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DRUGI POTOP: THE FALL OF THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

by

Wesley Kent

(Under the Direction of John W. Steinberg)

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to examine the factors that resulted in the fall of the Second Polish Republic and track its downward trajectory. Examining the Second Republic, from its creation in 1918 to its loss of recognition in 1945, reveals that its demise began long before German tanks violated Poland's frontiers on 1 September, 1939. Commencing with the competing ideas of what a Polish state would be and continuing through the political and foreign policy developments of the inter-war years, a pattern begins to emerge - that of the Poles' search for their place in modern Europe. The lead up to the Second World War and the invasion of Poland by the German-Soviet Alliance demonstrates the failure of the Poles to achieve that place. The actions of the Polish Government-in-Exile during the war embody an attempt to legitimize their claims by lending all the support at their disposal to the Allied war effort. Yet the entry of the Soviet Union into the Allied cause proved a death sentence for the Second Republic, despite the Poles contributions they paled in comparison to those of the USSR. The London Poles defense of their national territory and people in the face of Soviet demand aggravated the Western Allies, causing them to see the government-in-exile as uncooperative and therefore, inconvenient. Due to this, when the time came they were willing to sacrifice the London Poles to appease Stalin and ensure his continued pledge to inter-allied unity. The Second Republic emerges from this examination as a victim of the

circumstances of its time and place. From the beginning the Poles were fighting a losing battle to regain the position they had lost in the 17th century. In the end, despite their resistance to Germans and Soviets alike, they were resigned by the Western powers to be a Soviet puppet state for the next 50 years.

INDEX WORDS: Poland, USSR, Germany, The United Kingdom, The United States of America, France, The Second Polish Republic, The Polish Government-in-Exile, World War II, Katyn, Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, The Warsaw Uprising, The Teheran Conference, The Yalta Conference, The Potsdam Conference, Jozef Pilsudski, Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt

DRUGI POTOP
-THE SECOND DELUGE –
THE FALL OF THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC
by
WESLEY M. KENT

B.A., Georgia Southern University, 2011

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial
Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2013

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DRUGI POTOP- THE SECOND DELUGE - THE FALL OF THE SECOND POLISH

REPUBLIC

by

WESLEY M. KENT

Major Professor: John W. Steinberg

Committee: Brian K. Feltman

Jacek Lubecki

Electronic Version Approved:
July, 2013

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INTRODUCTION

The Polish Second Republic

The Second Polish Republic was forged in the dying embers of the First World War; the Polish people, sensing the demise of the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires, reversed over a century of foreign occupation and established an independent Polish nation in 1918. Tragically, the Second Republic was born into a geopolitically hopeless situation; its very existence in Europe reliant on factors seemingly outside of its control. The new Poland arose between the two wounded giants of Germany and Soviet Russia, and its subsequent survival rested almost entirely on the fallacy of these two nations remaining in their weakened state. The politics and foreign policy of the Second Republic mirrored the Poles view of themselves as a reborn great power in the vein of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 16th century, a delusion which blinded them to their true weakness. Europe's rejection of Poland's worldview resulted in the Poles attempting, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, to find their place in Europe and gain legitimacy both at home and abroad.

Their precarious position in Europe and inexperience with democracy resulted in the Republics fall into authoritarianism damaging its prestige in the eyes of the West. In foreign policy, they were unable to find their place in the European power structure due to the threat they represented to its balance of power. When attempting to negotiate with Germany or the USSR, Poland's 1000 year struggle against the two nations produced a mindset where the very idea of compromise with either power was equated with weakness and national betrayal. Therefore any Polish territorial concession, a prerequisite for alliance with either Germany or the USSR, represented submission to foreign domination. The Polish solution of forming alliances with the appeasing West, throughout the inter-war years, compounded their problems. This left the Poles

vulnerable and isolated between the growing power of their neighbors. Polish security was, therefore, built on illusions: that of their strength in comparison to Germany and the USSR and that of their importance to the West. Though the Second Republic's standing in Europe was tenuous at its foundation, as time went by, while Germany rearmed and the USSR industrialized, its position became less and less secure. The West, simultaneously, began distancing itself from the Poles, eager to appease Hitler and prevent another great European war. Yet with the commencement of the Second World War, the Second Republic's position in Europe became untenable. With renewed strength, Germany and the USSR stripped the Second Republic of its territory in September of 1939, forcing its government and military to flee abroad. The entry of the Soviet Union into the Allied war effort in June 1941 further weakened the Poles' alliances with the West. The problem of legitimacy, inherited by the Polish Government-in-Exile, was their greatest weakness, one that the Soviets and the Western Allies were able to exploit to unilaterally decide Poland's post-war fate. Consequently, in the face of Soviet demands, Poland's position in the Allied camp declined, until they were finally abandoned at the Yalta Conference in 1945; the Second Republic being sacrificed in the name of inter-Allied unity, a mirage destined to fall apart in the coming Cold War.

This thesis seeks to examine the factors that resulted in the fall of the Second Polish Republic and track its downward trajectory.¹ Examining the Second Republic, from its creation

¹ The historiography of the Polish Second Republic, available in English, can be divided into several major areas. For a general overview, *Gods Playground* by Norman Davies is the definitive work, describing the history of Poland from antiquity to the present day. *The Eagle Unbowed*, by Halik Kochanski, is a comprehensive survey of Poland in the Second World War, touching on everything from diplomacy to economics, the Polish Armed forces to the three great conferences, and the government-in-exile to the German death camps. The Soviets' role in the formation of the Second Republic is explored in *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20*, by Norman Davies, which describes the military and political events surrounding the Polish-Soviet War. Another work is *Soviet-Polish Relations, 1917-1921*, by Piotr Wandycz, which, conversely, focuses on the diplomatic battles between the Poles and the Soviets during the same period.

in 1918 to its loss of recognition in 1945, reveals that its demise began long before German tanks violated Poland's frontiers on 1 September, 1939. Commencing with the competing ideas of what a Polish state would be and continuing through the political and foreign policy developments of the inter-war years, a pattern begins to emerge - that of the Poles' search for their place in modern Europe. The lead up to the Second World War and the invasion of Poland by the German-Soviet Alliance demonstrates the failure of the Poles to achieve that place. The

The internal fragmentation of the Second Republic's politics is explored by Joseph Rothschild in his two works, *Pilsudski's Coup D'état* and *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*. Within, Rothschild chronicles the rise and fall of the Poles' parliamentary democracy, and its overturning by Joseph Pilsudski's coup in May of 1926. *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939*, by Antony Polonsky, also focuses on the inter-war politics of the Second Republic, showing the failure of the various governments to solidify their power enough to raise Poland into a position of strength.

Poland's diplomacy with its Western allies is the subject of two books by Anna Cienciala. In *From Versailles to Locarno*, co-written with Titus Komarnicki, Cienciala describes the origins of the Poles' alliances with France and the French's subsequent retreat for this alliance due to pressure exerted by the United Kingdom. Cienciala's second book, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939*, examines Poland's foreign policy in the lead-up to the Second World War and the failure of both the Poles' policy of equilibrium and their Western alliances.

The suffering of the Polish people during the Second World War and German-Soviet crimes against Polish citizens is the subject of numerous works. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, by Timothy Snyder, looks at the history of the Eastern European borderlands from the end of World War One through the Second World War. Snyder recounts the seemingly never-ending pattern of slaughter committed by the Germans and Soviets on not only Poles, but also Jews, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and others. *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity*, by Alexander Rossino, inspects the savage conduct of the German war machine during the September, 1939, campaign and shows how German actions in Poland were in many ways a test run for their future crimes in the USSR. *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment*, by Anna Cienciala, N. S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski, provides a wealth of primary documents and analyses of the Katyn massacre of 20,000 Polish officers and Intelligentsia at the hands of the NKVD in 1940. Looking at the course of the massacre from the Soviet invasion of Poland to the Russian government's confession in the 1990s, Cienciala seeks to explain the reasons for the Soviets' actions.

Poland's military contribution to the Allied cause in the Second World War is explored in *No Greater Ally* by Kenneth Koskoda. In his work, Koskoda recounts in detail the stories of the various Polish Armed Forces active against the Germans in Europe. *Rising '44*, by Norman Davies, is an overview of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Davies follows the course of the uprising from its outbreak to its eventual defeat, focusing primarily on the life of the resistance fighters, the Soviets' disregard for the uprising, and the Western Allies' refusal to press Stalin to aid the Poles.

The Polish Government-in-Exiles' struggles against Soviet demands and Western pressure to compromise is the focus of *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations 1939-1945*, by Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański. An English translation of many of the government-in-exiles documents from the Second World War, the collection is a record of the London Poles' opposition to Soviet demands. In *Allied Wartime Diplomacy: A Pattern in Poland*, Edward Rozek describes the Soviets' attempts to gain political control of Poland through diplomacy with the Western Allies. Rozek argues that control of Poland was one of the Soviet Union's earliest goals and that they used war with Hitler to gain control of all of Eastern Europe. *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin*, by Herbert Feis, looks at the inner diplomacy of the leaders of the three great powers as they decided the shape of the post-war world. Feis' work shows how important the Red Army was to the allied cause and how much the West was willing to give to ensure continued Soviet involvement in the war against Hitler.

actions of the Polish Government-in-Exile during the war embody an attempt to legitimize their claims by lending all the support at their disposal to the Allied war effort. Yet the entry of the Soviet Union into the Allied cause proved a death sentence for the Second Republic, despite the Poles contributions they paled in comparison to those of the USSR. The London Poles defense of their national territory and people in the face of Soviet demand aggravated the Western Allies, causing them to see the government-in-exile as uncooperative and therefore, inconvenient. Due to this, when the time came they were willing to sacrifice the London Poles to appease Stalin and ensure his continued pledge to inter-allied unity. The Second Republic emerges from this examination as a victim of the circumstances of its time and place. From the beginning the Poles were fighting a losing battle to regain the position they had lost in the 17th century. In the end, despite their resistance to Germans and Soviets alike, they were resigned by the Western powers to be a Soviet puppet state for the next 50 years.

CHAPTER I
The Stillborn Republic
The Inter-War Years: 1918-1939



Map 1. "Map of the Polish Second Republic: With Partition Borders" Ancestry.com. "
<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~atpc/maps/poland-1918.gif>, (accessed April 1, 2013)

The origins of the Second Republic's fall lay long before the opening shots of World War II. The position in which the Polish state found itself after having won independence was not enviable. Established in the aftermath of the First World War, the Second Republic was forged from the remains of three empires, the German *Kaiserreich*, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Russian Empire, which had all collapsed as a result of the recent conflict. Reclaiming their independence after 123 years of foreign domination with a series of uprisings, declarations, and border skirmishes, the Polish people saw their creation gain international recognition at the Versailles Conference in 1919. With this independence, however, Weimar Germany and the USSR, the successor states of two of the three formerly partitioning powers, looked on hungrily, chafing at having so much of "their" former territory torn away from them. This hostility led to violence even before the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. In what is known as the *Powstanie Wielkopolskie*, Greater Poland Uprising, beginning on 27 December 1918 and ending on 15

February 1919, members of the *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*, Polish Military Organization, many of whom were veterans of the First World War, engaged in armed conflict with the intention of driving the German occupation forces out of the areas of Poland occupied by Germany since the partitions at the end of the 18th century.² Taking advantage of weakened German moral after the Kaiser's forced abdication, and the armistice of 11 November, the Polish Military Organization pushed the German forces from Polish lands.³ The success of the uprising had far-reaching consequences at the Versailles Conference. The Versailles Treaty awarded the Poles not only the territory they had won through force of arms, but also territories still under dispute such as the Polish Corridor, the strip of land that gave Poland access to the Baltic.⁴ On their eastern border, things were not so simple.

Most Polish leaders at the foundation of the Second Republic wished to create a large Polish state, to better protect and foster the economic, political, and military development of the fledgling nation. There were, however, competing aims on what shape the new Polish nation should take. Roman Dmowski, the leader of the right wing *Narodowa Demokracja*, National Democrat Party, argued for a compact homogeneous Poland made up only of the territory in which Polish Catholics were the majority.⁵ The ethnic minorities in these areas would be expelled or subject to "Polonization."⁶ The Polish leader and Chief of State Marshal Jozef

² Richard Blanke, *Orphans of Versailles: the Germans in Western Poland, 1918-1939* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 14-15.

³ Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20* (London: Random House, 2003), 25-26.

⁴ Anna Cienciala and Titus Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno: Keys to Polish Foreign Policy, 1919-1925* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984), 53.

⁵ Norman Davies, *God's Playground, a History of Poland: In Two Volumes: Volume II, 1795 to the Present*. (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 2005), 55.

⁶ Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 59.

Pilsudski alternatively argued for an *Intermarium*, between the seas, policy.⁷ He sought the establishment of a Polish-led, democratic, federation of independent states, in the vein of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: comprised of the Eastern European nations that were attempting to establish themselves after the collapse of the three great empires. Only through this form of collective security and the creation of a “Third Europe” axis could the eastern nations hope to stand against a future resurgent Germany or Russia.⁸

Pilsudski’s early implementation of his *Intermarium* policy and his attempts to expand Poland’s borders to their greatest size possible ran into the competing aims of the newly-born USSR. Having emerged victorious from the Russian Civil War, the Soviet government was wary of Polish expansion into areas formerly controlled by the Russian Empire, such as Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Baltic States. These areas had been ceded to Germany by the Bolsheviks at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to gain breathing space for their own consolidation of power.⁹ That process completed, the Soviet government now looked to regain this lost territory. Additionally, many Soviet leaders, such as Leon Trotsky, were proponents of exporting the communist revolution to the rest of Europe, namely Germany. Poland was to be the bridge to the West.¹⁰ To achieve this, the Red Army would first have to make its way through the new Polish State. The intersection of Polish and Soviet expansion led to the Polish-Soviet War. Lasting from February, 1919 to March, 1921, this back-and-forth struggle eventually saw the Poles emerge victorious, after the Battle of Warsaw (the so-called Miracle on the Vistula).¹¹ The Treaty of Riga signed 18

⁷ Davies, *God's Playground*, 55.

⁸ Anna M. Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939* (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1968), 6-7.

⁹ Davies, *God's Playground*, 284.

¹⁰ Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 66-67.

¹¹ Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 223.

March 1921, secured some, but not all of the territory gained by the Poles in the east since the end of the First World War.¹² Even with victory, the Polish-Soviet War ended Pilsudski's hopes of an *Intermarium* federation. The Treaty of Riga left half of Ukraine and Belorussia, vital partners for the proposed federation, in Soviet hands. Simultaneous minor border conflicts with both Lithuania and Czechoslovakia poisoned relations between the three nations.¹³ Though Poland was able to maintain positive relations with the rest of Eastern Europe, the tensions these states had with their neighbors rendered it impossible for the establishment of any type of supra-national federation. The Western powers also disapproved of the *Intermarium* policy due to its shifting of the European balance of power they were trying to maintain. While the eastern Polish borders, as set by the treaty of Riga, left Poland with a sizable ethnic minority of Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Jews, the failure of *Intermarium* led to a policy "Polonization" in the early years of the republic.¹⁴ In many ways a watered down version of Dmowski's proposed policy of a distinct Polish state, became the de facto policy of the Polish government in the first half of the 1920s.¹⁵

Polish politics during the inter-war period were marked by the search for an effective form of government. A conquered people for the past century the Poles would attempted to develop a functioning political entity to rule their nation. In many ways, however, two decades is not long enough to foster a spirit of democracy in a people long used to living under an autocracy.

¹² Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 261.

¹³ Matthew D'Auria, *Europe in Crisis: Intellectuals and the European Idea, 1917-1957* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 191.

¹⁴ Davies, *God's Playground*, 272.

¹⁵ Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 34.

In 1921, the Poles adopted a constitution creating a government modeled on the French Republic with a strong legislative body, or *Sejm*, and a weak executive. The latter was an effort by Pilsudski's enemies to prevent him from keeping the power he had possessed as chief of state.¹⁶ The government that emerged was chaotic and splintered. The problem of integrating the remnants of three empires into a single democratic body proved a difficult undertaking.

Due to the *Sejm's* proportional representation, Polish politics fell prey to various fragmented factions, four major and numerous minor parties, each with their own constituents and ideologies that could not agree on any major issue.¹⁷ As in the waning days of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the political infighting and division of the *Sejm* rendered it unable to adequately respond to the various problems facing the Polish nation. The numerous wars and conflicts had devastated much of the Polish territory and the difficulties of incorporating the three economic zones of the old empires into one was a daunting task.¹⁸ The political experience that many of the Polish politicians had gained while under foreign rule did nothing to aid their governance of the Second Republic. The Polish parties that had been formed in the legislative houses of Germany, Austria, and Russia had primarily been concerned with specifically Polish issues, such as redress for political grievances, and agitation for self-rule.¹⁹ Having gained independence, all their training proved useless and detrimental to the running of a cohesive state. The *Sejm* often devolved into special interests and demagoguery, and the grievances of Poland's ethnic minorities were oft forgotten or ignored.²⁰ Corruption, resulting from a combination of political inexperience and heritage from Russia and Austria turned much of the populace away

¹⁶ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 45-46.

¹⁷ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 96.

¹⁸ Davies, *God's Playground*, 307.

¹⁹ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 509-510.

²⁰ Joseph Rothschild, *Pilsudski's Coup D'état*. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), 4.

from the very idea of a parliamentary system.²¹ The absences of Pilsudski from public political life, having declined to run for president owing to the weakness of the office, also served to foster a sense of illegitimacy in the *Sejm* amongst the common people. Pilsudski possessed a charisma and following unmatched in Poland due to his role in the establishment of the nation and his victory over the Soviets in 1920. His public withdrawal from politics after the assassination of the first elected President of Poland, Gabriel Narutowicz, further weakened public opinion of the *Sejm* government.²²

From 1921 to 1925, Poland's economy showed little sign of improving as unemployment and hyper-inflation remained rampant.²³ The continued corruption and ineffectiveness of the *Sejm* led to mass disillusionment with the government. In this political climate, many looked towards Pilsudski to use his connections in the military and left wing parties to launch a Coup against the *Sejm*.²⁴ Pilsudski, disgusted with the inaction of the current government, was eventually persuaded and on 12-14 May 1926 with the support of the military, the Polish Socialist Party, Liberation Party, Peasant Party, and even the Polish Communist Party, Pilsudski overthrew the government of President Stanisław Wojciechowski and Prime Minister Wincenty Witos with only minor violence.²⁵ On 31 May, the *Sejm* offered Pilsudski the office of the Presidency, but once again he turned it down due to the inherent weakness of the possession. Instead, one of his colleagues, Ignacy Mościcki, was elected with Pilsudski assuming the office of PM from 1926 to 1928 and again in 1930.²⁶

²¹ Rothschild, *Pilsudski's Coup D'état*, 10.

²² Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 111.

²³ Rothschild, *Pilsudski's Coup D'état*, 20-21.

²⁴ Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 55.

²⁵ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 171.

²⁶ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 179.

Pilsudski did not pursue major reforms and distanced himself from the more revolutionary left that had been his allies in the coup.²⁷ He did not abolish the Constitution of 1921, only altering it from a parliamentary system into a presidential system with a strong central government.²⁸ After the coup of 1926, a movement called *Sanacja*, or sanitation, governed Poland with Pilsudski as its guiding hand. *Sanacja* was a political ideology developed by Pilsudski and comprised of his allies, who were disgusted at the corruption in Poland's government and the weakness of its economy.²⁹ It was formed of a coalition of the right, left, and center that eschewed political parties as only self-serving entities. *Sanacja* served as the major force in the *Sejm* until the initiation of the Second World War.

Effectively, Pilsudski ruled as a strongman or quasi-dictator seemingly working within the confines of the constitution, but in effect, ruling by decree with the *Sanacja* controlled *Sejm* rubber stamping his orders.³⁰ Additionally, governmental positions were filled with "Pilsudski's colonels", the block of military officers that had formed under the Marshal during World War One. These colonels saw Pilsudski not as a political leader but as their old commander to whom absolute obedience was owed. This, coupled with Pilsudski's general contempt for politicians, meant that the true governing force in Poland was a small cohesive group of men.³¹

Though Pilsudski's leadership was somewhat authoritarian, it was accepted by many of the Polish people. The stability it brought allowed the economy to begin its recovery, the rights of minorities in Poland were protected, and the nation began a process of industrialization.³²

²⁷ Rothschild, *Pilsudski's Coup D'état*, 157-158.

²⁸ Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 57.

²⁹ Rothschild, *Pilsudski's Coup D'état*, 362.

³⁰ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 511.

³¹ Rothschild, *Pilsudski's Coup D'état*, 338.

³² Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 512.

Furthermore, fear of the rebuilding Germany and USSR was justification for many that authoritarianism was the only method to protect the nation's very existence.³³ Problems did arise in that Pilsudski did not understand that the *Sejm* would resent illegalities even if they brought success. Likewise the quasi-dictatorship of Pilsudski brought disapproval by the Western democracies on the idea of a Polish nation, at a time when Germany was beginning to demand changes to the post-war order of Europe.³⁴

Though he did not play much of a role in politics during the last years of his life, Pilsudski's presence was crucial to the existence and legitimacy of the Polish government.³⁵ With his death in 1935, the entire *Sanacja* movement lost much of its impetus. Pilsudski's authoritarian method of governance left him isolated and without peers, meaning, when the time came to find a replacement, no challenger could come close to matching the force the Marshal had been in Polish politics.³⁶ The *Sanacja* movement which had relied completely on Pilsudski for its ideological content and cohesiveness began to splinter in his absence. Three groups emerged each claiming to be the successor of Pilsudski's vision: the left under Pilsudski's aide Walery Sławek, the center under President Ignacy Mościcki, and the right under Pilsudski's military successor Edward Rydz-Śmigły.³⁷ Rydz-Śmigły emerged as the next head of the Polish state due to an alliance with Mościcki, and his years in power were marked by clashes with the *Sejm* that made the *Sanacja* movement evolve into far more right-wing authoritarianism than it had ever been under Pilsudski.³⁸ At the same time Pilsudski's protection of ethnic minorities was

³³ Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), 9.

