding with the Soviet side. He maintained that "we ourselves have never in the past guaranteed on behalf of His Majesty's Government, any particular frontier line to Poland". He had forgotten that article 3 of the secret protocol attached to the Polish-British pact of alliance from August 25, 1939, mentioned the invulnerability of "the sovereignty or territorial inviolability of the other Contracting party" when obligations were undertaken with regard to a third state. In connection with Churchill's statement, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Romer on February 24 lodged an official protest with the Foreign Office, where he recalled among other things the recognition of the Polish-Soviet frontier by the Conference of Ambassadors in 1923 and the commitment of British Foreign Minister George Curzon to this decision as well as the support of the United States for the Polish eastern frontier. Finally Stalin had his say. Despite gestures made to him by Churchill, the Soviet dictator wrote in a letter to the British Prime Minister from March 3 — and similarly in his letter from the same day to Roosevelt — that "the matter of Soviet-Polish relations is not yet ripe for solution". From his telegram to President Roosevelt from February 16 it could be deduced that the condition of such a "solution" of the matter of Polish-Soviet relations would in Stalin's opinion be "a radical improvement in the composition of the Polish Government", i.e. introducing Soviet agents to it. Stalin for an umpteenth time rejected the possibility of an understanding with the legal Polish

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<sup>31</sup> *DPSR*, vol. II, pp. 180-187; E. Raczynski, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-233; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 476-479, 481-482; *The Great Powers*, pp. 182-186; L. Woodward, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-174.

Government-in-Exile. He also ignored the commitment of British politicians to mollifying the Polish stand<sup>32</sup>.

As early as from the middle of 1943 the Polish cause was becoming increasingly an object of manipulation in the international arena. Polish diplomacy tried to defend itself against this process, however without having any trumps in its hands, it was more and more pushed into a defensive position. In the first place, the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Three Powers in October 1943, and then the Conference of the Chiefs of Governments and Foreign Ministers of the Three Powers as well as the foreign ministers of Great Britain and the Soviet Union in Teheran at the turn of November and December 1943, contributed to the serious weakening of the position of the Polish Government in Exile. Even earlier it had not found an effective support from Great Britain and the United States in its endeavours to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Since December 1943 the Polish Government found itself in a still more disadvantageous situation because of the policy, initiated by the Anglo-Saxon Powers during the above-mentioned conferences, of concessions towards the imperialistic ambitions of the Soviet Union, which aimed to extend its dominion after the war over possibly the largest part of the European Continent, beginning with Central-Eastern Europe. Polish diplomacy had to withstand not only Soviet territorial claims but also an increasing British pressure to accept the ever-growing claims of Stalin. Nor could it count on the support of the United States. On the other hand it had to be cautious in the face of the clearly pro-Soviet Czechoslovak diplomacy, directed by President Beneš. In the first two months of 1944 there finally came a turning point in the treatment of the legal Polish authorities in exile by Great Britain and also the United States. The Polish authorities changed into a supplicant — although persistently, but also ineffectively soliciting respect for Polish interests with the group of states of the

<sup>32</sup> W. Jędrzejewicz, *Poland in the British Parliament 1939-1945*, vol. II, *Fall 1941-Spring 1944*, New York 1959, pp. 340-342; *Sprawa polska*, pp. 480-481, 484-485, 475-476; *DPSR*, vol. II, 194-197; S. Mikołajczyk, *Polska zgwałcona (Poland Violated)*, Chicago 1981, pp. 70-71; E. Raczynski, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-233; A. Ciołkosz, *op. cit.*, p. 172; *Diariusz i tekt Jana Szembeka (1933-1945) (Jan Szembek's Diary and Portfolios 1933-1945)*, vol. 4, *Diariusz i dokumentacja za rok 1938 i 1939 (Diary and Documentation for the Years 1938 and 1939)*, Londyn 1972, pp. 764-769.

anti-Nazi coalition, which tried to impose on them solutions that were harmful and dangerous to Poland. The next months of the war were to bring a further deterioration of the situation of Poland, whose independent statehood would be threatened by the Soviet Union after it gained its expected victory over Nazi Germany. The tactics towards the Soviet Union, adopted by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, undermined the very essence of the Polish-British alliance concluded on the eve of World War II in August 1939.

*(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)*