³⁴ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 9.

³⁵ Rothschild, *Pilsudski's Coup D'état*, 367.

³⁶ Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 69.

³⁷ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 406-412.

³⁸ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 512.

overturned, and a program of “Polonization” was implemented in regards to Poland’s minorities.³⁹ With Pilsudski gone, the popular support for the *Sanacja* government began to evaporate. Pilsudski’s cult of personality was often evoked by Rydz-Śmigły, but he proved to be a poor successor to the Marshal.

Since the Coup of 1926 there had been opposition to the *Sanacja* movement, united primarily by the desire for a return to parliamentary democracy.⁴⁰ Pilsudski’s death and the move to open authoritarianism by his successor reinvigorated the opposition to challenge the legitimacy of the Polish government. The group that would come to have the most influence among the opposition was the Morges Front, founded in February 1936 by General Władysław Sikorski and the former Polish Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski in the Swiss town of Morges.⁴¹ The Morges Front was backed by the French government who, though they had, in theory, a binding military alliance with Poland during the 1920s and 1930s, at the same time had been supporting the opposition to *Sanacja*.⁴² Sikorski, a former general in the Polish Army, living in self-imposed exile in France, had effectively become a French agent, spending his time attempting to rally support away from the pre-war ruling party.⁴³ By joining with the deposed Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski, Sikorski and the Morges Front had a compelling claim to be the legitimate government of the Polish state. Many Polish politicians fled the *Sanacja* movement in the late 1930s to join with the Morges Front, creating a pool of pro-parliamentary Poles outside of Poland.⁴⁴ French support of the Front factored into how many in the West

³⁹ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 460-463.

⁴⁰ Davies, *God's Playground*, 313-314.

⁴¹ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 418.

⁴² Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 26.

⁴³ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 418.

⁴⁴ Jerzy Jan Lerski, *Historical dictionary of Poland, 1966-1945* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 151.

viewed Rydz-Śmigły government, raising questions about the acceptability of not only the Polish government but the Polish state.

Poland's internal struggles were compounded by their international position. The Polish state lived under the constant threat of a German-Russian alliance, the same alliance that had been responsible for the partitions at the end of the 18th century.⁴⁵ Yet the Poles found themselves isolated in Eastern Europe between the successor states of the former partitioning powers. The foundational conflicts with Germany and the USSR further soured the already poor relations between Poland her two neighbors. This, coupled with the historical animosity felt by the three nations, all but precluded any form of alliance between Poland and the two great states. Both Germany and Russia claimed much, if not all, of the territory which comprised the new Polish state, despite the fact that all of the territory, and more, had belonged to Poland before the partitions at the end of the 18th century. To compound the point, the Germans made their feelings on the issue official government policy in 1925 at the Treaty of Locarno. There the German government formally recognized its post-Versailles boundaries in the West, but not the East, an event that led to a damaging trade war between Poland and Germany.⁴⁶ Poland's eastern border, seemingly settled by the Treaty of Riga was less of a flash point than the West, yet the persecution of the Poles, marooned inside the USSR, by Joseph Stalin's government showed the animosity was still alive and well.⁴⁷ If the Polish nation was to secure its position through alliances with either Germany or the USSR, there is little doubt that the allying power would demand territorial concessions, concessions which would set a dangerous precedent and

⁴⁵ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*. 1.

⁴⁶ Gordon Martel, editor, *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered A.J.P. Taylor And The Historians* (London: Routledge, 1999), 38-49.

⁴⁷ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012) 89.

represent a betrayal of the Polish people. Allying with either of their historical foes would be tantamount to giving up their newly-won independence, relegating them to little more than a puppet state as they had been in the Polish Congress Kingdom, the regime set up in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars comprising of the Polish territory controlled by the Russian Empire.⁴⁸

Just as important, any alliance with Germany or Russia would be a betrayal of the Poles' own worldview. Since the foundation of a true Polish state, identified as the adoption of Christianity by Mieszko I in 966, the Poles had seen themselves as members of the Western European community.⁴⁹ With their adoption of Catholicism in 966, the links it provided to the West meant law, art, and philosophy flooded into Poland transforming its feudal organization into what the Poles came to see as an enlightened Republic.⁵⁰ Since that time, the Poles have linked themselves to the West through alliances, royal marriages, and political ideology. In this light, the Poles' only option for strengthening their national security was through alliances with the West. Their preferred choice was their traditional ally, France, and its new ally, England. France and Poland had been allies as far back as the 16th century, with the marriage of French princesses to Polish Kings, and grew stronger in the 18th century with the marriage of Maria Leszczyńska to Louis XV of France.⁵¹ After the partitions of Poland in the 1780s and 1790s, Napoleon's France established a Polish satellite state, The Duchy of Warsaw, in 1807 out of the Prussian areas of the partitions. He later expanded the Duchy to include Austrian portions; the Duchy lasting until his fall in 1815.⁵² Throughout the 19th century, France was also home to a

⁴⁸ Davies, *God's Playground*, 225-226.

⁴⁹ Piotr S. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations, 1917-1921* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1969), 1.

⁵⁰ Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, 1.

⁵¹ Davies, *God's Playground*, 389.

⁵² Davies, *God's Playground*, 216.

large Polish émigré community and welcomed many refugees from failed uprisings of 1832 and 1863.⁵³

During the Poles' struggle for independence in 1918-1920, the French sent arms, support, and a military mission, including a young Charles DeGaulle, to advise the Polish Army.⁵⁴ France, after the First World War, was open to the idea of a Franco-Polish alliance as well as a strong Polish state. With the loss of their Entente ally Russia to communist revolution, France desired a strong Eastern European power to aid in her defense against any future resurgent Germany.⁵⁵ Poland, with its large size and links to France, offered the best option for their policy of containment. Furthermore France sought to use the Eastern European states, Poland in particular, as a *Cordon Sanitaire* to seal off the West from the Bolshevik threat of the USSR.⁵⁶ With this in mind, France and Poland signed the Franco-Polish Military Agreement on 19 February, 1921.⁵⁷ The agreement was aimed at threats from Germany and the USSR and assured military action by both nations if one of the signatories suffered an "unprovoked" attack.

The United Kingdom, however, was a different situation altogether. Due to the threat of Germany and the USSR, the Poles, in the opening days of their independence, saw expansion to their geographical limit as the only way to safeguard their national sovereignty. The United Kingdom, a country with little knowledge of Polish culture, history, or political ideology, saw the expansion, hypocritically, as rank imperialism which would upset the already fragile balance of power in Europe. This attempt to maintain the European balance of power, in line with Britain's traditional on the continent, was designed to keep Britain's markets, the basis of her

⁵³ Davies, *God's Playground*, 209.

⁵⁴ Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 94-95.

⁵⁵ Cienciala and Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno*, 5.

⁵⁶ Cienciala and Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno*, 13. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 10.

⁵⁷ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 35.

prosperity, open. A balance of power for the British, therefore, meant a strong Germany. Polish expansion, even to the borders established at Versailles was a detriment to the rebuilding of the German economy.⁵⁸ As the 1920s progressed, the British became increasingly sympathetic to the Germans plight. They felt guilt for the harshness of the Treaty of Versailles, and believed that the German-Polish border was unjust.⁵⁹ Poland's western border, the British agreed, could not last. They also felt that Poland and the Eastern European states were bound to fall under German control eventually as the east was Germany's natural sphere of influence, just as the United Kingdom's was in Western Europe and the Mediterranean.⁶⁰ With the signing of the Franco-Polish Military Agreement, the Polish nation was further harmed in the eyes of Great Britain as they viewed the treaty as turning Poland into a French satellite, just as they had viewed the Duchy of Warsaw in 1808, thus rousing long dormant fears of French hegemonic ambition in Europe. This led to diplomatic back-pedaling on the part of the French, who were desperate to keep the British on the best of terms to form a united front against a weakened, but not destroyed, Germany. The British, it was decided, were a far better ally to have than the Poles.⁶¹

Starting with the Locarno treaties in 1925, the French began a gradual retreat from their grand post-war design of containment. Without another great power, i.e. Britain, the French did not feel strong enough to pursue a policy with Poland and the other Eastern European nations. Britain's insistence at Locarno that France abandon their eastern allies in order to normalize relations with Germany convinced many in Poland, most importantly Pilsudski, that the West

⁵⁸ Cienciala and Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno*, 6-7.

⁵⁹ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 10.

⁶⁰ Anna M. Cienciala, "Polish Foreign Policy, 1926-1939: Equilibrium: Stereotype and reality". (*The Polish Review*) 45.

⁶¹ Cienciala and Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno*, 9-10.

could not be relied on to insure the survival of the Polish state.⁶² The Anglo-French entente and France's eastern alliances effectively canceled each other out, weakening both in the process. France subordination of its foreign policy to that of the United Kingdom hampered their original policy of containment and forced them to retreat from their post-war Eastern European sphere of influence, leaving Poland adrift searching for a lifeline.⁶³

The failure of their western diplomatic gambit all but forced the Poles to reevaluate their position in Europe. Pilsudski and the Polish Foreign Minister Colonel Jozef Beck's response was a policy of equilibrium and an individual action Eastern Europe.⁶⁴ This equilibrium was designed to counterbalance their French allies' concentration on Western security by means of Polish actions in the east, thus raising the value of Poland as a French ally and allowing them more say in the allied decision making process.⁶⁵ Beck and Pilsudski's plans also centered on the idea of self-reliance. As they considered Poland a reincarnated great power, they were determined to act as a great power, attempting to use their supposed strength as leverage in dealing with the nations of Eastern Europe. Their successful defense of Warsaw in 1920 and subsequent counterattack, which despite French supplies was primarily a Polish undertaking, helped to convince many in the Polish government that their policy of self-reliance was the right one. In reality their attempts to act as a great power were often interpreted poorly by the West and led them to overplay their hand, based on the illusion of their own importance.

The foundation of this equilibrium was the attempt to achieve normal and more importantly neutral relations with both Germany and the Soviet Union. Polish foreign policy

⁶² Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 8.

⁶³ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 203.

⁶⁴ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 5.

⁶⁵ Davies, *God's Playground*, 311.

throughout the next decade consisted of attempts to solidify its national security through a series of non-aggression pacts. The first major pillar in the Pole's policy was the signing of the Soviet–Polish Non-Aggression Pact with the USSR on 25 July 1932. The Pact was to last three years but was later changed to remain in place until 1945.⁶⁶ In the agreement, both sides vowed to renounce violence in their mutual relations, to resolve problems through negotiations, and to forgo any armed conflict or alliances aimed at the other side. The Soviets desired an arrangement with the Poles due to the Japanese attack on Manchuria in 1931. Fearing a war with Japan in the east the USSR was eager to sign a non-aggression pact with Poland to ensure the security of its western border.⁶⁷ The success of the agreement for the Poles was two-fold: first it shored-up its eastern frontier at a time when France, at the behest of Britain, was distancing itself from its agreements with Poland. Though the Poles saw the Soviet-Polish Pact as in keeping with the Franco-Polish alliance, as France had also signed such a treaty with the Soviets in 1931.⁶⁸ Secondly, the pact with the Soviets strengthened Poland's position, weakened due to the trade war, in negotiations with a rapidly rearming Germany.

Indeed, the Poles' attitude toward their western neighbor was becoming more complicated as the 1930s progressed. With the rise of the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler to power in 1933, the German repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles, their program of rearmament, and increasing nationalism were watched carefully by the Poles. Pilsudski, now in his later years, saw the revanchist Nazi party as a future threat to Polish security. His reaction was to propose a preventive war to France and the United Kingdom, to remove the Nazis from power before Hitler had further time to rearm. The West's reaction was one of shock and horror, and they quickly

⁶⁶ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 36.

⁶⁷ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 9.

⁶⁸ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 18.

refused the proposition. This unwillingness to act against the Germans seriously weakened Pilsudski's faith in French aid to Poland and led to a cooling in Franco-Polish relations. Pilsudski's fears were compounded by the construction of the Maginot Line, which he foresaw, correctly as it turned out, as a French signal that in the event of war with Germany, France was to conduct primarily defensive operations.⁶⁹ This went against the joint planning that had been in place since 1921, which consisted of coordinated attacks from France, Poland, and Czechoslovakia into Germany.

With France seemingly taking itself out of the picture, Pilsudski saw his only recourse as a non-aggression agreement with Germany to solidify Poland's western border. Three factors made such an agreement possible. First, Germany leaving the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference enabled Pilsudski to use the international isolation of Hitler's new regime to approach the Germans from a position of strength.⁷⁰ Second was that before Hitler's regime, the precondition for the normalization of relations between Poland and Germany had always been the revision of Poland's western border. Though Pilsudski was unable to get a German guarantee on the border's integrity, Hitler's isolation and need for time to rebuild Germany in his image caused him to drop the precondition.⁷¹ Third, was a French proposition to the Germans claiming that if they concluded a non-aggression pact with the Poles, in return France would support limited German rearmament and consider German claims to portions of Poland's western border.⁷²

⁶⁹ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 19.

⁷⁰ Cienciala *Poland and the Western Powers*, 15.

⁷¹ Cienciala, *Polish Foreign Policy*, 49.

⁷² Cienciala, *Polish Foreign Policy*, 50.

Additionally, Pilsudski considered Hitler's government to be less dangerous to the Polish state than the USSR. Pilsudski assumed that because Hitler was an Austrian and not Prussian, his claim to Polish territory was more political theater than an actual policy goal.⁷³ The terms of the German–Polish Non-Aggression Pact, signed 26 January 1934, were heavily in Poland's favor. Both nations swore to resolve all problems through bilateral negotiations and forgo armed conflict for a decade. A subsequent trade agreement ended the harmful trade war which had existed for the past ten years.⁷⁴ To reassure France, the Poles explicitly stated in the treaty that the pact did not compromise any of their prior international agreements, primarily the Franco-Polish Military Agreement. The treaty was still received poorly in France, with the Poles blamed for weakening their two-front solution vis-a-vis Germany. Some also charged the Poles with weakening the West's policy of collective security by pledging peace with Germany. The truth, however, was that the West was already sabotaging the idea of collective security by their retreat from their Eastern European alliances, and their willingness to give in to Hitler's demands for the sake of maintaining the peace.⁷⁵

With Pilsudski's death in 1935, the Poles lost not only the glue that held their government together, but also their guiding hand on the international stage. German rearmament, meanwhile, continued with the remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936 and turned into geographic expansion with the *Anschluss* with Austria in 1938. In both cases, Poland's Western Allies, for economic and political reasons, neglected to stop the blatant German violations of the Versailles

⁷³ Cienciala *Poland and the Western Powers*, 15.

⁷⁴ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 38 - 39.

⁷⁵ Cienciala, *Polish Foreign Policy*, 43-44.

Treaty. As the Nazi Reich attempted to gather all Germans within its borders, Poland, with its sizable German minority, around 100,000 in 1939,⁷⁶ looked on with growing concern.

The West's policy of appeasement, of giving into Hitler's demands for the sake of preventing war, seriously alarmed the various Eastern European nations dependent on the West for their survival. As the West appeased, Beck, now Pilsudski's foreign policy successor, began to rely more heavily on making unilateral decisions in Eastern Europe.⁷⁷ This attempt to survive autonomously had dire repercussions for the Polish state. Beck's policy of rapprochement with the Germans had the effect of making the Poles seem almost an ally of Germany.⁷⁸ With French inaction during the German remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936, the basis of its alliance with Eastern Europe, its willingness to fight, was almost completely undermined. Knowing that the French would not act, Beck nevertheless informed them that Poland was ready to aid them militarily in actions against the Germans. At the same time Beck informed the Germans that the Poles did not object to their actions. Beck's message to the Germans was soon discovered by the French, heightening suspicion already present due to the Poles' quasi-fascist government.⁷⁹ In 1938, Beck accepted the German *Anschluss* with Austria, unwilling to speak out due to French and Italian inaction. By chance, an incident on the Polish-Lithuanian border occurred in the same week, and Beck used the fear of a Polish-Lithuanian *Anschluss* to force the Baltic nation to reinstate long broken diplomatic relations. Disastrously, this action gave the West the image of Polish collusion with the Germans.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Blanke, *Orphans of Versailles*, 244.

⁷⁷ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 144.

⁷⁸ Polonsky, *Politics In Independent Poland*, 506.

⁷⁹ Polonsky, *Politics In Independent Poland*, 473.

⁸⁰ Polonsky, *Politics In Independent Poland*, 475.

The situation further deteriorated with the signing of the Munich Agreement at the Munich Conference on 30 September 1938 by Germany and the Western powers. The agreement granted Germany the Sudetenland on the western border of Czechoslovakia, home to a large German population, in exchange for a guarantee from Hitler that this would be his last territorial demand.⁸¹ The Sudetenland also served as the strategic key to Czechoslovakia's defense due to the presence of the Czech border forts and much of their armaments industry.⁸² Its absorption by Germany left the Czech state defenseless. Throughout the negotiations, Czechoslovakia, in what would become precedent for many future negotiations on Poland, was not consulted.

Poland's reaction to the Munich Conference was mixed. In the lead up to the conference, as Hitler was agitating for the cession of the Sudetenland, Beck attempted to pursue a policy of options. He made demands on the Germans in regards to the Polish minority in Slovakia, in case the West abandoned the Czechs, while simultaneously restating their agreements with France, on the slim chance that the West would stand against Hitler.⁸³ With the conclusion of the Munich conference, on 30 September 1938, Beck issued an ultimatum to the Czechs demanding they cede the territory of *Tesche*, home to large numbers of Poles.⁸⁴ The next day the Czechs acquiesced and Polish troops entered the territory. Beck's rationale for the action was twofold. First, it was primarily meant as a protest against the major powers for being left out of the conference that decided Czechoslovakia's fate. Beck's vision of Poland as the great Eastern power demanded that they be included in such important decisions.⁸⁵ The second reason was far more practical: Beck did not want the Germans to possess a territory with large numbers of

⁸¹ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 40-41.

⁸² John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 40.

⁸³ Cienciala, *Polish Foreign Policy*, 51.

⁸⁴ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 476.

⁸⁵ Cienciala, *Polish Foreign Policy*, 51.

ethnic Poles. Aside from nationalism, Beck felt that if the Germans possessed such an area they could offer to exchange it for the Polish Corridor, the strip of land that connected Poland to the Baltic, and other territory won by the Poles in the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918. Beck may have feared that the West would unilaterally agree to such a trade without consulting the Poles just as they had at the Munich Conference.⁸⁶ Whatever the reason, the Poles' seizure of *Tesche* stigmatized them in the eyes of the West. To France and the United Kingdom, this was further evidence of collusion between Poland and Germany.⁸⁷ Combined with the Poles authoritarian government; this put the Poles, in the eyes of many, within the fascist camp of Europe.

The charge leveled at Beck, of turning Poland into a German accomplice, does not hold up to scrutiny. Through he used the Germans' actions to his advantage, Beck showed no willingness to form an alliance with Hitler's government. From 1935 onwards, Hitler had floated the idea of Poland joining the Anti-Comintern Pact, a proposition repeatedly turned down by Beck.⁸⁸ Hitler also sought Polish aid in an attack on the USSR, claiming that the Poles would gain vast lands in the east, especially Ukraine, in return for giving up their claims to the Polish Corridor.⁸⁹ Again Beck declined. Though the West saw Beck as becoming too close to Germany, in truth, France's policy of appeasement sabotaged its alliance with Poland. The only option left to Beck was his rapprochement with Hitler. Due to the German claims on Polish territory, they could not afford to anger Hitler and were therefore forced into their own version of appeasement.

With Central Europe firmly under its control, Germany began demanding the return of the Polish Corridor. To push the issue, on 28 April 1939, Hitler withdrew from the German–

⁸⁶ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 144.

⁸⁷ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 475.

⁸⁸ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 474.

⁸⁹ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 115-116.

Polish Non-Aggression Pact five years prematurely and began to threaten the Poles with war if they did not acquiesce to Germany's demands.⁹⁰ Beck's reaction was based on his view of Poland as a great power. In the face of the growing German threat, he proposed a Third Europe policy, a continuation of Pilsudski's *Intermarium* idea. Believing that Czechoslovakia would disintegrate after the loss of the Sudetenland, he planned to construct a bloc of Eastern European states based on an alliance between Poland and Hungary, who would gain a common frontier at the expense of Slovakia.⁹¹ This idea fostered on the illusion of Poland as a great power, was supposed to create a third bloc in Europe, with the support of the West, to counteract the German-Italian alliance. This would allow the nations of the east to have more say in the containment of Germany and ensure there were no further territorial concessions given to Hitler. The project failed due to disinterest on the part of both the West and the various Eastern nations.⁹² More importantly on 15 March 1939, Hitler violated the Munich Agreement and annexed the rest of Czechoslovakia. With the entire country under German control, this ended the possibility of a common border between Poland and Hungary, the backbone of Beck's policy. The actual result was that Poland now found itself surrounded by Germany on three sides.

In the summer of 1939 the Poles were left with little option but to reestablish and reinforce their alliances with the Western powers, the same powers that had made clear their unwillingness to fight. The Poles saw an alliance with the appeasing nations of France and Great Britain as the only choice available aside from capitulation to one of their neighbors. On 31 March, Poland received guaranties from France and the United Kingdom that Poland's territorial

⁹⁰ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 42.

⁹¹ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 471.

⁹² Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 175-176.

integrity would be defended by the two powers.⁹³ These efforts were sabotaged on 23 August 1939, when the unthinkable happened. In Moscow the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed between Germany and the USSR. The agreement vowed non-aggression between the two powers and pledged the USSR's noninvolvement in a European war. There were numerous reasons for the Soviets to sign such a pact. First, the signing meant they might safely deal with the Japanese in the east without the fear of a German-Japanese alliance.⁹⁴ Second, was the threat of German expansion, through war or territorial concessions, to the Soviet border, leaving the USSR's heartland without a buffer zone. Third, Stalin knew that an invasion of Poland would put Germany at war with the West, buying time for him to strengthen the USSR, thus the pact was in the best interest of Soviet security.⁹⁵ For Hitler, the pact secured his eastern border so that he could face the Western powers if they decided to stand with Poland, without the threat of falling into a two front war.⁹⁶ Yet, it was the pact's secret protocol that would eventually lead to the Second Republic's downfall.

Much has been said about the USSR's overtures for collective security against the Germans, and the Western powers attempts to gain such an alliance. In truth, the only Soviet offer for a defensive pact with the Poles came in 1933, though the offer was only an attempt to sabotage the current Polish-German rapprochement.⁹⁷ Nevertheless as the summer of 1939 went on, there were attempts made to prevent a European war by means of an alliance between the

⁹³ Kenneth K. Koskodan, *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland's Forces in World War II*. (Oxford, UK: Osprey Pub., 2009), 16.

⁹⁴ Saulius Sužiedėlis, "The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: The Documents", *Lituanus: The Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Volume 35, No.1 - Spring 1989: accessed April 1, 2013, http://www.lituanus.org/1989/89_1_03.htm.

⁹⁵ Herbert Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957), 5.

⁹⁶ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 27.

⁹⁷ Cienciala, *Polish Foreign Policy*, 49.

West and the USSR. British Prime Minister Chamberlin, the architect of Munich, desired a general defensive pact with the Soviets. Their asking price was a free hand in the Baltic States, through which they feared a German attack might come. Chamberlin was unwilling to grant such demands, not trusting the Soviets to stop their expansion in the Baltic, and fearing that such expansion could be the cause of the war he was currently attempting to prevent. Mainly, his unwillingness to conclude a defensive pact with the Soviets was because he still believed that he could reach some kind of agreement with Hitler.⁹⁸

The Poles, for their part, were unwilling to join in any alliance with the USSR that would allow Red Army troops on Polish soil. Despite French insistences that they accede to Soviet demands the Poles refused stating that allowing the Soviets to garrison Polish territory would be the same as letting the Germans garrison Alsace and Lorraine.⁹⁹ Though Polish hesitation was a minor part of the breakdown in negotiations, it was a convenient scapegoat for the West's withdrawal.¹⁰⁰ While the Soviets seemingly sought collective action with the West, simultaneously they were conducting negotiations with the Germans.¹⁰¹ Stalin may have been using his negotiations with the West as leverage in his talks with Germans. Just as in the West, Polish hesitation was a useful scapegoat for Stalin to explain his failure to conclude an alliance with the West. Though Poland's distrust of the USSR was used as a pretext for the breaking of Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, the truth is that even had they agreed to a Soviet alliance, not that it was ever offered, it is unlikely that the USSR would have stood without corresponding

⁹⁸ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 246.

⁹⁹ Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 73.

¹⁰⁰ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 246.

¹⁰¹ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 23-24.

declarations of firm action from the West.¹⁰² The Soviets' goal was always to buy time to strengthen the USSR for the eventual conflict with Germany. An alliance with Poland might have precipitated a war with the Germans without the aid of the West. By allying with Hitler, the Germans would turn their vision West where, in Soviet terms, the capitalist nations could exhaust themselves leaving the USSR in a position of strength.¹⁰³ If Hitler proved a danger to the Soviet Union, Stalin understood that the Western Allies would always welcome him into their fold, he could join them any time he wished.¹⁰⁴

Even with the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, on 23 August, the Poles and the British signed the Polish-British Common Defense Pact which, with the almost two decade old Franco-Polish Military Alliance, formalized the military alliances implicit in the Allies 31 March guaranties.¹⁰⁵ Despite the alliance, in France there was a split in the cabinet over what the French reaction to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact should be. Some advocated the immediate mobilization of the French Army to show solidarity with the Poles. Others wanted to renege on their guarantees to Poland due to the absence of the USSR from the equation.¹⁰⁶

The British alliance with Poland was not a friendly one but one born of necessity. With the failure of appeasement, it was realized that a conflict that would revise the European balance of power was inevitable. The British were adamant that the battle must be fought outside of the United Kingdom; the treaty with Poland would ensure that.¹⁰⁷ Poland's resistance would therefore divert Germany's attention and buy time for the United Kingdom to ready for battle in

¹⁰² Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 354.

¹⁰³ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ The Avalon Project: *Agreement of Mutual Assistance Between the United Kingdom and Poland.-London, August 25, 1939*, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/blbk19.asp>.

¹⁰⁶ Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000) 200.

¹⁰⁷ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 27.

the West. Yet even at this late hour the Western Allies were still willing to give in to German demands. Though the Polish-British Pact had already been signed, members of the British cabinet suggested such plans as an Anglo-German declaration eschewing aggression as a means to policy or offering the Germans territory in Africa in exchange for dropping its claims in Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁸ These pleas only convinced Hitler that the United Kingdom was not serious in its guaranties and would not stand against him if he moved on Poland. Even as late as September 2, a day after the conflict had begun, the United Kingdom still hoped for an armistice and a Munich style conference to grant Hitler's demands.¹⁰⁹ Yet by this time it was too late, German troops were already engaging the Poles inside the Polish borders.

The Second Polish Republic was born into a fatal position. The glory days of the Commonwealth were far behind them, destroyed by over a century of foreign rule. Poland's mission in the inter-war years can, therefore, be described as an attempt to establish its legitimate place on the European stage both in its internal politics and its foreign policy. The Poles experiment-with-democracy failed due to the position they found themselves in. Formed from the remnants of three great autocratic states, they had insufficient time to foster a healthy democracy. With corruption, economic woes, and mass disillusionment with a parliamentary government, the Poles turned to authoritarianism to provide stability both at home and abroad. In doing so, they weakened their claims to legitimacy in the eyes of the Western powers in a Europe that was quickly splitting into fascist and anti-fascist camps. Their attempts to act as a great power in the east only weakened their already tenuous position in Europe, their victories against the Germans and the Soviets after the First World War drawing them into the illusion of strength.

¹⁰⁸ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 244.

¹⁰⁹ May, *Strange Victory*, 203.

Yet a Poland stuck between a resurgent Hitler and Stalin had little hope of survival. Furthermore, they relied on the West to aid them in their continuing existence, unaware of how hollow the seemingly mighty nations of France and Great Britain truly were. The First World War impacted the Western Powers in a way that the Poles did not understand. Whereas Poland won its independence as a result of the conflict, the only result seen by the West was the loss of an entire generation of its youth. Such nations were not willing to risk another war for an Eastern European “backwater.” In this way, the Polish nation was doomed from the start. It is said that successful diplomacy relies on their being choices, yet, in many ways the Poles had none.¹¹⁰ Their only options were an alliance with one of the former partitioning powers, which meant their continued existence as a vassal state, or an uncertain alliance with the West. Beck’s attempt to limitedly pursue both only resulted in Poland becoming the last of Germany’s victims while simultaneously causing the Western powers to see the Poles as turning into an ally of Germany. While it is true that a policy of attempting to maintain the status quo may have been more successful than trying to independently assert Poland’s great power status, it too was doomed to failure so long as the great Western powers refused to back up their words with force.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 351.

¹¹¹ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 506.

CHAPTER II
The Fourth Partition
The German-Soviet Invasion of Poland: 1939-1941

Polish defense plans against a German invasion originated in the early 1930s with the rise of the Nazis.¹ Pilsudski's rapprochement with the Germans was designed, at least in part, to give the Poles time to better prepare themselves for an eventual war with Germany.² Poland's military at the beginning of the decade was among the most modern and effective armies in Eastern Europe. It had an army of well over half a million men with modern small arms produced in Poland.³ From their French allies they inherited a formidable artillery force and doctrine and possessed modern anti-tank guns and rifles.⁴ In terms of armor, the Polish military had, unfortunately, fallen prey to the Tankette (small two-man tanks) fever that was sweeping much of Europe. They had up-to-date Tankettes, but they would come to learn, just as the British and Italians would, the weakness inherent in the design, most importantly their poor speed and maneuverability, and lack of anti-armor capability.⁵ The Poles also retained a large number of cavalry divisions, mostly mounted infantry, amounting to around 10% of their army. These horse-mounted troops had proven invaluable during the Polish-Soviet War for their ability to move swiftly through terrain that was impassable to motorized weapons.⁶ In the sky, Poland had

¹ Steven J Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002) 19.

² Anna M. Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939* (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1968), 16.

³ Steven J. Zaloga, *Poland 1939: The Birth of Blitzkrieg*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 22.

⁴ Kenneth K. Koskodan, *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland's Forces in World War II*. (Oxford, UK: Osprey Pub., 2009) 19.

⁵ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 28.

⁶ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 30.

an air force composed of modern aircraft and well trained pilots.⁷ Such was the strength and confidence of the Polish military that twice in the early 1930s, the Poles had proposed to the French plans for a joint preemptive invasion of Germany, first by Pilsudski in 1933 in reaction to German rearmament⁸ and again by Foreign Minister Beck in 1936 in reaction to the remilitarization of the Rhineland.⁹ Both times the horrified French refused to mobilize. By 1937-38, however, the Polish military had begun to lag behind. The weakness of their economy precluded them from keeping up with most of the technological advancements of the other great powers.¹⁰ In contrast with the Germans, who completely rebuilt their military into a modern fighting force, the Poles were forced to pick and choose what they would invest in. Nevertheless in late 1938 and 1939 Poland began to upgrade its military to more modern equipment, starting with their 7TP Tank, a design superior to most German tanks at the time.¹¹ Unfortunately, by the beginning of hostilities, the Poles had managed to build only 140 of 7TPs, leaving it vastly outnumbered by the German armored forces.

Despite these deficiencies, the Polish plan for resisting a German invasion was an ambitious one. As most of Poland's wealth and industry was located in the westernmost area of the country, this was the area that must be defended. The problem was that from the border with Germany to the Vistula River, in the middle of the country, the terrain was almost completely open fields with no geographic features that aided in the defense of Poland. With this in mind, many, including foreign advisors, pushed the Poles to abandon the western portions of their

⁷ Michael Alfred Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity in World War II* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2004), 2.

⁸ Victor Rothwell, *Origins of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 92.

⁹ Anna M. Cienciala, "Polish Foreign Policy, 1926-1939 'Equilibrium': Stereotype and Reality." *The Polish Review* 20, no. 1 (1975): 52.

¹⁰ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 52.

¹¹ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 29.

nation and deploy defensively behind their rivers.¹² The Polish high command was vehemently opposed to such a strategy because of the importance of the western territories to the Polish war effort. Moreover, a retreat from the areas claimed by Germany might give the Western Allies the opportunity to make a separate peace with Hitler just as they had in the Munich agreement.¹³ The Polish General Staff's solution to this problem was dubbed *Plan Zachód*, Plan West. Predicting a German assault towards Warsaw or Gdansk, the Poles planned to defend their western borders from the outset and conduct a slow, steady fighting retreat to their eastern defenses while the reserves of the Polish Army mobilized for a counterattack against the advancing Germans.¹⁴ Crucial to Plan West was the Poles' alliances with France and the United Kingdom. The plan called for the Poles to hold the Germans in place while the French and British, honoring their promises to the Poles, would launch offensives into western Germany, forcing the *Wehrmacht* to redeploy many of its troops to the West. This would allow a Polish counterattack to push the Germans back.¹⁵

Plan West had taken a serious hit, however, in March, 1939, when the Germans annexed the remainder of Czechoslovakia. The Germans now outflanked Poland. With German armies able to strike from the East Prussia in the north, Germany proper in the west, and Slovakia in the south, Poland's Plan West was untenable. While Polish strategists still expected the main German thrust to come from Pomerania, with any attack coming from the north or south being a minor diversionary action,¹⁶ what the Poles had failed to realize, was the true strength of the German military. On the eve of World War II, Germany mobilized 60 Infantry divisions, 5800

¹² Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 20.

¹³ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 20.

¹⁴ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 55.

¹⁵ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 17.

¹⁶ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 54-55.

guns, 2500 tanks, and 2315 aircraft - a total of one and a half million men against Poland. This compared to Poland's 39 Infantry Divisions (of which many never completed mobilization), 2065 guns, 615 tanks, and 400 aircraft - a total of 950,000 men.¹⁷ Furthermore, the German Armed Forces were well trained and ready for a modern type of warfare relying on piercing armor attacks and coordinated air power as the primary instruments of battle, as opposed to the Poles who, like the rest of the world, saw these as support for infantry formations.¹⁸ The sheer size of the *Wehrmacht* also allowed them, in contrast to Polish thinking, to attack with three strong armies from the north, west, and south.

Polish problems were compounded by their reliance on the West for action. For the French the Poles were all that was left of France's collective security dream of the early 1920s.¹⁹ Their attempts to placate their British allies by distancing themselves from such a policy looked to have backfired. Effectively the French decided to back Poland because they had no other option. In May of 1939 at the Franco-Polish staff talks, the French promised that, in the event, of war their army would begin a limited offensive against Germany within three days of mobilization, with the goal of relieving pressure on the Poles. Once mobilization was complete, about 16 days after it began, the French would begin major offensive operations.²⁰ Yet, as Pilsudski feared, the French saw the coming war as a repeat of the last - a war of attrition that would evolve into trench fighting. Therefore, their planning was almost entirely defensive-minded when it came to operational strategy.²¹ The British were not much better; while planning to put troops on the continent, they were inclined to stay on the defensive with the French until

¹⁷ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 22-23.

¹⁸ Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005) , 254- 255.

¹⁹ Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 75.

²⁰ Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000) 271.

²¹ . Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 18.

subject to German aggression. Instead the British planned to bomb Germany in retaliation for bombing Poland.²² Their promises of offensives to the Poles had been little more than lies. Neither the French nor the British had any plans for large scale actions against the Germans. Indeed, there is evidence that the West never had any intention of saving Poland in 1939. Poland role in the Allied grand strategy, unbeknownst to the Poles themselves, was to provide breathing space for the West.²³ The French and British expected the Poles to last three to four months, in which time the Anglo-French allies could marshal their forces and confront the German war machine at a later date.²⁴ The Poles were not informed of these developments and went ahead with Plan West in the understanding that the Western Allies would honor their promises to begin offensive operations against Germany's western frontier. As the Chief of the British Imperial General Staff Edmund Ironside stated, "The French have lied to the Poles in saying they are going to attack. There is no idea of it."²⁵

The West hindered the Poles' war-planning in another way as well. Throughout the late summer and early fall of 1939, the West pressured the Polish government to stall the mobilization of its army in an effort to avoid the appearance of provoking the Germans.²⁶ Yet, at the same time that France and the United Kingdom were issuing these pleas, the *Wehrmacht* was already poised on the Polish border. When the hammer fell, the Polish Army had mobilized only half of its divisions.

²² Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 65.

²³ Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958) 27.

²⁴ May, *Strange Victory*, 193.

²⁵ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 49.

²⁶ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 15.



Map 2. "Map of German and Soviet Invasions of Poland: September 1939"
Probert, Matt and Leela. 1993 - 2013 The New Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge Southampton, United Kingdom - <http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/photolib/maps/Map%20of%20Polish%20Campaign%201939%201966.jpg> (accessed April 23, 2013).

The hammer did fall on the night of 31 August 1939, when members of the German SS dressed as Polish troops seized the Gleiwitz radio station on the Polish border and began transmitting anti-German propaganda in Polish.²⁷ The Gleiwitz operation was one of a number of artificial *casus belli* created by the Germans as an excuse for their invasion. The first overt act of war occurred at 4:40 AM on 1 September 1939, when the German Luftwaffe attacked and destroyed 75% of the Polish village of Wieluń, a target with almost no military value, killing 1,200 civilians,²⁸ an ominous portent of German conduct in the coming war. Five minutes later the German battleship *Schleswig-Holstein*, anchored in the harbor under the pretext of a courtesy visit, opened fire on the Polish transit depot at Westerplatte in Danzig.²⁹ As 1 September unfolded, German armies struck into Poland from the north, west, and south, without a formal declaration of war. Polish forces resisted fiercely for the first few days in what is known as the Battle of the Borders, fighting night and day without rest to hold back the Germans.³⁰

On 3 September, France and the United Kingdom declared war on Germany but offered little more than words to support the Polish forces in the field.³¹ Over the next week, in the face of superior numbers and German armored formations, the Poles were pushed back further into their territory. German armored spearheads cut Polish formations into disjointed pieces, throwing off any coordination, and leading to portions of the same unit attacking and retreating at the same

²⁷ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 58.

²⁸ Norman Davies, *We Must Not Forget the Real Causes of the War*, The Independent, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/we-must-not-forget-the-real-causes-of-the-war-1778973.html>.

²⁹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground, a History of Poland: In Two Volumes: Volume II, 1795 to the Present*. (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 2005), 322.

³⁰ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 28.

³¹ Davies, *God's Playground*, 325.

time. By 7 September, German forces were in the outskirts of the Polish capital of Warsaw.³² At this time, the Polish Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły, abandoned the failed Plan West and ordered a general retreat to the south and east, at the same time moving the Polish government to more defensive terrain around the Romanian border, the so called Romanian Bridgehead.³³ His new plan was to use the area's mountainous terrain and rivers to nullify the advantage of the German armored divisions and hold out until winter and beyond awaiting the promised Western offensive to begin. The Poles treaties with Romania would allow them to receive supplies from their allies through ports on the Black Sea.³⁴

This plan, however, became obsolete on 17 September 1939, seventeen days after the German invasion, when the USSR, as agreed upon in the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, commenced a westward invasion of the Polish Republic. Since the initiation of hostilities, the Germans had repeatedly requested the Red Army begin operations into Poland.³⁵ The Red Army was already positioned along the Polish border waiting for the command to go. Yet the Soviet government was adamant in resolving its five month undeclared war with Japan in the Far East before beginning operations into Poland. This resolution came on 15 September, when Ambassadors Molotov and Shigenori Tōgō signed an agreement, the Nomonhan Cease-fire, ending the hostilities on 16 September 1939.³⁶ The next day Stalin ordered the invasion of Poland. Rather than using false pretense to justify their invasion, the Soviets chose to employ political cover. A telegram from the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov to the German ambassador

³² Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 70.

³³ Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*, 10.

³⁴ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 38.

³⁵ Davies, *God's Playground*, 325.

³⁶ Stuart D Goldman, *Nomonhan, 1939; The Red Army's Victory That Shaped World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 163-164.

in Moscow stated that with the imminent defeat of the Polish Army, the Soviets feared that a political vacuum would emerge in the eastern portions of Poland. With this political cover the Soviet Union invaded Poland claiming that they were doing so to end the intolerable political and economic conditions under which the national minorities in the borderlands were forced to live.³⁷ The pretext for the Soviet's aggression, protecting the Ukrainians and Belarusians living in Poland, mirrored many of the German's claims to Polish territory.

Yet the official reason for the Soviet invasion, delivered to the Polish embassy in Moscow on 17 September, stated that Warsaw was surrounded and ready to capitulate to the Germans; therefore, it was no longer the capital of Poland. In addition, the whereabouts of the Polish government were unknown and their armies were in flight. As such, the Soviets declared that the Polish government had abandoned its people, meaning that the Polish state had ceased to exist, and any treaties, such as the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, signed between the former Polish state and the USSR were void. The Soviet Union therefore laid claim to the eastern border lands in order to prevent any contingency that might transform them into a threat to the USSR.³⁸ The Polish war effort, already reeling from the German invasion and the inevitable failure of Great Britain and France to uphold their military treaties, was compromised by the Soviet invasion. The Polish high command ordered the Polish military in the east to withdraw without molesting the Soviet forces; however, some units refused the orders leading to some

³⁷ Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations. 1939-1945. [Edited by Count Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański.]*. Vol. I. London: Heinemann, 1961, 44.

³⁸ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*. vol. I, 45.

small battles, to which the Soviets responded with massacres and atrocities, especially targeting Polish commissioned and non-commissioned officers.³⁹

Sandwiched in between the advancing German and Soviet Armies, the Polish forces in the field began to disintegrate. By 29 September, Poland's fate was sealed; the remnants of the Polish Army in the field were retreating south, following the Polish government into Romania, and from there making their way west to France to reform and continue the fight.⁴⁰ In the entire campaign, which lasted slightly over a month, the Poles lost almost one million soldiers killed, wounded, and captured. More disturbing was the almost 200,000 civilian dead left in the wake of the German attack.⁴¹ In the first instance of Hitler's ruthless racial war for *lebensraum*, living space, against the people of Eastern Europe Germans treated Polish citizens that fell into their path as sub-human, using atrocities to forestall civilian resistance and attacking fleeing refugees with their air force.⁴² Even more frightening was the implementation of Operation Tannenberg, the systematic extermination of over 20,000 Polish intellectuals, clergy, activists, and politicians in the wake of the advancing *Wehrmacht*. The SS units responsible for the massacres, the forerunners of the *Einsatzgruppen*, used their experience in Poland to perfect the methods they would later use in the extermination of Jews during Operation Barbarossa.⁴³

The speed at which the Germans pushed the Polish Army back, and indeed the rapidity of the invasion itself has led to a number of myths about the entire September Campaign. The most

³⁹ Anna M. Cienciala, N. S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 21.

⁴⁰ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 90-91.

⁴¹ Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918-1947* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1998), 301.

⁴² Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 120.

⁴³ Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 61-74.

famous and longest lasting is the myth of Polish cavalry charging German tanks with nothing but sabers and lances. This myth was derived from a successful Polish cavalry attack on German infantry at the Battle of Krojanty , who were then counter-attacked by German armored cars. The rumor that the Poles had attacked the armor was begun by the Germans, with the help of an Italian war correspondent, as a propaganda attack on the Polish military.⁴⁴ In reality the Polish cavalry, the elite of the Polish Army, was trained to use their horses for maneuver then dismount and fight on foot. Only against targets of opportunity were they trained to attack while mounted, which they did on many occasions in September 1939.⁴⁵ In addition, the Polish cavalry had towed anti-tank weapons and carried the most effective anti-tank rifle in the world at that time. The Polish cavalry formations served effectively as mobile reserves and excelled in covering the Polish Army's retreats. They proved to be among the ablest of formations the Poles possessed in the September campaign.⁴⁶

Another myth that still is published in military literature, such as John Keegan's, *The Second World War*⁴⁷ is that the Polish Air Force was destroyed by the *Luftwaffe* while still on the ground in the wars opening hours. In reality, the Polish Air Force had been, in the weeks before 1 September, removed from its military bases to camouflaged airfields in the Polish countryside in order to prevent their destruction before they could be employed.⁴⁸ Though only a third the size of the *Luftwaffe* and vastly outclassed by the advanced German fighters, the Polish air force actively fought against the Germans throughout the campaign until ordered to retreat into Romania and make their way to France. Though outnumbered three-to-one, the Polish pilots,

⁴⁴ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 23-24.

⁴⁵ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 89.

⁴⁶ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 30-31.

⁴⁷ John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 44.

⁴⁸ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 19.

among the best trained in the world, managed to shoot down or damage beyond repair some 560 German planes, 25% of the Luftwaffe's air power at the loss of 330 aircraft.⁴⁹ The Polish pilots that escaped to France would fight there in June of 1940, and later, flying alongside British, French, Norwegian, Czech, Slovak, Dutch, Belgian, American, and Commonwealth pilots, would be instrumental in the Allied victory in the Battle of Britain.

A third myth is that the Polish military was broken quickly and offered little resistance to the German Armed Forces. Being the first campaign of the Second World War and one that was isolated from the West, the course of the fighting is not well known, and the speed at which the Poles were defeated in the field seemed astonishing. This, however, does not hold up to scrutiny. The Poles won many battles against both the Germans and the Soviets, but, without any support or coherent overall strategy, they were unable to exploit any of their victories.⁵⁰ Over 16,000 Germans were killed in the fighting, while the Poles suffered the loss of some 66,000 men defending their homeland.⁵¹ The outnumbered Polish defenders held out for over a month against the German onslaught and the Soviet invasion. France and the United Kingdom only held the Germans alone for a little over a week longer even though they possessed superior numbers of men and equipment.⁵²

The question then becomes; why was the September campaign so great a defeat for Poland? Poland's own military deficiencies must take much of the blame. Their flawed and outdated overall strategy, Plan West, weakened the limited strength of their military by attempting to defend the entirety of their western border. Compounding this was their failure to

⁴⁹ Richard J Overy, *The Air War: 1939–1945* (London: Europa Publications, 1980), 28.

⁵⁰ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 10-11.

⁵¹ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 41.

⁵² Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 86.

realize the scope of the German attack and the size of the forces that Germany would employ. Most importantly, the Poles were expecting to fight a different type of war. France and the United Kingdom were expecting a replay of the trenches of World War One, and Poland was expecting a war similar to their conflict with the USSR in 1920. In reality, they became the first victim of a new type of war, which would come to be labeled blitzkrieg.⁵³ Against the German's fast moving combined arms armored and air attacks, the Poles found their tactical and strategic weapons to be obsolete, just as the West would discover for themselves in June 1940.

Poland's' inter-war economy was able to build a first class army in the late 1920s, but was unable to modernize and support a military machine able to stand up to a rearmed Germany, let alone the USSR as well. Had they better employed their forces, perhaps they may have been able to meet the advancing Germans on more favorable terms. Yet this strategy would have necessitated the abandonment of the western portion of their nation, a massive political and economic sacrifice. The pre-war emphasis of the Polish command on tactical and strategic improvisation at the expense of trained doctrine also hindered Polish efforts to resist their foes.⁵⁴ The breakdown in command structure and communication caused by the piercing German armored thrusts rendered the Polish command incapable of organizing any joint operations on-the-fly as they had trained to do during the past decade.

Just as responsible for the campaign's failure was the inactivity of the Western powers. Though the majority of Germany's military strength was engaged in Poland and despite the military agreements between the Poles and the West, the only major operation by the Allies was the French Saar offensive, from 7 to 16 September, in which 40 French divisions, along a 16

⁵³ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 267.

⁵⁴ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 88.

mile front, drove 5 miles into Germany before withdrawing.⁵⁵ Though Some French did urge an all-out offensive against the Germans, these voices were in the minority.⁵⁶ The United Kingdom resigned itself to flying bomber missions over German cities, with the aircraft dropping leaflets rather than bombs.⁵⁷

The West's lack of action seemingly proved Hitler's statement that France and the United Kingdom would not truly fight for Poland correct. The German military was free to focus all of its attention on Poland without having to worry about its western border. As Walther von Brauchitsch, commander of the German Military, had sated in the first week of September, "every day of calm in the West is for me a gift from god."⁵⁸ Without an Allied offensive into Germany, the pre-war Polish plan and indeed the retreat to the Romanian bridgehead were doomed to failure. Despite the promises, guaranties, and assurances that France and the United Kingdom had given the Poles all throughout the summer of 1939, when the conflict actually began the West failed to honor their word, deciding to use Poland's resistance to buy time. For the Poles, their reliance on the West proved a major weakness from which there was no obvious solution. This Western inactivity even after the fall of Poland led into what is called the Phony War from September 1939 to May 1940, where despite numerical and technical superiority, the Allies refused to launch a major offensive against Germany.⁵⁹

Perhaps the greatest single reason for the speed with which Poland was defeated was the intervention of the USSR. With two of the most powerful nations in the world conspiring to subdue them, the Polish military could not successfully resist. Without a Soviet invasion, it is not

⁵⁵ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 64.

⁵⁶ . May, *Strange Victory*, 275.

⁵⁷ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 65.

⁵⁸ May, *Strange Victory*, 93.

⁵⁹ Davies, *God's Playground*, 325.

impossible to believe that the Poles might have held the Romanian bridgehead, with its defensive terrain, hidden supply caches, and access to the reserves forming in eastern Poland until winter.⁶⁰ Yet the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact represented a diplomatic coup, and in hindsight, a death knell for the Polish Second Republic. Becks policy of equilibrium had proved a failure, the isolation it had engendered keeping Poland from finding its legitimate place in Europe. Just as in the past, the German and Russian states had put aside their numerous issues to focus on the one thing they both agreed upon - the destruction of an independent Polish state. After securing their armistice with the Japanese, the Soviet invasion of Poland proved the fatal stroke to the Poles military resistance. The Soviets effectively used Poland just as the Western Allies had, a way to buy time and space. Stalin knew that he would most likely have to fight Hitler at some point. By allying with the Germans over the corpse of Poland he ensured that Hitler would turn to the West rather than continue on against the USSR.⁶¹ Stalin's deal bought the USSR two years to prepare for conflict against the Germans, and ensured that the opening battles of the war would be fought in Eastern Europe not in the heart of European Russia. Poland, however, was to pay the price for both the West and the USSR's breathing space.

With the campaign lost, the Polish government crossed into Romania. They did so with the repeated verbal guaranties of the Romanian government that they would be given aid and access to the Black Sea from which they could make their way to the West.⁶² This was in keeping with the numerous treaties and agreements signed between the two nations in the inter-war years, most notably the Treaty on Mutual Assistance Against Aggression and on Military Aid, signed 9

⁶⁰ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 11.

⁶¹ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 31.

⁶² Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 90.

February 1927.⁶³ As they headed south, the Poles received word from their allies that they were welcome to come and reform their government in France. Yet, due to pressure exerted by Hitler, the Romanians reneged on their verbal and written agreements. They detained and separated the members of the Polish government as well as disarming and interning the Polish military that had escaped into the country.⁶⁴

The Western governments made little effort to persuade the Romanians to release the internees, and it is unlikely that the Romanians would have complied due to the Germans threatening military action against them. Due to this the, pre-war president, Ignacy Mościcki saw no choice but to resign the office in order for an exile government to form in France to take over the responsibilities of governance. What allowed this to occur was the fact that the Polish constitution was very flexible. It foresaw the possible need of a government-in-exile and contained nothing that would prevent the existence and function of a state authority outside of the nation's borders.⁶⁵ Having been conquered and partitioned many times before in their history, it is no wonder that the Poles would have rules in place to keep the state operating if it were to happen again.

Mościcki's first choice to replace him as president was the Polish Ambassador to Italy, General Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski. Shockingly, after being nominated on 25 September, the next day the French government and the Polish politicians already present in France, led by General Władysław Sikorski and members of the Morges Front, refused to

⁶³ Edmund Jan Osmanczyk, *Encyclopedia of the United Nations and International Agreements*, (Routledge, London, 2002, ISBN 2002), p. 1815.

⁶⁴ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 90.

⁶⁵ Wacław Jędrzejewicz, ed., *Poland in the British Parliament* (New York: Józef Piłsudski Inst. of America for Research in the Modern History of Poland, 1946), 318.

recognize him as president.⁶⁶ Wieniawa-Długoszowski's had been one of Pilsudski's colonels, Pilsudski's personal *aide-de-camp*, and had assisted the Marshal in the organization and planning of the 1926 coup. This put him firmly in the tradition of the pre-war *Sanacja* government - the same government Sikorski and other Polish politicians in France had opposed.

Due to the Franco-Polish front against the *Sanacja* government, it became readily apparent, as the government-in-exile began to form, that it was to be made up primarily of the pre-war opposition, the French backed Morges Front in particular, rather than members of the *Sanacja*.⁶⁷ There are two reasons for this development. First, France and the United Kingdom were home to large numbers of Poles that had fled or been deported from Pilsudski's *Sanacja* Poland. Consequently, the Poles living in the West, as well as the Western governments themselves wanted the new Polish Government-in-Exile to represent a more democratic government than that possessed by pre-war Poland.⁶⁸ Indeed the French decision to exclude *Sanacja* members from the forming Polish Government-in-Exile was in keeping with their inter-war policy towards Pilsudski's government. Though France had, in theory, a binding military alliance with Poland during the 1920s and 1930s, they had at the same time been supporting the opposition to the *Sanacja*.⁶⁹ The fall of Poland offered both France and the pre-war opposition the perfect chance to end *Sanacja* rule. Second, the pre-war government, with its primarily *Sanacja* membership, was interned in Romania unable to play a further role in Polish politics. Other politicians, due to their perceived lack of importance, were able to escape and make their

⁶⁶ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 91.

⁶⁷ Jerzy Jan Lerski, *Historical dictionary of Poland, 1966-1945* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 151.

⁶⁸ Antony Polonsky, *Politics In Independent Poland 1921-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 504.

⁶⁹ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 418.

way to France.⁷⁰ France, in many ways, was attempting to mold the shape of the Poles post-war, perhaps in order to ensure a Poland that was more subservient to French interests and less independently minded. Indeed there is some evidence that the French government, in order to further their goal of changing the Polish government, even exerted pressure on the Romanians to keep the pre-war government incarcerated and therefore off the political stage. Additionally, by warning their preferred Polish leaders of the so called “Romanian Trap” the French made sure that the Polish politicians they desired made it to the West.⁷¹

In this climate, after deliberation in Paris, former President of the Polish Senate Władysław Raczkiewicz was put forward as the preferred candidate.⁷² Raczkiewicz was chosen due to his moderate stance and in order to bridge the gap between the pre-war divide. The Western Allies also accepted his nomination and on 30 September 1939, President Mościcki resigned his position; Raczkiewicz, already in Paris, was sworn in as the first President of the Polish Government-in-Exile. Among his first orders was to appoint Sikorski as Prime Minister.

The appointment of the moderate Raczkiewicz as president and of Sikorski, an old opponent of Pilsudski’s government, as Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, represented a complete break from pre-war Poland. Many members of the military, especially its officer corps, were angered at the change in leadership. The new government, however, claimed that the change was not an alteration but a restoration. The government-in-exile being made up primarily of the pre-war opposition to *Sanjacia*, could claim that they represented the legitimate Polish government that had been overthrown in Pilsudski’s coup. By claiming these democratic roots, they could also claim the support of the Polish people

⁷⁰ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 92.

⁷¹ Olgried Terlecki, *General Sikorski* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981), 140-142.

⁷² Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 91.

for their governance. Yet from the start, Sikorski compounded the internal problems of the government-in-exile. When appointing his cabinet, he deliberately made it larger than necessary in an attempt to include members of every major pre-war party, thus representing every shape of political opinion. In all, the government had 22 representatives on its national council primarily of opposition members but also including those remaining *Sanacja* members who had managed to escape from Romania.⁷³ This resulted in a disjointed government whose lack of unity would cause many instances where no course of action could be decided. The government-in-exile, effectively, had created for itself the same problem that the *Sejm* had possessed in the early 1920s. The very gridlock and partisanship that had precipitated the May Coup had been reestablished by Sikorski leading to the same lack of action on important issues.

Internal problems aside, the position that Raczkiewicz and Sikorski found themselves in was not enviable; they represented a government without a country and were at war simultaneously with two of the most powerful nations in the world. They did possess a small navy, air force, and army which were quickly being reorganized for the defense of France and operations in Norway. Though small, this force represented the third largest Allied contingent behind the militaries of France and the United Kingdom. Additionally, the government-in-exile was recognized by these nations as well as the United States as the legitimate government of Poland.⁷⁴ Aside from directing their troops to aid in the Allied cause, a failing proposition which forced the government-in-exile to relocate from Paris to London, the Poles spent much of their time in discussions with the Allies regarding the reestablishment of Poland at the end of the war and denouncing Soviet actions in their occupied country.

⁷³ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 92.

⁷⁴ Herbert Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957), 30.

The destruction of the Polish nation in September 1939 was the first decisive step in the fall of Second Republic. With the loss of their territory, and therefore the source of their power, the new Polish Government-in-Exile was almost solely reliant on the support of their Western Allies. In reality, all of the Allies' promises and words could do nothing to aid them. The speed at which Poland fell and the reshaping of its government by outside forces also damaged the reputation of the Polish government, painting them as a collection of inept puppets. The Poles reliance on the West to safeguard their independence, coupled with their own overblown image of their own power mean that when Hitler decided he would have his war, Poland stood little if no chance. The intervention of the Soviets into Eastern Poland was the final blow, setting the stage for the eventual death of the Polish Second Republic

CHAPTER III
“Our” Soviet “Allies”
The Polish-Soviet Alliance: 1941-1943

On 14 November 1939, General Sikorski and British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax met to discuss Soviet policy in Poland. In this meeting they deliberated over what they thought were the Soviets' long term aims: Sikorski submitted that it was the Stalinization of Europe, or at least its eastern portions. What was unknown was how the Germans would fit into the equation. Would they be partners or opponents to the Soviet scheme? Lord Halifax thought the latter was more likely.¹ On 19 June 1940, with the expulsion of the British Expeditionary Force from the continent and fall of France to the *Wehrmacht* imminent, Sikorski met with the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to discuss Soviet aims in light of the German victory in the West. Sikorski told Churchill that while not advocating for the Allies to provoke the USSR, he warned against holding any illusions in regards to Stalin's policy towards the West. Churchill, expressed interest in friendly relations toward the Soviets stating, prophetically, that after the United Kingdom defended herself successfully, Hitler might be tempted to strike Russia in the next spring, thus bringing into the Allied fold a powerful ally against the Germans.²

Churchill's assumption came to pass on 22 June 1941. With the German invasion of the USSR, the Western Allies, now consisting of the United Kingdom, its empire, and the various governments-in-exile, saw a prospective new ally to aid them in their struggle against their common enemy. To the British Hitler's invasion of the USSR was a godsend. Having borne the

¹Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations. 1939-1945. [Edited by Count Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański.]*. Vol. I. London: Heinemann, 1961,91.

²Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 94.

brunt of the war since the capitulation of France in June 1940 they were eager to integrate the Soviet Union into the Allied war effort. Even before the initiation of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the USSR, the British foreign office had begun to reestablish its links to the Soviets, severed after their invasion of Poland, based on Churchill's belief that a German attack on the USSR was inevitable.³ As German troops massed on the Soviet border, Churchill insisted that when the hammer fell Britain be ready to aid the Soviets in any way possible. When the invasion began, the British pounced.

The London Poles were also willing to reestablish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union despite the role the Soviets had played in the destruction of their country. On 23 June 1941, Sikorski addressed the Polish nation on the German-Soviet War. He spoke of the great risk that the German nation was taking by invading the USSR; not only did the Germans lose a powerful ally and access to unlimited resources, but by invading they also betrayed their fear of the strength of the Soviet Union and its ability to influence events in Europe. More importantly for Poland, the German invasion represented the end of years of collaboration between the two nations over Poland's future. Since the first partition of Poland in 1772, Germany and Russia had always seen eye to eye on one issue: the elimination of Poland. With this new conflict, Sikorski claimed that this old partnership had ended once and for all. In addition, the German betrayal meant that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939 had been rendered void, meaning, he hoped, a return to the pre-war borders of the Treaty of Riga, promised numerous times by the British government, after the Allies secured victory. In this spirit, Sikorski called for the Soviets to release the Polish prisoners that they had taken in 1939, so they could aid in the common

³ Herbert Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957), 6.

struggle against the Germans.⁴ Stalin, for his part, desperately sought troops to confront the German onslaught. With whole Soviet armies being swallowed up in vast German encirclement operations, the Soviets began looking for alternate sources of man power. Stalin was so desperate for men he confided to the American President, Franklin Roosevelt's, diplomatic advisor Harry Hopkins, that when the United States entered the war, which he thought would be soon, he would welcome the deployment of independent American forces on the Eastern Front.⁵

With both the Soviets and the Western Allies desperate for each other's aid, an agreement between Stalin and the Polish Government-in-Exile was seen as vital. Sikorski and the London Poles realized this, and the weakness of their position in regards to the Soviets. Throughout the preliminary talks for the Polish-Soviet alliance, the issues that would arise from the conflicting interests of the two parties were skimmed over or postponed to a later date. The Poles understood their lack of power in the negotiations and guessed, correctly as it turned out, that the future of the Polish state would depend on their allies' good will. Understanding the Western Allies were not willing to antagonize their newfound ally by opposing Stalin's expansionist ideas, Sikorski sought to bypass any issues that might appear to the United Kingdom as obstructing the course of negotiations.⁶ The Poles were willing to make a deal with Stalin to show their goodwill to the Allied cause to the United Kingdom.

Despite their desire for goodwill, the London Poles had certain conditions for military collaboration with the Soviet Union; foremost was the recognition by the Soviets of the Treaty of Riga and the repudiation of the 23 August 1939, Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Next, they argued for the release of all Polish citizens being held in bondage by Soviet authorities. Any formation

⁴ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 108-112.

⁵ Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin*, 13.

⁶ Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), 117.

of Polish fighting units in the USSR would be dependent on the sovereignty of any such units, and their employment in battle would be solely up to discretion of the London Poles.

Furthermore, any military force formed would be under the care and protection of the Soviets and would be supplied and equipped by them as well.⁷

In these discussions, the fractured nature of the government-in-exile reared its ugly head. Members of the rightist parties, fiercely anti-communist, threatened to resign if the government's leftist members made deals with the Soviets without territorial guarantees from Stalin. As the terms of the treaty between the Poles and the USSR were being negotiated, three ministers of the cabinet resigned when Sikorski signaled his intent to enter into an alliance with Stalin without such guarantees or the release of all Poles interned in the USSR.⁸ Due to a diplomatic breakthrough, Sikorski was able ensure the release of the Polish prisoners, but without Stalin's agreement on Poland's post-war borders, the damage had already been done; the three resigned members left the government. This discord would arise throughout the war, leading to a government that the Allies viewed as obstinate and to be avoided even as Sikorski sought to find intermediate ground. The inflexibility of the London Poles was part of the reason that the Allies were content to decide the post-war fate of Poland without the involvement of the government-in-exile, just as Pilsudski had done with the squabbling *Sejm*.

Nevertheless the negotiations resulted in the signing of the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement on 30 July 1941, a Polish-Soviet treaty which annulled the 1939 Soviet-German treaties regarding Poland. This agreement restored diplomatic relations between the two nations, called for joint military operations against the Axis powers, and gave amnesty to Polish prisoners being

⁷ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 112.

⁸ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 168.

held by the USSR. An additional treaty, the Polish-Soviet Military Agreement was signed 14 August 1941. This facilitated the formation of Polish Army in the USSR. The Poles conditions were primarily met with the signing of this document. The new Polish Army would serve the London Poles, and its soldiers would take an oath of loyalty to said government. While the force would exist under Soviet operational command, it would not be employed without Polish agreement and would be staffed by Polish officers. Additionally, the USSR would outfit the troops to be reimbursed by the Polish government once the war had been won.⁹ The army created by this agreement, it was thought, would be used to help stem the tide of the German invasion and help, even if only slightly, to lessen the operational burden of the Red Army. Yet while Stalin would welcome the aid of Western troops in his time of need, his view on the Poles was more considered. Even at this early date, as the Germans were advancing deep into the Soviet Union, Stalin was intent on keeping the territory he had gained in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.¹⁰ An independent Polish force fighting its way into Poland alongside the Red Army would have complicated his vision of post-war Europe. As the Poles would discover in the coming years, Stalin would never give arms to those not directly under his control to him. In regards to the shape of post-war Poland, a secret protocol was also included in both documents, stating that any territorial claims or other issues were to be dealt with at a later time.¹¹ Sikorski's attempts to garner goodwill while dealing with the Soviets were, effectively, forced on him by the British.¹² In their rush to ensure Soviet support for the war effort, the British strong-armed the Poles into accepting an alliance with the USSR while omitting any reference to Poland's post-war borders.

⁹ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 147.

¹⁰ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 440.

¹¹ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 141.

¹² Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 440.

The reason for the Poles' acceptance of this rather vague secret protocol were the repeated guaranties made by the Western Allies, Britain in particular, that Poland's prewar borders would be recognized upon the cessation of hostilities. On 30 July 1941 British Foreign Secretary Eden, issued a note stating the United Kingdom would recognize no territorial changes that had affected the Polish state since August of 1939. Furthermore, Eden assured Sikorski that Great Britain had made no agreements with the USSR which would affect the relationship between the United Kingdom and Poland.¹³

In hindsight Sikorski and the London Poles may have missed their best chance for a favorable post-war outcome in these original negotiations with Stalin.¹⁴ The suffering and strain that the Germans were visiting upon the USSR was enormous, Stalin's power was at its weakest, and his need for aid at its height. Had the Poles forced the issue of territorial integrity, against the wishes of the United Kingdom and the USSR, and been willing to compromise they may have been able to secure some measure of survival for the Second Republic in the post-war world. Stalin may have seen the Poles support in his dark hour as more important than something in the unforeseen future. At the same time, the Soviets were aware of the British pressure on the Poles to comply with Soviet demands.¹⁵ They could and did bet on Britain's understanding that Anglo-Soviet cooperation was more important than the problem of Polish borders. So long as the British were pushing the Poles to accept Stalin's terms, he had no need to compromise with the London Poles, knowing that the British would ensure that he would get his way.

In regards to the war, Sikorski, Churchill, and Stalin agreed that the new Polish Army would be used to help shore up Soviet defenses against the Germans, and therefore should be

¹³ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 142.

¹⁴ Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin*, 33.

¹⁵ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 441.

made operational as quickly as possible. Sikorski and Churchill also agreed that the Polish force should be assembled and deployed as closely to British supply and military bases as was possible, showing accurate foresight of problems that would arise between the Soviets and the Poles over the creation and use of the Polish forces.¹⁶

The entrance of the USSR into the Allied war effort in June 1941 was just as harmful to Poland's cause as the Nazi-Soviet invasion. Poland's sway as the third largest Ally power resisting the Germans was greatly diminished by the entry of the Red Army. It became obvious to the Western Allies, and the Poles alike, that the Soviets were far more important to the struggle for victory than some half a million Polish troops or the national integrity of Poland's post-war borders. The hesitance on the part of the Poles and British to press Stalin on the issue of Polish territory while he was at his weakest proved a dire mistake for future negotiations. The London Poles still possessed a measure of strength and had the recognition and the British promises to back them up, yet, from this point on, their importance would rapidly begin to dissipate.

¹⁶ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 156.

CHAPTER IV
“*Za naszą i waszą wolność*”¹
The Polish Army-in-Exile: 1940-1945

Perhaps the Polish Government-in-Exile’s greatest strength was the military forces that it could, and did, contribute to the Allied cause. Despite the loss of their nation, Poland was determined to fight for its freedom rather than wait for the Allies to give it to them. With this resolve, the newly formed Polish government went about recreating a Polish Army of as large a size possible. The creation of this army-in-exile served two of the Polish goals. First, it showed that even though Poland had been conquered as a result of the German and Soviet occupation, its government, recognized by the Allies, still represented the Polish people and possessed an armed force that would actively be resisting the occupying powers. Secondly, the presence of a large Polish military force, it was hoped, would allow the government-in-exile to gain a place on the Allied War Council. This would give the Poles an important position within the Allied camp and a voice in Allied decision-making and war-planning, vital for the Poles to retake their homeland.² As the war went on, the Polish Armed Forces became even more important to the government-in-exile as it represented one of their major continuing contributions to the Allied war effort. Operational Polish soldiers, sailors, and airmen, it was thought, ensured that Poland would be fully reborn after the conflict. Though they would begin their time in exile with a large amount of men at their disposal, for most of the war, Poland would be represented on the ground by only two formations, the Polish I and II Corps.

The origins of what would come to be known as the Polish I Corps go back to the September campaign of 1939. After the Soviet invasion of 17 September, the Polish Army still in

¹ English Translation: For Your Freedom and Ours.

² Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 204.

the field followed their final orders and retreated south into Romania and Hungary, with the intention of escaping Eastern Europe and reforming in France alongside the Polish government in order to continue to offer resistance to the invaders of their country. This plan was interrupted due to German threats to Romania and Hungary, resulting in the retreating Polish troops being disarmed and interned just as their government had been. The cost of keeping so many Polish prisoners was prohibitively expensive, and the pre-war friendships that existed between the three nations, meant that many Polish servicemen escaped with the aid of the Romanians and Hungarians who usually looked other way.³

Upon joining the government-in-exile's forces, they formed a large sovereign Polish Army. Yet, for many reasons, including the fact that many of the French Poles worked in areas the French saw as crucial to the war effort, only a portion of the forces desired by the Poles were able to be raised. In all, some 43,000 Poles were formed into four infantry divisions and an armored brigade in France.⁴ What resulted was a peculiar army, mixed in its composition in every way imaginable, just as the Polish Army had been at the founding of the Second Republic. There were pre-war Polish soldiers to be sure, but mixed in among them were, artists, writers, priests, university professors, former French Foreign Legionnaires, Polish settlers from Peru, Polish miners from France, and even the former Polish ambassador to Berlin. The politics of the army also varied from the right wing Poles that had managed to escape Poland, and left wing Poles who had been living in France, some to escape Pilsudski's *Sanajca*.⁵

³ Kenneth K. Koskodan, *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland's Forces in World War II*. (Oxford, UK: Osprey Pub., 2009), 42-45.

⁴ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 52

⁵ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 211-212.

Further complicating the problems of forming a competent new army was that many in the French political and military command blamed the Poles for provoking the Germans and starting the war.⁶ Others did not wish to allocate military resources to the Poles due to their swift defeat at the hands of the Germans.⁷ Due to the feeling that the Poles were not willing, or simply unable to fight, they were put at the “bottom of the rung” for supplies, billeting, and training.⁸ As well, the French for the most part, ignored Polish intelligence about new German technology and tactics. Yet the French did take time to study the short Polish War and from it tried to derive the German’s strategy. The problem was that each person who looked at the September campaign took a different lesson from it, usually proving arguments they had long made, such as DeGaulle’s emphases on offensive armor operations, General Georges stressing the use of air power coordinated with ground forces, or even Chamberlin who saw the fighting in Poland as proof that the bomber was the key to victory. The common conscious in the French command was that the Germans actions in Poland were based on the specific strategic situation and therefore, their action in the West, while maintaining some similarities, would be different. They were determined to not make the same mistakes as Poland such as defending their entire border or marching out to meet the blitzkrieg.⁹ As some French officers snidely put it France was not Poland. In reality, the French would make their own mistakes.

Despite these problems, the Poles had one unit that was combat-ready by the time Allied operations in Norway began on 14 April 1940. The Polish Podole Brigade was sent to Narvik to aid in its recapture from the Germans. While there, it performed admirably, but the entire Allied

⁶ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 45.

⁷ Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler’s Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 290.

⁸ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 210.

⁹ May, *Strange Victory*, 289-294.

mission proved a failure, and the expeditionary force was pulled out on 8 June, with the Polish brigade forming the rearguard, to aid in the defense of France.¹⁰

Having played no part in the fighting in the low countries in May 1940, when the German invasion of France proper began on 5 June 1940, the negative opinion of the Polish Armed Forces was quickly forgotten and the hastily thrown together Polish divisions were put into the line of battle at Petén's personnel request. Despite not having been adequately trained, supplied, or armed, the rough Polish divisions, having previous experience fighting the Germans, were determined to prove their worth. On 26 May, the Polish 1st division held Metz against four German divisions, leading Petain to despair that "If there had only been ten Polish divisions, victory would have been assured."¹¹ Throughout the fighting, the experienced and motivated Poles were often used to cover the retreating French Army, holding bridge heads and even launching counter offensives to take pressure off of French units. The 10th Armored Cavalry Brigade, the name given to the reformed "Black Brigade", the only mechanized and undefeated Polish unit in September campaign, had been given little training in their time in France and were issued old French tanks only shortly before they were ordered into battle. Despite this, they rode out to the front, holding off a German attack on 13 June and providing a rearguard for retreating French units for five days until, due lack of fuel and ammunition, they were forced to abandon their tanks.¹² With the French armistice, Sikorski ordered the Polish forces to make their way to the sea and then to the United Kingdom.¹³ Though the task was difficult, many were eventually evacuated by Polish and British ships. At the same time many Polish units were

¹⁰ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 51-52.

¹¹ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 214-215.

¹² Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 53-54.

¹³ Steven J. Zaloga, *Poland 1939: The Birth of Blitzkrieg*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 15.

forced to surrender to the Germans while others decided to retreat into Switzerland where they were interned for the remainder of the war.¹⁴ This tremendous loss of men and the chaos of the French campaign convinced the Poles that, from then on, Polish units would only fight in cohesive formations and not be scattered piecemeal across a whole battle front.

The Polish force that had escaped to the United Kingdom was vastly smaller than the four divisions they had possessed in France. When reformed in Brittan, there proved only enough manpower to outfit two units. The decision was made that the war effort could be best served by the formation of an armored division and parachute brigade.

The armored division, labeled the 1st Polish Armored Division was formed primarily from the survivors of the Polish “Black Brigade” and subsequent 10th Armored Cavalry Brigade, reinforced by Polish volunteers. The British, having seen the success of Polish units fighting in France, and needing all the manpower they could muster, were much more free-handed than the French in their supplying of the division, issuing the Poles modern tanks for the first time and giving them the task of defending a section of the Scottish coast against the feared German invasion.¹⁵ It was later assigned to be used in the invasion of the continent. Fearful of the heavy casualties that the first wave would encounter and due to the fact that the division comprised a large portion of Polish servicemen engaged in the war effort, it was agreed by the Allies that the division would be employed in the second phase of the invasion, the Normandy breakout. On 1 August 1944, the same day as the uprising in Warsaw began, the Polish division was brought ashore at Normandy.¹⁶ The regiment quickly gained a reputation for aggressiveness, desiring to kill Germans above all else. Its moment of triumph came on 19-21 August when the division

¹⁴ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 217.

¹⁵ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 136.

¹⁶ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 481.

held Mount Ormal through three days of continuous fighting in the key battle to close the Falaise pocket, and destroy the encircled *Wehrmacht* in Normandy.¹⁷ For the rest of the war, the division faced continued actions against the Germans, helping to push them back through Belgium, the Netherlands, and into Germany proper. In their push into Germany, they liberated the towns of Saint-Omer, Ypres, Ghent, and Passchendaele ending the war and capturing and occupying the *Kriegsmarine* naval base in Wilhelmshaven.¹⁸

The Polish airborne unit, dubbed the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade, was created with the intent of dropping an experienced, trained, and well-supplied force into Warsaw after the initiation of an uprising.¹⁹ From the very beginning, however, the shortage of transport aircraft and the vast distances involved proved a hindrance to such a plan. With the initiation of the Warsaw uprising on 1 August 1944, the brigade encountered further problems due to the fact that Stalin would not allow Allied planes supporting the uprising to land at Soviet airports, an absolute necessity for any airborne jump into Warsaw.²⁰ With the reason for their original creation denied, political pressure was put on the London Poles to release the brigade into Allied command, to be used in the upcoming operation Market Garden. Due to the Soviet intervention, the lack of available aircraft, and in order to prove the Poles commitment to the Allied cause, the brigade was released to British service.²¹

In Operation Market Garden, the Polish brigade was put into battle far too late after it was clear to the Allied command that the operation had failed. In what serves as a microcosm for Poland's struggle during the Second World War, the use of the Polish Parachute Brigade in

¹⁷ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 143-147.

¹⁸ Steven J Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 21.

¹⁹ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 154.

²⁰ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 486-487.

²¹ Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*, 21.

Market Garden did nothing but squander a large number of trained Polish fighting men at the expense of the resistance in Poland itself. Despite the hopelessness of their cause and the Allies having dropped the brigade onto enemy-occupied landing zones, resulting in extreme casualties, the brigade fought valiantly, making a river crossing under enemy fire and providing cover to allow the British airborne to escape the German encirclement.²² To add further insult, for many years the Poles were blamed for the debacle by one of the operations planners, Fredric Browning, despite the fact that it was poor planning in the first place that led to the useless slaughter. It was not until many years later when personnel accounts of the battle and a comprehensive history by Cornelius Ryan were published that the Poles were absolved of the false accusations.²³

The beginnings of what would come to be the Polish II Corps also lay in the September Campaign, but rather than being comprised primarily of those soldiers that had escaped southwards, it would be composed of Polish POWs taken by the USSR in their westward invasion of Poland. After the Soviet invasion on 17 September 1939 more than 1.5 million Polish citizens, including over 240,000 Polish POWs, had been deported from Soviet-occupied Poland by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the NKVD, to the Gulags of the eastern USSR.²⁴ The Sikorski-Mayski Agreement stated that the Polish Army in the USSR was to be comprised of these released prisoners. Yet by October 1941, over two months had elapsed since the signing of the agreement, and progress was painfully slow. Vast numbers of Polish citizens were still being held in Soviet labor camps. When this was brought up by the London Poles, the

²² Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 162-174.

²³ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 494.

²⁴ Cienciala, Anna M., N. S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski. *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007),26.

Soviets gave numbers and statistics which claimed that most of the Poles had been released. The Polish ambassadors pointed out that the numbers were wildly inaccurate based on other documents given to the government-in-exile by the Soviets themselves. The Soviets promised to look in to the matter, yet the point would come up again and again throughout the formation of the army.²⁵

Granted amnesty by Stalin, the POWs and volunteers from the civilian prisoners who had been released would be trained, equipped, and supplied by the USSR. As stated in the military treaty, the army would be subordinated to the command and authority of the Polish Government-in-Exile.²⁶ This was an early and rare recognition by Stalin as to the legitimacy of the London Poles, most likely due to the Soviets need for all the assistance they could get. Operation Barbarossa was still advancing deep into the USSR causing millions of casualties, capturing even greater numbers of POWs, and showed no signs of stopping. Even with the size of the Red Army, and the harsh penalties imposed by Stalin on those who retreated in the face of the *Wehrmacht* Stalin realized that it would still take a massive effort to drive the Germans back, if the Poles could aid in the endeavor then he was willing to use them, at first. The London Poles under Sikorski appointed General Władysław Anders, just released from the NKVD's Lubyanka prison in Moscow, as the commander of the new Polish II Corps that would eventually come to be called Anders Army. As Anders made his way south, on 17 August General Michał Tokarzewski began forming the Polish Army-in-Exile in Totskoye, near the Kazakhstan border, in the remains of a camp where the Soviets had kept Polish prisoners of war.²⁷ In the months that

²⁵ Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations. 1939-1945. [Edited by Count Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański.]*. Vol. I. London: Heinemann, 1961, 178.

²⁶ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 141.

²⁷ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 209.

followed, Polish prisoners, freed by Stalin's amnesty, began to coalesce in the area from the eastern USSR.

By the spring of 1942, over 75,000 soldiers had been recruited into the Polish II Corps and been formed into four infantry divisions. General Anders was given specific guidance by Sikorski on how these troops should be employed. Most importantly, the Polish troops must not be used as Soviet cannon fodder. They should not be split up and spread out over the front, as they had been in the Battle of France, but rather fight as a cohesive Polish Army. The troops, Sikorski stated, were far too important to the future of Poland to be wasted; they would be needed after the war to assure that communism was not transplanted by the Soviets onto Polish soil. Additionally, Anders was to make sure that the army would not be used in battle until they were combat ready. Sikorski also suggested that the Poles be used in the Caucasus, as this was fast becoming a decisive front and was also near British lines of supply, which would aid in their success.²⁸

During the formation of the II Corps, questions began to arise that would have disastrous consequences in the coming year. While the II Corps had a great deal of manpower, there was a distinct lack of officers. A significant number of Polish officers listed by the Soviets as POWs were missing from the II Corps rolls; they had never arrived at the marshaling areas. When the London Poles received this vexing news, they petitioned the Soviet government seeking information about the missing officers while citing their importance to the Poles' and Soviets' joint war effort. The problem was first brought up on 7 October 1941, when the Polish ambassador inquired as to the location of some 7,500 Polish officers. The ambassador pointed out that the officers had failed to be located despite strenuous efforts by the Polish government.

²⁸ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 162.

Soviet authorities responded that the London Poles had misplaced the officers.²⁹ The requests for information about the missing officers continued throughout 1941 and into 1942.³⁰ The Polish government became more concerned as time went by because, all together, these missing officers made up almost half of the pre-war Polish Armies' officer corps, and they were direly needed by the new Polish Army forming both in the USSR and in the United Kingdom. The government-in-exile's questions concerning the officers' locations were overlooked, ignored, or written-off by Soviet authorities. Stronger and continued inquiries by the London Poles into the location of the missing men were eventually answered personally by Stalin. In their meeting, Stalin assured Sikorski that all the Polish prisoners, including the missing officers, had been freed, but they could not all be accounted for due to having lost track of them in Manchuria after the German invasion.³¹

At the same time the Soviet authorities were making it increasingly difficult for the Polish forces to reach combat readiness. First, there was an ongoing dispute with the Soviets over whether non-ethnic Poles, Jews, Belarusians, and Ukrainian who were citizens of the Second Polish Republic were eligible for recruitment into the II corps. As the Second Republic was a multi-ethnic nation, the government-in-exile assumed that all citizens would be allowed to be recruited into the army. As this was the agreed-upon policy in the 30 July 1941 Sikorski-Mayski Agreement, the Polish embassy in Moscow delivered a note to the Soviets on 10 November 1941, requesting that it be carried out in accordance with the agreement.³² The Soviets considered the Belarusians and Ukrainians to be Soviet citizens and would not allow them to join

²⁹ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I,171.

³⁰ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 202, 205, 271.

³¹ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I,232-233.

³² Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I,200.

the Polish force, and indeed drafted many of them into Soviet units. The Soviets responded to the Polish embassy's note stating that as the remaining citizens of eastern Poland, referred to by the Soviets as the western districts of Ukraine and Belorussia, had been granted Soviet citizenship by a decree from the Supreme Council of the USSR on 29 November 1939, they were no longer Polish citizens and were eligible to be drafted into the Red Army. This Soviet decree forced the peoples in the eastern part of Poland, without their consent, to lose their Polish citizenship.³³ Second, the Soviets were assigning low priorities to the logistics of the Polish II Corps. With the Red Army's need for material and Stalin's distrust of the Poles, the II Corps was at the tail end of the USSR's supply chain. This lack of support made it difficult for the Poles to train and impeded their ability to enter into combat operations. In response to these concerns, the Soviets suggested that the Poles get their equipment from the Western powers that were better able to supply them.³⁴ Things became worse in 1942, when the Soviets cut the rations allotted to the II Corps, stating that they should go to Soviet units fighting at the front. In all, Anders Army had its rations cut to half its official size, which did not take into account the large numbers of Polish civilians that had become dependent on the army's rations.³⁵ As a result, starvation began to affect members of the Polish camps, with upwards of 100 people dying every day.³⁶ Throughout 1942, mostly due to the Soviets' lack of supplies, the II Corps was unable to reach operational readiness.

With this lack of action and delays in forming a functioning combat unit, many of the more committed Poles requested to be transferred to Polish units in the West which were already

³³ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 227.

³⁴ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 169.

³⁵ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 294.

³⁶ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 48.

engaged in fighting German forces. The Soviets, insisting the bulk of the Polish Army should be kept for use in the Soviet Union,³⁷ refused to allow these volunteers to leave USSR and join the existing and currently fighting Polish Armed Forces in the West. This can be seen as Soviet reluctance to lose their de-facto control over the II Corps by allowing the best and brightest to slip away to the West. Another problem emerged upon the discovery that not all of the Poles in the Soviet labor system had been released, despite Stalin's blanket amnesty of all Poles in the Soviet Union. It came to light that some administrators of Soviet Gulags were not willing to release their Polish prisoners as they required the slave labor to meet Soviet production quotas. Molotov stated on 15 November 1941, to the Polish ambassador who raised the question of the Poles still in Soviet labor camps that as the Polish Corps forming in the USSR was not yet active against the Germans, the needs of USSR meant that Poles in the Soviet Union must work where and when they were needed to aid the war effort.³⁸

With the growing agitation and dissatisfaction of the Polish II Corps, as well as the changing fortunes of the Eastern Front, Stalin began to view the Polish troops as non-vital and a drain on the Soviet war effort. As early as fall of 1941, Sikorski foresaw the problems with creating a Polish Army in the USSR and began planning to move most of, if not all of the force, to the British controlled Middle East. Fear of Soviet treachery combined with the material support of the Western Allies made the transfer all the more appealing.³⁹ On the Soviet side, the London Poles, and therefore Anders Army, began to be viewed by Stalin as a threat to his post-war vision for Poland. Ander's Army represented a strong military presence loyal to the government-in-exile, in the liberated Polish state. This would serve as an impediment to Soviet

³⁷ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I,301.

³⁸ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I,214.

³⁹ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I,185

attempts to control Poland after the war. Better, Stalin decided, to allow the II Corps to be transferred to the West, thus keeping them far away from their Polish homeland. In accordance with this line of thinking, on 18 March 1942, with the Soviet authorities unable to provide adequate rations for the Polish Army, which was sharing its limited food supply with a growing number of Polish civilians, flocking to the Polish military for aid after being released from Soviet prisons and camps, Stalin made his decision. He agreed to move a portion of the Polish formation as a military force to Iran along with over 41,000 civilians.⁴⁰

In July, under pressure from the Western Allies, Stalin agreed to allow the remainder of the Poles to be moved to Iran, effectively transferring control of the II Corps from the Soviets to the British.⁴¹ Throughout March and April of 1942, the Polish forces were transferred by the Soviets across the Caspian Sea to the port of Pahlavi in Iran. For most of the Polish soldiers and civilians, their hardships were not over. The Soviets and the British, either lacking or withholding the transportation needed to get the Poles to their marshaling grounds in the Middle East, left the Poles to their own devices to get to their destination and most were forced to walk or hitchhike through Central Asia.⁴²

As the transfer of the soldiers began, the core of what would become the II Polish Corps had already been fighting the Germans for some time in North Africa. Made up from Poles who had made their way to French-controlled Syria after the fall of Poland and subsequently British controlled Egypt after the fall of France, the newly reformed 1st Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade was at first earmarked for operations in Greece and the Balkans.⁴³ This was changed due

⁴⁰ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 213.

⁴¹ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 320.

⁴² Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 116.

⁴³ Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*, 19.

to the sudden appearance of Erwin Rommel and his *Afrika Korps* in the North African desert. In late August 1941, the unit was shipped to the besieged port city of Tobruk, where for the next few months they held one of the fortresses most vulnerable sectors against repeated German and Italian attacks.⁴⁴ Having emerged victorious at Tobruk the brigade was withdrawn back to the Middle East to provide a battle hardened cadre for the recently arrived Anders' Army.⁴⁵

By 1944, the Polish government was under tremendous pressure to put the II Corps into battle. Having refused Stalin's request to send a division to the Eastern Front, Stalin accused the Poles of being unwilling to fight, despite their exemplary service on many other fronts.⁴⁶

Additionally with the eastern portions of Poland being offered up to the Soviets, it was imperative that the II Corps be put into action, to further show the contributions that Poland was making to the defeat of Germany. Their chance came with the Allied invasion of Italy. Initially, the Poles had been in favor of Churchill's proposed strategy of a landing in the Balkans, the true so-called, soft underbelly of Europe, as this would have been the closest direct route to their homeland, with the chance to perhaps even beat the Red Army to the Polish frontier. When the decision was made that Italy, not the Balkans, would be the Allies' target, the Poles reluctantly put the II Corps at the Allies disposal.⁴⁷ The moment of triumph that the II Corps had been waiting for came in May of 1944, at the Battle of Monte Casino. Monte Casino, a massif upon which a 7th century Benedictine monastery was built, was the center point of the German defenses in Italy, the so called "Gustave line." Throughout April, 1944, the Allies had made three separate attempts to take the position but American, British, New Zealand, and Indian

⁴⁴ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 223-224.

⁴⁵ Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*, 18.

⁴⁶ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 466.

⁴⁷ Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*, 19.

forces had been bloodily repulsed.⁴⁸ In May, Anders' Army was given the option of leading the next attack, while at the same time, being told they had the right to refuse due to the enormous casualties he was expected to take in an assault on the monastery.⁴⁹ Anders however saw this as a golden political opportunity with immense propaganda value. If the Poles could take the monastery where no other nation's troops had been able, they would bring Poland's cause - currently so hard pressed - to the forefront of world opinion.

After a first failed attempt, on 17 May, the Poles again attacked the massif. Through a tremendous hail of artillery, grenades, and small arms fire, the Poles finally managed, after a day of fighting, to clear the monastery of its defenders, the elite 1st and 3rd *Fallschirmjäger* regiments.⁵⁰ In doing so, they had taken over 4000 casualties, including 1000 dead.⁵¹ Though they had achieved a major victory, their losses had been too heavy, and they were taken off the line for rest and resupply. With the June 1944 Normandy invasion, the Italian campaign became a secondary theater of operations, and many divisions were taken from Italy and sent to France. The II Polish Corps remained engaged in heavy fighting throughout the rest of 1944 into 1945, leading the Allied drive up the Italian peninsula. Anders' Army ended their war on 2 May 1945 in Northern Italy. Yet, the Poles received little credit for their exploits in Italy after Monte Casino; by this time they had become a political liability for their rabid hate of the Soviets and their system, of which many members of the II Corps had firsthand experience. By the later parts

⁴⁸ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 125-126.

⁴⁹ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 469.

⁵⁰ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 127-130.

⁵¹ Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*, 20.

of the war, it was noted by observers that they were visibly more concerned with Soviet troop movements in Poland than in those of their German opponents.⁵²

Of all Poland's military forces active during the war their Air Force has received the most, yet still limited, publicity. After escaping Poland and making their way to France, the majority of the Polish pilots continued on to the United Kingdom, as the Royal Air Force was seen to be preferable to the dated French Air Force.⁵³ Despite their admirable performance in the defense of Poland and their desire to continue the fight against the Germans with the Western air forces, German propaganda had painted the Polish pilots as backwards and amateurs. The British further hindered the integration of Polish pilots into the RAF by forcing them to confirm to Commonwealth guidelines, including an oath of allegiance to the King of England.⁵⁴ When the Battle of France began, those Poles who had managed to join foreign squadrons were immensely frustrated by the Western Allies' use of air power. The Poles saw the tactics and operations of the West to be inferior to the Germans, but their observations were not taken seriously by the Allied air command. The rapid retreat of the Allied armies and the generally chaotic course of the campaign also hampered the usefulness of the air support. Nevertheless, some 133 Poles flew in the battle shooting down over 50 German planes with a loss of only nine pilots.⁵⁵

As the Battle of France ended, the Polish airmen made their way across the channel to the United Kingdom. Desperate for men, the RAF now dropped its hindering requirements for Poles to serve and began grouping the Poles into their own squadrons. Once again, the British initially viewed the Poles as ill trained, despite the fact they had more combat experience than any other

⁵² Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 480.

⁵³ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 210.

⁵⁴ Lynne Olson, Stanley Cloud, *A Question of Honor: The Kościuszko Squadron: The Forgotten Heroes of World War II* (New York: Arrow, 2004), 98-100.

⁵⁵ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 216.

Allied pilots. Yet after the language barrier was broken and the Poles adapted to the constraints of the RAFs flight system, four Polish squadrons, 300, 301, 302, and 303, were made operational.⁵⁶ During the Battle of Britain these Polish squadrons were placed in one of the most dangerous areas in the whole of fighter command, flying in the most active period of the German air assault during the Battle of Britain. By the time the German onslaught died, the Polish 303rd squadron had become the highest scoring squadron of all the Allied forces with 126 victories, three times the RAF average, at a loss of 33 of their own pilots. For the remainder of the war, the Polish Air Force, due to its limited size, was kept under British command and participated in bombing missions over Germany, close air support, convoy security, transportation, and fighter cover for various amphibious landings in Europe.⁵⁷

The Polish Navy largely escaped destruction at the hands of the Germans in 1939 due to the foresight of Operation Peking. Peking was the Polish government's reaction to the naval and air superiority possessed by the Germans in the Baltic Sea. It was realized that if the Polish Navy remained in the Baltic, it would be destroyed. The best course of action was, therefore, to send the Polish Navy out into the Atlantic and to the ports of their ally Britain. As war clouds began to gather in August 1939, the operation was put into effect, with the fleet reaching the United Kingdom on 1 September the same day the German *Wehrmacht* crossed the Polish frontier.⁵⁸

The Polish Navy operated in a much more limited way than the other arms of Poland's military. Consisting of only 27 ships, including 2 cruisers, 9 destroyers, 5 submarines and 11 torpedo boats, some of which were given by the British who possessed spare ships they lacked

⁵⁶ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 119-120.

⁵⁷ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 96-100.

⁵⁸ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 231.

the manpower to crew them,⁵⁹ it was unable to operate as a purely Polish force and instead joined with the British in their varied naval operations. Additionally, the Poles brought 14,000 tons of merchant shipping, in the form of the Polish Merchant Navy, to the Allied cause. The Polish Navy took part in the invasion of Norway, in which the destroyer *Grom* was sunk by German aircraft and where the submarine *Orzel* sank the German cruise liner turned troop transport *Rio de Jenero*.⁶⁰ The high point of the Polish Navy during the war was when the destroyer *Piorun* was the Allied ship that located the German battleship *Bismarck* after Allied aircraft had lost sight of it on 25 May 1941. The small destroyer then began shelling the super battleship, all the while transmitting messages and hauling signal flags to let the *Bismarck* know that it was a Polish ship that was firing on them until the arrival of Royal Navy forces when, out of ammunition and fuel from its “dual” with the German battleship, it was forced to return to port.⁶¹ Both the Polish Navy and Merchant Marine served throughout the Battle of the Atlantic, making up parts of convoys across from the United States to the United Kingdom through the Arctic Circle to the USSR, losing seventeen ships in the process.⁶² They also joined with the Allied fleets to provide cover for numerous amphibious landings including Norway, Dieppe, North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and Normandy.⁶³

An additional and often overlooked contribution of the Polish government is that, while fighting for their political and military survival, they allocated vast resources to bring to light the true horrors of the German occupation of Europe. Indeed, the Polish Government-in-Exile, due to its extensive intelligence network on the continent and its ability to communicate with the

⁵⁹ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 79.

⁶⁰ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 231-232.

⁶¹ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 79.

⁶² Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 233.

⁶³ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally* 79.

Home Army inside occupied Poland, was the first to reveal what would become known as the Holocaust to the outside world. In a note delivered to the governments of the United Nations on 10 December 1942, Polish ambassador to England Count Raczynski described in great detail the German extermination of European Jews. He described unequivocally in the document that: “new methods of mass slaughter applied during the last few months confirm the fact that the German authorities aim with systematic deliberation at the total extermination of the Jewish population.”⁶⁴ Due to the bravery of men like Jan Karski and Witold Pilecki who had infiltrated a Nazi sorting facility⁶⁵ and volunteered to be interned in Auschwitz respectively,⁶⁶ the Polish Government-in-Exile provided proof of the German atrocities and a timeline of the adoption and implementation of the final solution.

On 18 January 1943, the government-in-exile was the first to demand that the Allies attempt to halt the German extermination of Europe’s Jews. They demanded to the Allied council that the Allies should begin reprisal bombings into Germany, press Berlin to let the Jews leave German controlled countries, and demand that neutral nations take in the Jews. The Poles came close to demanding reprisals against German POWs and German nationals in Allied nations, but halted as this would have been a violation of international law. The British Foreign Minister Eden rejected the Polish proposal, only offering vague promises to intervene in neutral countries.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Project In Posterum: *The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland*, accessed April 1, 2013, http://www.projectinposterum.org/docs/mass_extermination.htm

⁶⁵ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 109.

⁶⁶ "Witold Pilecki's Auschwitz Report," Witold Pilecki's Auschwitz Report, section goes here, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.witoldsreport.blogspot.com/>.

⁶⁷ Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth About Hitler's "Final Solution"* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 236.

What the London Poles thought was their greatest claim to legitimacy was the fact that the overwhelming majority of the resistance inside occupied Poland recognized them as the legitimate Polish government.⁶⁸ The state of the resistance in Poland differed from anywhere else in Europe. Though their country was occupied, the Germans had not declared war on Poland, and the Poles had never formally surrendered.⁶⁹ Therefore, no collaboration government emerged in Poland; rather, the Germans ruled it as a colonial possession. Instead, a new underground society was formed by the Poles as the ultimate form of resistance. It set up primary schools, universities, theaters, symphonies, newspapers, courts, and radio - all things banned by the Germans - in an attempt to keep Polish culture alive.⁷⁰ The underground's military arm, the *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army), was one of the largest underground movements of the Second World War, one that saw the government-in-exile as legitimate and took its orders from London.⁷¹

During the early stages of the war, after the German invasion of the USSR brought all of Poland under their control, the Home Army began a campaign of sabotage against German railways in Poland, damaging almost 200 trains in 1943 alone. The resistance's skill at such operations resulted in a plan to synchronize the disruption of all railway lines going through Poland to the eastern front, over which 85% of German manpower was carried east. The plan was approved by Sikorski, but when he presented the idea to Stalin, the Soviet leader did not even bother to respond. Another method of sabotage was the resistance cells set up inside of factories producing war materials for the German military. These cells sabotaged what they

⁶⁸ Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*, 23.

⁶⁹ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally* 59.

⁷⁰ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, Chapter 3.

⁷¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground, a History of Poland: In Two Volumes: Volume II, 1795 to the Present*. (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 2005), 344.

could, but more importantly, they managed to divert what materials and arms they could to the Home Army's supply stores.⁷²

The underground also initiated a policy of setting up resistance cells inside of the German concentration camps located in Poland, providing links to the outside world. They primarily engaged in sneaking food and medicine into the camps, but also targeted the most sadistic *Kapos* (prisoner supervisors), SS guards, and informants using methods such as typhus infected lice and planting evidence to get the offending *Kapo* or informant killed.⁷³

For the most part, the Home Army initially stayed away from attacking the German forces directly, fearing reprisals on Polish civilians, such as those that occurred when the less “sentimental” Soviet-backed Partisans attacked the Germans head on.⁷⁴ In 1943, as the German terror campaign against the Polish people was increased, the Home Army responded in kind, becoming more aggressive and launching a campaign of targeted assassinations. The assassinations focused on Poles collaborating with the Germans, like the Polish actor turned Nazi propagandist Igo Sym, Poles who exposed Jews to the German occupiers, and Gestapo officials such as Franz Kutschera, the Gestapo chief in Warsaw.⁷⁵ Attempts were even made on Hans Frank the Governor-General of occupied Poland's “*Generalgouvernement*” territory.⁷⁶

Most importantly, the Home Army trained and marshaled their forces for the great uprising to come, where they would attempt to free their nation themselves, before the Soviets arrived to enforce their own brand of “liberation”. Polish officers and NCOs from the pre-war Polish Army, supplemented by Poles trained by the British Special Operations Executive and

⁷² Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 281.

⁷³ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 281-282.

⁷⁴ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 289.

⁷⁵ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 65.

⁷⁶ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 288.

airdropped into occupied Poland,⁷⁷ formed the resistance into military units and educated them in the methods of war.

Though their two Polish Corps were contributing greatly to the war effort, the Three Great Powers were, in effect, determining Poland's future unilaterally, without the voice of the government-in-exile that considered itself Poland's legitimate government. Yet the London Poles still had their control of the *Armia Krajowa*, the Polish Home Army. To demonstrate the power of the organization and the control that the London Poles still had over their nation, they developed a strategy where by the Home Army would stage an uprising to wrest control of Warsaw from the Germans as the Red Army approached.⁷⁸ By accomplishing this, the Soviets would enter a city already liberated from within and under the control of the government-in-exile. This would legitimate both the London Poles' and the sovereignty of the Polish state.

The Uprising, part of a series of actions against the German occupation in the latter half of 1944 codenamed *Akcja Burza*, Operation Tempest,⁷⁹ began on 1 August 1944, triggered by the sight of the Red Army on the eastern banks of the Vistula and urgings to rebel broadcasted by Moscow radio.⁸⁰ The Home Army, under their commander Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, had amassed around 40,000 combatants for the uprising in Warsaw, armed with a mix of captured, airdropped, and homemade weapons.⁸¹ In the first four days of the Uprising, the Poles managed to capture much of the city center, including the historic Old Town, but found stiff resistance in the outlying areas of the city.⁸² The areas they did hold were large enough to receive Allied

⁷⁷ Norman Davies, *Rising '44*. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 191-194.

⁷⁸ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 187.

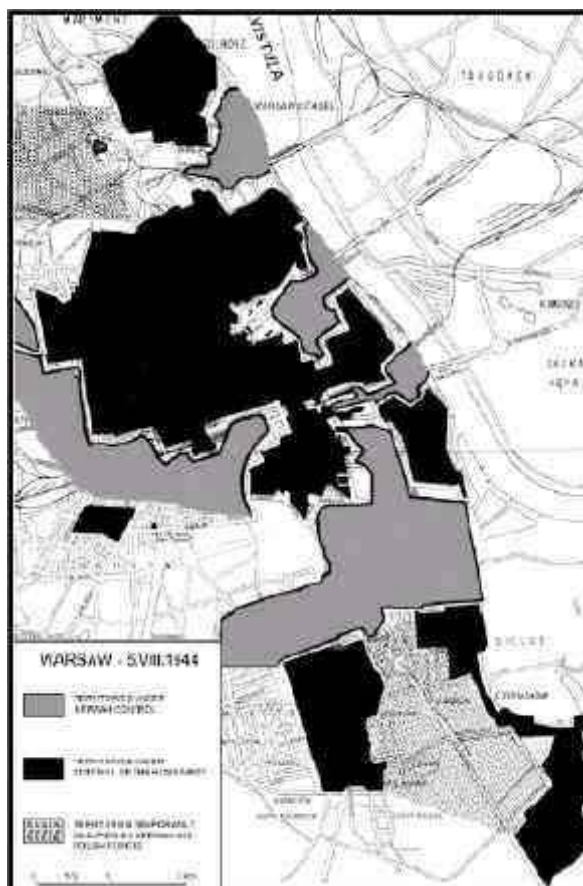
⁷⁹ Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*, 24.

⁸⁰ Davies, *God's Playground*, 353.

⁸¹ Davies, *Rising '44*, 183.

⁸² Davies, *Rising '44*, 254.

airdrops,⁸³ including they hoped, the Polish airborne brigade, and the Poles settled in to hold their position until the Red Army entered the city.



Map 3. “Warsaw Uprising Day 5 August 1944” Armia Krajowa w Dokumentach, Vol. IV., http://www.polishresistance-ak.org/images/Warsaw_5.08.1944.jpg (accessed April 1, 2013)

Soon after the uprising began, Soviet forces halted their advance 10km outside of Warsaw; The Red Army did not attempt further operations until January of 1945. Furthermore, they refused to supply the Home Army or support them with aircraft or artillery.⁸⁴ On 4 August 1944, Churchill sent a dispatch to Stalin stating that the Royal Air Force planned to airdrop sixty tons of supplies to the beleaguered fighters in Warsaw. He also conveyed the appeal of the Polish

⁸³ Davies, *Rising '44*, 247.

⁸⁴ Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*, 25

Government-in-Exile to engage in operations to relive the Home Army.⁸⁵ Stalin responded the following day by saying that the information Churchill had received on the Warsaw Uprising was incorrect. Instead of the city being transformed into a warzone, he stated that the Home Army was merely a few detachments of fighters masquerading themselves as whole divisions. The bands, said Stalin, had no guns, aircraft, or tanks with which to fight and therefore he could not imagine that they could have recaptured the city of Warsaw from four German armored divisions.⁸⁶

On 9 August in a conversation between the new Prime Minister of the government-in-exile Mikolajczyk and Stalin, the former pleaded desperately with Stalin to send aid to the Home Army and to reinitiate Red Army operations against the Germans across the Vistula. Mikolajczyk stated that since the start of the uprising, the Home Army had been holding bridge corridors across the Vistula River in preparation for linking up with the Red Army, but these corridors were in serious danger of being overrun. Stalin responded by stating that the Poles had begun their operations in Warsaw prematurely, despite the calls from Moscow for the national uprising,⁸⁷ and that the Red Army was in no position to cross the Vistula. Despite Mikolajczyk's further pleas for support, Stalin stonewalled his requests and instead changed the discussion to the Committee of National Liberation.⁸⁸ In denying western aircrew's access to land at airfields in Soviet territory after supplying the uprisings, Stalin essentially ended the chance of Western aid to the Warsaw resistance. Stalin's encouragement for the uprising to commence quickly turned into the condemnation of the *Armia Krajowa* as criminals. On 16 August 1944 Stalin

⁸⁵ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 323.

⁸⁶ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 324.

⁸⁷ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 323.

⁸⁸ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 334-338.

made his true intentions known in a telegram to Mikolajczyk. He wrote that after closer study the Soviet High Command determined that since the Warsaw “adventure” was launched without the Soviet’s knowledge, there was nothing that the Red Army could do to support the uprising. Consequently, he claimed that the entire enterprise was a useless move that resulted in the deaths of the city’s inhabitants. Because of this and the attacks by the Polish press on the Soviets for their “legitimate” lack of action, the USSR disclaimed any responsibility for the uprising and any fault for its outcome.⁸⁹

On 22 August, Stalin replied negatively to Roosevelt and Churchill’s request for Soviet aid to the Home Army. He claimed that the Home Army was led by power seeking criminals who had brought the fury of the Nazi war machine down on the residents of Warsaw. In addition, the uprising was causing an undo amount of focus by the *Wehrmacht* to be directed at Warsaw, resulting in the increase of German activity in the Warsaw area. This made it impossible for the Red Army to liberate the Polish capital at the present time. Indeed the Soviets, it was claimed, had to repulse German counter attacks in the area rather than getting the rest and resupply that was necessary to reinitiate offensive operations.⁹⁰ By this point the Germans had responded to the uprising in force. After being reinforced by several SS units including the SS Dirlewanger, a penal unit comprised of criminals,⁹¹ and the elite Hermann Göring Fallschirm-Panzer Division,⁹² the Germans began to encircle and push back the Home Army forces. German tactics relied on

⁸⁹ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 346.

⁹⁰ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 356.

⁹¹ Robert Forczyk, *Warsaw 1944: Poland's Bid for Freedom* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009), 58.

⁹² Forczyk, *Warsaw 1944*, 32.

the use of heavy artillery and close air support to demolish the areas occupied by the resistance. The Poles, lacking any defense against such methods could only sit and take the bombardment.⁹³

In the weeks that followed, due to the lack of direct Soviet support, numerous requests were made by the Western Allies for use of Soviet aerodromes to support the uprising by air; the Allied planes needed to land and refuel to make the round trip. The Soviets denied access saying that they had already tried airdrops into Warsaw and those had failed causing the vast majority of the supplies to fall into German hands. This despite Mikolajczyk's denial that any airdrops had been made by the Soviets.⁹⁴ Though the Allies' called for the Soviets to relent throughout the rest of August and September, Stalin still refused the use of Soviet aerodromes until the very end. For over two months, the London Poles tried desperately to get the Western Allies to lend aid to the uprising, but their pleas fell on deaf ears; the Allies were not willing to cross Stalin for the Polish resistance fighters. As Polish troops in the West died helping close the Falaise Gap and jumped into enemy positions in Arnhem to rescue the British Airborne, the Allies merely launched complaints to the USSR in their attempt to save the people of Warsaw from German retribution. After holding out for 63 days, the *Armia Krajowa* had lost over 18,000 fighters, and another 250,000 civilians were killed, most in acts of German reprisal, with 85 percent of Warsaw leveled systematically.⁹⁵ In the last few days the Poles had kept up their resistance merely to gain better terms for their inevitable surrender. The Germans for their part realized that as long as the Poles resisted, it made the position of Warsaw as a front line city more untenable for the German forces. On 2 October 1944 having secured terms that guaranteed Geneva Convention rights to the

⁹³ Davies, *Rising '44*, 282.

⁹⁴ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 387-388.

⁹⁵ Koskodan, *No Greater Ally*, 220-221.

Home Army,⁹⁶ the resistance capitulated to the Germans, and the fighters shipped off to various concentration and death camps throughout the Reich.⁹⁷ This was the great mortal blow to the London Poles: Their main political and military asset had been destroyed, they had seemingly been abandoned by their supposed allies, their capital was in ruins, and their nation was defenseless against the Soviet “liberators.”

The Warsaw Uprising was the last desperate gamble to turn Poland’s fortunes and save her from being offered-up to Stalin by her supposed allies. The attempt by the London Poles to underscore their authority backfired spectacularly due to their underestimation of Stalin. The man who had ordered the Katyn massacre had no qualms with allowing the Germans to root out the Home Army, saving the NKVD the trouble. As if by *Déjà vu*, the London Poles, again overestimated the willingness of the Western Allies to stand for Poland; they had not done it against their enemy Hitler; they would not do it against their ally Stalin. The Warsaw Uprising was the London Poles’ swan song, and the defeat of the Home Army signaled that any power held by the government-in-exile within Poland was lost.

The various actions and battles in which the Polish Army, Navy, Air Force and Home Army struggled during the Second World War does much to prove the fact that the Second Republic was still striving for Allied victory over the Germans long after September 1939. The importance of the Polish Armed Forces to the war effort belies their size. Though vastly outsize by the Red Army, the Poles were, nevertheless, present at many of the decisive points in the European War. In the Battle of Britain, the skill of the Polish pilots helped put the narrow margin of victory in the Allies favor. At Mount Ormal, the Polish 1st Armored Division plugged the

⁹⁶ Davies, *Rising '44*, 424-427.

⁹⁷ Davies, *Rising '44*, 480.

Falaise Gap allowing the destruction of much of the *Wehrmacht* in Normandy. The Polish Airborne pulled the remnants of the British airborne from destruction at Arnhem. The II Corps walked through the wilds of Central Asia to take Monte Casino and help break the Gothic Line. The Polish Home Army provided the Allies with the majority of the intelligence gained about the German actions on the continent. Yet, while the Polish servicemen were fighting, their sacrifices were being ignored at the great conferences. Despite the London Poles belief that the Polish Armed Forces were proof of their legitimacy, no matter what impact the Poles had on the war, the Red Army's numbers proved to be the more convincing bargaining chip.

CHAPTER V

Katyn

1943

During the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland in September 1939, the Red Army had met with little resistance from the defending Polish Army. With the Poles engaged with the Germans in the West, their high command, not realizing what was happening, not understanding whether the purpose of the Soviet intervention was to aid or hinder the Poles, and not wanting to antagonize the USSR, had not authorized its troops to attack the Soviets.¹ This resulted in massive capitulations by encircled Polish troops; in all, between 250,000 to 450,000 Poles were captured by the Red Army.² Two days after the Soviet invasion, on 19 September 1939, Lavrenti Beria, head of the NKVD, in an effort to manage the growing number of Polish prisoners, issued orders to create the Administration for Affairs of Prisoners of War and Internees, the UPV. Under NKVD control, eight camps were constructed in eastern Belorussia based on the GULAG model. The UPV would put the POWs to work and begin a political indoctrination campaign, as well as gather information on POWs about their membership in pre-war political parties, to determine who might be a threat to the USSR after hostilities had ceased.³ After the secession of hostilities, the NKVD began to arrest and interrogate Polish officers who had escaped capture during the September campaign and had not managed to go into hiding. On 3 December 1939, Beria, on the command of Stalin, ordered the arrest of "all registered regular officers of the former Polish Army."⁴ On 14 December Beria learned that almost 6000 Polish officers had been

¹ Cienciala, Anna M., N. S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski. *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 19.

² Kenneth K. Koskodan, *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland's Forces in World War II*. (Oxford, UK: Osprey Pub., 2009), 41.

³ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 8 - 9.

⁴ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 31.

arrested since the 3 December order. Additionally, Beria decided that officers would remain in the labor camps while the rank and file POWs were sent home.⁵ These camps also began to be filled with members of the Polish Intelligentsia, who had been rounded up and arrested by the NKVD as threats to Soviet control over the country.⁶

While at the camps, from October 1939 to February 1940, the Polish prisoners were subjected to interrogations and near constant political agitation by the NKVD. The orders handed down from Beria on 8 October 1939 contained explicit directions about how the NKVD should interact with the prisoners. They stated that the NKVD should begin to create a system of informants among the POWs in order to root out any counter-revolutionary groups that might exist. The monitoring of the mood and moral of the officers was also a high priority, to better gauge the overall mood of the Polish people. Files on the various prisoners were to be made, focusing on past employment, membership in organizations, and political beliefs.⁷ The prisoners expected that they would soon be released and allowed to return home, but in reality, the interviews were actually a selection process to determine who would survive, and who would perish. On 5 March 1940, four members of the Soviet Politburo - Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, and Mikoyan - issued an order to execute over 25,000 Polish "nationalists and counterrevolutionaries" kept by the NKVD at camps and prisons in the USSR. The memorandum to Stalin by Beria stated that the officers and men in the camps were "sworn enemies of the Soviet Union," who are continuing their counter-revolutionary practices and espionage. Due to the threat these men represented they were to be tried, without their knowledge and sentenced to

⁵ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 34.

⁶ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 125.

⁷ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 16.

death, to be carried out in secret by the NKVD on the grounds of anti-Soviet agitation and preparation to “enter actively into battle against Soviet Power” upon release.⁸

Why such an order was issued by the Soviet government is a hotly debated issue. The most compelling argument is that Stalin ordered the execution in an effort to deprive any future Polish state of a large portion of its talent.⁹ By murdering the cream of the Polish officer corps, Stalin sought to permanently cripple the Polish military. Furthermore, by weakening the Polish people in this way, Stalin could be certain that any revived Polish state, which would assuredly be unfriendly to the USSR, would not possess the skill or leadership to challenge Soviet control of Eastern Poland which Stalin was determined to keep.¹⁰ Another reason for the mass execution was the Soviet high commands fear that the Polish officers represented a threat to Soviet control of Poland, as the officers would undoubtedly form the core of any resistance operations mounted by the Polish people. Indeed, in Beria’s memorandum, he states that “in all these counter-revolutionary organizations [encountered in former Poland], an active, guiding role is played by former officers of the former Polish Army and former police and gendarmes.”¹¹ With their military training and leadership abilities, they could make the German-Soviet occupation very difficult. Another explanation is that Stalin feared war with the West due to the United Kingdom and France’s expressions of support for Finland during the Winter War. With many Polish forces having escaped to the West, the thought of having such a large number of trained officers hostile

⁸ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 118.

⁹ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 141-143.

¹⁰ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge [England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 107.

¹¹ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 47.

to the Soviets so close to where the battle lines might be drawn, may have influenced Stalin to order the executions.¹²

The execution process was carried out by the NKVD between April and May 1940, primarily in the Katyn forest outside of Smolensk. The first recorded transport of prisoners to Katyn took place on 5 April 1940, described in a message to the Deputy Commissar of Internal Affairs Merkulov. The victims were listed on manifests in a clear and precise method as they departed on trains to Katyn. Most were listed by name, rank, father, birthday, and Prisoner number.¹³ The total number of victims is estimated to be at about 22,000 Polish citizens, with those who died specifically in the Katyn forests numbered approximately 14,500 victims.¹⁴ They included an admiral, two generals, 24 colonels, 79 lieutenant colonels, 258 majors, 654 captains, 17 naval captains, 3,420 NCOs, 7 chaplains, 3 landowners, a prince, 43 officials, 85 privates, 131 refugees, 20 university professors, 300 physicians; 300 lawyers, engineers, and teachers; more than 100 writers and journalists and about 200 pilots.”¹⁵ The remaining 7.5 thousand were killed and disposed of at several NKVD prisons.¹⁶ When the mass executions were over, the NKVD had murdered almost half the Polish officer corps. The killings were carried out mainly with German-made Walther PPK pistols, supplied to the NKVD by Moscow. This was partly to provide plausible deniability for the Soviets and allow the blame to be placed on the Germans in case the killings were ever discovered. Yet the primary reason for the use of the Walther PPK

¹² Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 143.

¹³ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 60-62.

¹⁴ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 73,76.

¹⁵ Benjamin B. Fischer, "CSI," *The Katyn Controversy: Stalin's Killing Field* â€” Central Intelligence Agency, accessed January 11, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter99-00/art6.html>.

¹⁶ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 118.

was far more practical: the Nagant revolvers with which they had initially begun the executions had far too much recoil for prolonged and repeated use.¹⁷

The actual process of the killings was faceless and methodical. The prisoners would be driven in a bus to a building in the forest. One by one they would be taken into the building past running mechanical fans designed to help drown out the gunshots. They would then be forced to enter a room which had been sound-proofed and stood in front of a sandbag wall where they were shot in the back of the neck from behind by a man waiting in an alcove. The bodies would then be carried out the back door to waiting trucks, which would take them to a mass grave deep in the forest.¹⁸ The process was repeated hundreds of times a day for weeks, only ceasing once for the May Day holiday. The murders were completed on 22 May, and the various prisons and camps were ordered to send the murdered prisoners' data cards to Moscow and report on the effectiveness of the Poles pre-death labor in keeping their upkeep expenses at a minimum.¹⁹ With the executions complete, the Soviets though their problems with the Polish officers were over and buried.

With German invasion of the USSR in June 1941, the killing site in Katyn was overrun by the German Army and the mass graves of the Polish officer corps were located behind the German lines. Additionally, with the signing of the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement on 30 July 1941, the USSR and Poland had become allies, facilitating the formation of the Polish II Corps. With this decision came Stalin's amnesty for Polish POWs and citizens in Soviet hands. As Ander's Army assembled, questions about missing officers began to be raised by the Polish government.

¹⁷ Witold Wasilewski, Barbara Polak, and Jędrzej Tucholski, "Katyn Forest Massacre - Barbara Polak Talks to Jędrzej Tucholski and Witold Wasilewski," *Bulletin of the Institute of National Remembrance*, no. 05-06 (2005): 4-21, accessed January 3, 2013, <http://www.ceeol.com/asp/getdocument.aspx?logid=5&id=f4349d43-b13d-4c2c-a70d-056e8801493d>.

¹⁸ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 124 -125.

¹⁹ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 82.

While the USSR gave excuses for the missing Poles, the Germans were becoming aware of the Soviets' crimes. Sometime in late 1942 and early 1943, a German intelligence officer, Rudolf von Gersdorff, received reports about mass graves of Polish soldiers in the Smolensk countryside.²⁰ After an investigation, they discovered the first of the many mass graves in the Katyn forest.

The Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels saw this discovery as the perfect tool to drive a wedge between Poland, the Western Allies, and the USSR, as well as to highlight the Nazi propaganda about the horrors of Bolshevism and the Western Allies subservience to it. It would also serve as a major moral weapon, which was sorely needed after the German 6th Army's surrender at Stalingrad two months before. Goebbels therefore gave instructions to the German press to make the widest possible use of the propaganda material.²¹ On 13 April 1943, the German government, through Radio Berlin, announced to the world their discovery of the mass graves containing 12,000 massacred Polish officers. In the broadcast, Goebbels claimed that German forces had uncovered the mass execution site in occupied Russia, 16 kilometers west of Smolensk. They described a pit, 28 meters long and 16 meters wide with a mass of 3000 bodies' twelve layers deep.²² The identification of the bodies was not difficult, as they were all dressed in Polish military uniforms with their identification documents still on their bodies. All of the victims had their hands tied behind their backs and a single pistol shot in the back of their necks. It was reported that they were the remains of the entire Polish officer corps captured by

²⁰ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 215.

²¹ Joseph Goebbels and Louis Paul Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-1943*(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948), 328.

²² Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations, 1939-1945. [Edited by Count Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański.]*. Vol. I. (London: Heinemann, 1961), 523.

the Soviets in 1939.²³ The Germans stated that the officers were murdered by the Soviets in the spring of 1940.

To validate their claims, the Germans quickly brought in a commission consisting of twelve forensic experts and staffs from German-occupied Europe and Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Croatia, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and the neutral country of Sweden.²⁴ Unsurprisingly, albeit correctly, the German directed commission found that the mass executions were carried out by their enemies, the Soviets, in 1940, and condemned the USSR for its actions.

As expected, the Soviets vehemently denied the accusations. The Soviet government issued a communiqué attacking the German propaganda on 15 April 1943. It claimed that the statements issued by the German propaganda department were vicious lies. The Soviets argued that the Germans were responsible for the heinous crime, having caught the Polish officers working on road building operations near Smolensk in the June, 1941, invasion. In their response on 15 April, to the initial German broadcast of 13 April, the Soviet Information Bureau, stated that "[...]Polish prisoners-of-war who in 1941 were engaged in construction work west of Smolensk and who [...] fell into the hands of the German-Fascist hangmen [...]." In addition, the communiqué argued that by blaming the Soviets, the Germans were covering up their own crimes and attempting to discredit the USSR on the international stage.²⁵

On 16 April, the London Poles issued a statement describing their search for the missing Polish officers. When given their locations at the beginning of 1940 by the Soviets and

²³ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 101

²⁴ George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (London: Routledge, 2005), 130.

²⁵ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 524.

comparing it with the lack of officers reporting for service to the Polish II Corps, the government-in-exile was seriously concerned. Additionally, lists of officers taken prisoner by the Red Army, compiled by fellow POWs showed conclusively that the vast majority of officers were missing and unaccounted for after the spring of 1940.²⁶ This evidence flew in the face of the statements that the Soviets had issued, assuring the London Poles that all prisoners in their custody had been released. The government-in-exile's statement ended by saying that the Poles were accustomed to German lies and that they possessed irrefutable evidence of German mass murder in occupied Poland (the Holocaust), but the Germans detailed description of the massacre site, along with how well their information matched up with the Poles' own, the government-in-exile's concern for the whereabouts of their officers warranted further investigation.²⁷ The London Poles then requested an examination of the site by the International Red Cross of Geneva.

Stalin responded in a letter to Churchill on 21 April 1943, stating the fact that the Poles were questioning the Soviet's claims of innocence at a time when the Germans were accusing the USSR of this crime was "indubitable" evidence of contact and collaboration between the London Poles and the Nazis. This, Stalin claimed, necessitated the breaking-off of relations between the Soviet Union and the London Poles.²⁸ On 25 April, Molotov contacted the Polish government stating that, due to their recent behavior and attacks on the USSR as well as the "obvious" collusion between the Poles and the Germans with their simultaneous request for a Red Cross investigation of the Katyn site, the Soviet Union felt it necessary to sever all diplomatic and

²⁶ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 217.

²⁷ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 103.

²⁸ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 530.

military relations with the Polish government in London.²⁹ On the same day, Churchill contacted Stalin in an effort to forestall the break in relations. He stated that he had met and discussed with Sikorski his appeal to the International Red Cross. Churchill insisted that Sikorski had made the appeal to the Red Cross independently and that the Germans had followed suit as a propaganda tool. Furthermore, he informed Stalin that Sikorski was a committed patriot who had had no contact with the Germans and additionally was willing to cease his calls for an investigation in order to keep friendly relations with the USSR. Churchill continued by saying that any break in the Allied bloc would only serve to assist Hitler and play directly into the overall plan of the propaganda attack.³⁰ Despite this and other pleas, Stalin would have none of it. The discovery of Katyn and the London Pole's inquiries provided a convenient reason for Stalin to break with the London Poles. The Polish Government-in-Exile had become a thorn in his side, unwilling to bow to his demands. Their continued resistance was an impediment to his desires for post-war Eastern Europe. Katyn gave him the excuse he needed to brush them aside.

On 23 May 1943, Molotov contacted the Polish ambassador to Moscow Tadeusz Romer with the USSR's decision to break off diplomatic relations with the London Poles. In the note, Molotov stated that the break was due to the government-in-exiles slanderous and pro-fascist remarks on Soviet guilt of the Katyn incident. He continued by claiming that the London government was in collusion with the Germans due to their simultaneous call for an investigation into the killings. Due to the anti-Soviet hostility expressed by the government-in-exile and their accord with the Nazis, the Soviet Union could no longer maintain diplomat relations with the

²⁹ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 533.

³⁰ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 534.

London Poles.³¹ With Molotov's note Stalin finally had the political cover to begin his campaign of isolating and sidelining the London Poles in earnest. From this point on Stalin, would cease to try and win territorial acquisitions from the government-in-exile and would instead begin to push the Western Allies to recognize a communist Polish government set up by the Soviets as the legitimate head of the Polish state.

To this end, on 4 May 1943, Stalin, in a letter to Churchill, wrote that due to the anti-Soviet actions of the London Poles, as well as its perceived pro-Nazi leanings, he had begun forming a new Polish government in the USSR. He further stated that he wished in the future to consolidate the government-in-exile with his new government into the future ruling body of Poland.³² With the crisis of recognition now hitting its climax, further tragedy befell the London Poles. On 4 July 1943, on his return trip from inspecting the Polish troops in the Middle East, Sikorski, along with his daughter and chief of staff, were killed when their airplane crashed shortly after takeoff from Gibraltar Airport.³³ This was perhaps "the" turning point for the London Poles. With the death of Sikorski, the Poles had lost their most prestigious leader, and no subsequent Pole would have the influence he had had on the Allied camp. As went Sikorski, so went Poland's power amongst the Allies.

The replacement of Sikorski proved a very difficult endeavor. He alone had been able to control Polish hatred of the Soviets and therefore work personally with Stalin. The split between the pre-war opposition and the *Sanacja* had never fully been mended, and the search for a replacement opened up the same wounds that had existed during the formation of the

³¹ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 104.

³² Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations. 1939-1945. [Edited by Count Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański.]*. Vol. II. London: Heinemann, 1961, 2.

³³ John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds, *Poland, 1939-1947* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 88.

government-in-exile. After Sikorski's death, the decision was made to separate the positions that he had held, that of Prime Minister and commander-in-chief. This was an effort to separate the military from politics and disperse the control of Poland's Armed Forces away from one individual.³⁴ Originally, the fiercely anti-Soviet General Sosnkowski was the choice for commander-in-chief with Anders proposed as a suitable alternative. Anders, with his history of butting heads with the Soviets, was seen by the Allies as unfit for the position. Sosnkowski was acceptable, they agreed, if his appointment was mirrored by a more democratic Prime Minister. For PM, the choice was Mikolajczyk, a member of the pre-war opposition and the leader of largest political party, the Peasant party. He accepted the offer of PM with the condition that the Constitution, still that of 1935, be changed to limit the power of the executive.³⁵ Furthermore, he set about to decentralize the military power of the commander-in-chief, removing the position from the political cabinet as well as his command of the Polish Home Army to the defense minister. The Polish military and underground met the news of Sikorski's replacement with anger and apprehension. They did not trust the new government, angry that the power of the much-loved Sosnkowski was taken away and that the pre-war Constitution was, in effect, rewritten. Another damaging factor to the new government was that with the breaking of relations between the London Poles and the USSR, they were entirely dependent on the goodwill of the Western Allies, Roosevelt and Churchill in particular, to act as intermediaries, this at a time when the Poles were becoming more and more of a liability to inter-Allied unity in the eyes of the West.

³⁴ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 347.

³⁵ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 347-8.

As the fortunes of war turned, the Red Army began to push the Germans back. After the liberation of Smolensk and the Katyn area on October, 1943, the Soviets began a massive cover-up operation designed to hide the truth about the killings and ensure that the world “knew” that it was the Nazis who had killed the Polish officers. To facilitate this, the Soviets initiated the leadingly named “Special Commission for Determination and Investigation of the Shooting of Polish Prisoners of War by German-Fascist Invaders in Katyn Forest” under Nikolai Burdenko. The Burdenko commission unsurprisingly concluded that the Germans had committed the crime in the fall of 1941. The commission’s report would be cited repeatedly as the “official” Soviet explanation until the admission of guilt by the Soviet government on 13 April 1990.³⁶

In the meantime the growing Polish-Soviet crisis brought about by Katyn was beginning to threaten Western-Soviet relations when the Poles' importance to the Allied war effort started to diminish due to the entry of the military and industrial goliaths, the Soviet Union and the United States. The London Poles might have to be sacrificed for the sake of good relations between the West and the USSR. Even so Churchill, admitted on 15 April 1943, during a conversation with General Sikorski about the discovery of the mass graves that: "Alas, the German revelations are probably true. The Bolsheviks can be very cruel."³⁷ Indeed classified British documents stated that Soviet guilt was a "near certainty", but the alliance with the USSR was deemed to be more important than any moral issues; thus, the official documents and public accounts supported the Soviets, up to censoring any contradictory accounts in the government or the press.³⁸ In the United States, Franklin Roosevelt sent Navy Lieutenant Commander George Earle to investigate the Katyn murders. Earle’s report concluded that the Soviets, not the

³⁶ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 106.

³⁷ David Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester [England: Manchester University Press, 2000), 105.

³⁸ Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 1004.

Germans, were guilty of the crime. Roosevelt rejected the investigation's conclusion and publicly declared that he was convinced of Nazi Germany's responsibility. He then ordered that Earle's report be suppressed, to the point of "banishing" Earle to American Samoa for his insistence that the report be made public.³⁹

To add insult to injury, at the post-war Nuremberg Trials of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, the USSR attempted to add the Katyn Massacre to the list of German war crimes. The inclusion embarrassed the Western judges as guilt for the crimes was still being contested in the Western media. The Soviets, on 14 February 1946 put it forward as one of the most heinous of the German crimes but were unable to prove that any of the German defendants had been involved with the killings.⁴⁰ The Burdenko commission, which the Soviets thought would prove their case was disallowed by the tribunal as it was seen as biased in favor of the USSR. Also, they managed to make sure that any evidence used by the defense that might incriminate the Soviets be disallowed.⁴¹ As such the U.S. and British judges dismissed the charges. That the Soviets might do something like this was a fear that had been voiced back in 1943. British Undersecretary of State Alexander Cadogan stated "that we may eventually, by agreement and in collaboration with the Russians, proceed to the trial and perhaps execution of axis 'war criminal' while condoning this atrocity."⁴² Despite the fact that the Allies possessed numerous and detailed reports and investigations, including the classified British documents and the American Earle report, the Western Allies sat in judgment alongside the Soviet's, guilty of

³⁹ Fischer, Benjamin B. "CSI." *The Katyn Controversy: Stalin's Killing Field* 1997. Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed January 11, 2013. <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter99-00/art6.html>

⁴⁰ Telford Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials* (New York: Little Brown & Co, 1993), 467-468.

⁴¹ Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 107.

⁴² Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 232.

many war crimes themselves, passing sentences on the Germans. The Allies said nothing; they were unwilling to anger the Soviets, a phrase that had become all too common for the Allies when dealing with Polish-Soviet relations throughout the war.

The uncovering of the Katyn massacre proved to be another decisive moment in the demise of the Second Republic. Not only was it an unimaginable tragedy for the Polish people and Armed Forces, but the government-in-exile's response to the discovery provided Stalin with the excuse he needed to finally sever diplomatic relations with the London Poles. This allowed Stalin the freedom to make his own bid for control of the Polish nation without having to placate the obstinate government-in-exile. Sikorski's death compounded the problem; the Polish leader who possessed the respect of the Allies proved impossible to replace. Yet, as the break had already occurred between the Poles and the Soviets, there is not much evidence that even Sikorski could have helped rescue the situation. Perhaps more disturbing is the evidence that, from the beginning, the Western Allies, FDR, and Churchill in particular, possessed convincing evidence that the Soviets were responsible for the heinous crime. Nevertheless, even with this knowledge, they still sat and negotiated with Stalin at Tehran and Yalta and gave him control over Poland and Eastern Europe; such was the USSR's importance to the war effort.

CHAPTER VI
The Polish Problem
Tehran: 1943

The harsh truth for Poland was that as the Second World War went on the question of its future government and geography diminished in importance. The Western Allies saw ultimate victory and the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan to be their single most important objective. To achieve this victory, they needed the Soviet Union and its vast reserves of manpower. With this in mind, the West was willing to sacrifice part of, and eventually all of, Poland to satisfy Stalin's demands. Though Polish troops would continue fighting and dying, playing critical parts in many of the wars most important battles, including the Battle of Britain, Monte Casino, and Operation Market Garden, the London Poles would not be allowed to participate in any conference that would affect the future of their nation, due to the insistence of Stalin.

Since the Soviet government's announcement on 6 January 1943 that they meant to permanently claim the areas of Poland they had occupied alongside the Germans, the government-in-exile had vigorously protested the Soviets actions as unacceptable.¹ Though when in contact with the American and British governments they received sympathetic words, neither nation would take any action against the USSR due to the tremendous burden it was carrying of the allied war effort. Despite this, the Poles kept up their resistance to the USSR's territorial and claims. The London Poles remained convinced that they could not compromise on the shape of their eastern frontiers. They felt that they did not possess the constitutional right to cede territory

¹ Herbert Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957), 191.

to the Soviets and that if they were to go ahead and do so they would lose the support of the Polish Army and people.²

With the discovery of the Katyn killing ground and the Soviets subsequent breaking off of relations with the London Poles, Prime Minister Mikolajczyk and British Foreign Minister Eden met to discuss the possibility of reestablishing relations between the government-in-exile and the USSR. Eden, contrary to his previous assurances of Poland's post-war territorial integrity, pressed Mikolajczyk to give in to Soviet demands and accept concessions in the east in exchange for German territory. Mikolajczyk responded that while he was anxious to reestablish relations with the Soviets he was not willing to discuss concessions. He stated that he could not accede to the Soviets demands because, in his opinion, the Soviets did not just desire a piece of Polish territory, but control over the entire nation as a stepping stone for their goal of controlling Eastern Europe. He continued that as soon as Soviet forces entered Polish territory, he expected Stalin to unveil a communist Polish government to challenge the London Poles for post-war control of the nation.³

The London Poles, with their history of dealing with the Soviets before the war understood the goals of the USSR better than the Western Allies. As such they continued to resist Soviet demands even as the United States and the United Kingdom began to distance themselves from their previous statements on the Polish problem. The government-in-exile still thought that they would have a say in the final decision on post-war Poland, they felt that the Western Allies would eventually honor their promises and the fact that Polish military forces were currently engaging the Germans on several fronts would serve as a large bargaining tool in negotiations.

² Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin*, 191-2.

³ Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), 142.

What they failed to realize is just how unimportant the Polish issue was to the West when compared with the Soviet contributions to the war effort. FDR especially, had made it clear in March 1943 that the Three Great Powers alone would decide the fate of Poland, and that they would not bargain with the Poles, but do what was best for the peace of the world.⁴ The Poles would have to yield to Soviet demands.

The first of the three great conferences that would decide Poland's fate was Tehran. On the 28 November 1943, Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt met in Tehran to discuss the future conduct of the war and to begin considering the shape of post-war Europe. This was Stalin's first chance to enact his plan for Soviet control of Eastern Europe, including Poland, after the war. For Stalin and the Soviet Union, the conquest of Poland was among their oldest and consistent goals.⁵ Poland, due to its size and geographic location, was the key to establishing communist control over Eastern Europe. With this in mind, at the great conferences of the Second World War Stalin was determined to retain the territory that he had gained taken the Poles while allied Hitler, Stalin's major aim in negotiations being Western recognition of these frontiers.⁶

Stalin's diplomatic strategy was the traditional Soviet strategy, pressed from his position of strength. It was based on the Marxist principal of the inevitability of the West's collapse and subsequent Soviet victory. This explains Stalin's predatory instinct, where he managed to take advantage of every Western complacency and mistake, knowing that the West would allow it to happen. Realizing that the Western Allies were primarily interested in global peace he was able to use that desire to wring concessions advantageous to the USSR.⁷ Therefore while the United

⁴ Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin*, 192.

⁵ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 438.

⁶ Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin*, 23.

⁷ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 5.

States and the United Kingdom entered into negotiations on the future of Poland willing to give in the interest of a stable post war world, Stalin came to the table determined to wring every last concession possible from the Western Allies and the Poles in particular.

At the conference, the topic of Poland and its post-war destiny was not the primary concern of the Big Three leaders. The main objective of the United States and Great Britain was to ensure the full cooperation and assistance of the Soviet Union in the execution of Allied war policies.⁸ The West was desperate to bring the Soviet Union's massive military might to bear on the Germans in the most effective and coordinated method possible. Stalin agreed at the necessity, but with his own conditions. First, Roosevelt and Churchill would have to begin operations to support the communist partisans in Yugoslavia. Secondly, the West would have to express their support for the manipulation of the border between Poland and the USSR, in violation of a large number of agreements made with the Polish government. Most important, were the discussions on the opening of a second European front, and the coordination of the D-Day landings with a massive Soviet offensive operation, which would come to be called Operation Bagration.⁹ This topic outshined the Polish question. The "Big Three" spent days arguing about when D-Day should take place, who should be its commander, and when the operations should begin. Throughout the conference, in what would come to be the norm for such meetings, Stalin dominated the discussion, using the Red Army's great victory at the Battle of Kursk, its military might, and the key positions it held on the Eastern front, to ensure that his

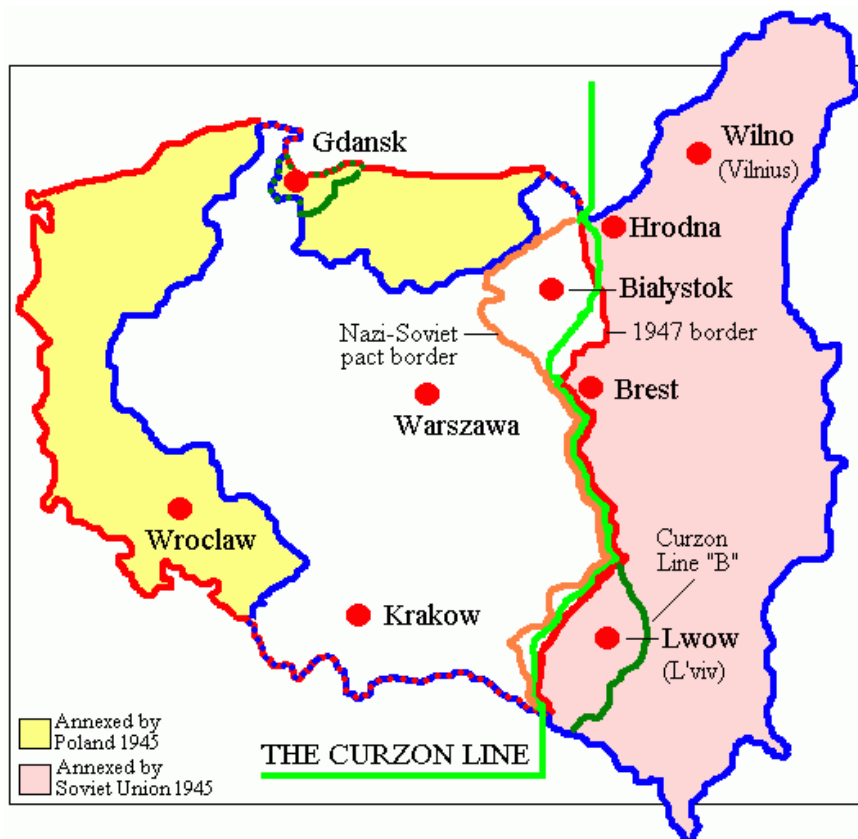
⁸ Serhii Plokhy, *Yalta: The Price of Peace* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 30.

⁹ "The Avalon Project : The Tehran Conference," The Avalon Project : The Tehran Conference, accessed January 3, 2013, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/wwii/tehran.htm>.

demands were met.¹⁰ Poland was not the only state that Stalin was promised a free hand in at Tehran, Churchill, and Roosevelt also acquiesced to the Soviet Union forming puppet communist governments in Czechoslovakia, the Baltic States, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and the Balkans, once they had been “liberated” by the Red Army. It became readily apparent to Stalin that the Western leaders were far too concerned about achieving victory in the war to risk upsetting him. Furthermore the West’s negative attitude towards the Poles, brought on by the government-in-exile’s refusal to concede territory to the Soviets, encouraged Stalin to be uncompromising in his demands, knowing that the West would eventually pressure the poles into yielding in the name of Allied unity.¹¹

¹⁰ Plokhy, *Yalta, The Price of Peace*, 140.

¹¹ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 443.



Map 4. "Map of Poland in 1945"

Carr, Adam Wikipedia, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/75/Map_of_Poland_%281945%29.png (accessed April 1, 2013).

At the Tehran conference, Stalin and Churchill discussed privately their views on the Polish question. Churchill pointed out to Stalin that England had gone to war for the sake Polish national sovereignty and was as committed as ever to a strong and independent Poland. Yet, he stated, in contrast to previous guaranties to the London Poles, that the British had no particular attachment to any specific Polish frontier. He then pressed Stalin on his feelings toward a western Polish frontier on the Oder River, to which Stalin replied that he was in favor, yet he stated that the issue of Polish frontiers would require further thought.¹² The American President

¹² Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations. 1939-1945. [Edited by Count Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański.]*. Vol. II. (London: Heinemann, 1961), 96.

Franklin D. Roosevelt also spoke with Stalin privately on the issue of borders and on the principle of self-determination in regards to Poland. This discussion was particularly useful because it reveals Roosevelt's true feelings on the Polish issue, and helps to explain his reasoning for being so accommodating with Stalin, i.e. that both were primarily concerned with their own political issues, above all other matters. Roosevelt stated to Stalin that there was an American presidential election the next year and that six to seven million Poles lived in the United States. Roosevelt wanted their votes, and, therefore, even though he agreed with Stalin on issues regarding the post-war Polish borders, he could not participate in any public decision on them until after the election.¹³ Roosevelt then explained to Stalin that the American public demanded the right of the Poles to self-determination after the war, even though he thought that the Polish people would choose to join the USSR.¹⁴ Stalin agreed on "future expressions" of the "will of the people" within the Soviet system, but stated outright that he would not allow any form of international control. Stalin also stated that Roosevelt should have some propaganda work done to convince the American people that the Poles would be better off under Soviet rule and that they would be able to express their will in accordance with the Soviet constitution.¹⁵

The actual discussion on Poland at Tehran occurred on 1 December. Stalin responded to requests to resume talks with the London Poles by stating categorically that he could not due to the fact that they had joined forces with the Nazi propaganda machine to slander the USSR and that Polish forces were involved in the killing of Soviet partisans in Poland. Stalin also stated that the least the Soviet Union would accept, in terms of territorial acquisition, was the Curzon Line, an eastern Polish frontier named after the post-World War One British Foreign Secretary

¹³ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 98.

¹⁴ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 98.

¹⁵ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 97.

Curzon, put forward by the Allied Supreme Council after the First World War but before the Polish-Soviet war. They did agree to compensate the Polish state for the lost territory with East Prussia and other eastern German territory. The United Kingdom agreed to this decision and stated that if the Polish Government-in-Exile were to refuse, that they would be well and truly done with them and would defer to the Soviets at the peace table.¹⁶ This decision stripped Poland of 48 percent of its pre-war territory, and, in exchange, Poland would be given territory taken from eastern Germany, the so-called “recovered territories” based on the notion that they had historically belonged to Poland in the medieval period, before German encroachment to the east.¹⁷ This plan, it was agreed, would be finalized at a later meeting.

In all of these deliberations the London Poles were kept uninvolved and in the dark by Stalin’s demand. The Polish Government-in-Exile’s response to the “official statements” of the Tehran conference came on 6 December 1943. In the response, the Polish Foreign Minister stated that Poland, as the longest struggling Allied nation, saw the cooperation of Teheran as heralding a speedy and complete end to the war. Moreover, the London Poles restated their belief in the Atlantic Charter to deliver to them a free and independent Poland in the post-war world.¹⁸ Stalin stated his view on the events of the conference on 15 December. He maintained his position that the London Poles were agents of Hitler and in league with the Nazis in an effort to defame the USSR. He stated that it was the policy of the Soviet Union to accept the Curzon line as the western Soviet border if the USSR was also given the Northern portions of East Prussia. In addition, as an amendment to the Curzon line, the Soviets would not return the city of Lwow, despite its majority Polish population, as it lay in an area dominated by Ukrainians. Stalin also

¹⁶ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 98-101.

¹⁷ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 325.

¹⁸ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 103.

made public his support for a western Polish frontier on the Oder River.¹⁹ Churchill attempted to use the proposed Polish absorption of German territory to sell the Poles on the decisions reached at Yalta. With both Poland and the USSR set to receive German territory at the war's end, Churchill argued to the government-in-exile that the two nations would be bound together by their joint duty to guard against a future German reemergence.²⁰ Churchill presented the option to the Poles by stating that they were being invited to be a protector of European peace. The Poles saw it differently, and correctly as it turned out, as being permanently bound to the USSR due to the threat of German revanchism.

Later, in February 1944 Churchill spoke about the Tehran conference in the House of Commons. In his speech, he stated that even though the United Kingdom had gone to war to protect Poland's independence, Great Britain had never guaranteed any specific Polish frontier, a reversal of Foreign Minister Eden's statement of 30 July 1941. Furthermore, the British had never agreed to the Polish expansion after 1919, which had given them much of their eastern territory; it had instead upheld the Curzon Line. Churchill, mirroring Stalin's own sentiments, claimed that Russia, having suffered two invasions from the West in the last fifty years, and after losing millions of men as a result, had the right to protect themselves by establishing more defensible western borders. Churchill did agree, like Stalin, to compensate the Poles for the loss of this territory by means of eastern portions of Germany.²¹ Though the London Poles were told what had been discussed, the ultimatum on the post-war borders was never delivered, as Churchill had promised, and the Poles were never informed that any final decision had been made. This led to an incident at the Moscow conference in October, 1944, where the new Polish

¹⁹ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 105.

²⁰ Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin*, 288.

²¹ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 194.

Prime Minister, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, began to discuss the London Poles' problems with the border issue, only to be told by a shocked Molotov that the issue had been settled at Tehran.²²

His territorial ambitions all but secured, Stalin next turned his attention to insuring that the Polish nation that remained after the war would be politically controlled by the Soviet state. Realizing that it would be the Red Army that would "liberate" Eastern Europe, Stalin knew that he would be able to get a lead on any attempt by the Western Allies to reestablish the pre-war governments of Eastern Europe by putting into power, in the "liberated areas", communist governments, backed by the Red Army that answered to Moscow. On 24 June 1944, Stalin sent a letter to Roosevelt outlining his views on the restructuring of the Polish government. In it, he wrote of the importance of reorganizing the Polish government with elements of the London émigré leaders as well as Polish communists in the USSR and liberated Poland. As evidence of this need for change, he pointed out those statements by the London Poles on the issue of borders demonstrated that they had not made any forward movement on the issue of reconciliation with the Soviets. Thus Stalin, expressed his rationale for a change of authority over the Polish state.²³

To this end the Soviets proclaimed on 21 July 1944, the establishment of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, also known as the Lublin Government.²⁴ This committee, formed from leftist and communist Poles acceptable to the USSR, was Stalin's challenge to the authority of the London Poles. The Lublin Government claimed control over all the areas of Poland that the Red Army had "liberated".

²² Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 413.

²³ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 271.

²⁴ Norman Davies, *God's Playground, a History of Poland: In Two Volumes: Volume II, 1795 to the Present*. (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 2005), 352.

The London Poles responded to the formation of the Committee of National Liberation in a memorandum to Churchill on 24 July. The government-in-exile stated that the Committee was a communist government that was formed in areas of Poland which had never been contested by the Soviet Union. The Committee was established with the full knowledge of the USSR, and the use of Soviet radio in broadcasting the announcement proved Soviet backing for the Committee. Furthermore, the Committee was made up almost entirely of communists unknown to the vast majority of the Polish people. Nevertheless, the communists were organizing themselves as a government and claiming that the London Poles were an illegal fascist organization which made the Committee the sole legal source of authority in Poland.²⁵ Despite this claim, the London Poles continued, the Committee offered no grounds as to why they should be considered Poland's legitimate authority at the expense of the government-in-exile. The London Poles went on to express their worries that the Committee, not recognizing the government in London, would break up and/or betray the Polish underground, who had been struggling against the German invaders for five years. All of this was contrary, stated the London Poles, to promises made by Stalin throughout their negotiations on the future reestablishment of a government in Poland. It was evident that Stalin was putting into power a government that was answerable to him, not to the Polish people. The memorandum expressed that the Polish government fully expected the British to honor their promises to restore the Polish Government-in-Exile at the cessation of hostilities.²⁶ Churchill sent a dispatch to Stalin on 27 July 1944, referencing the formation of the Committee of National Liberation. In the dispatch, Churchill pushed for the creation of a joint government of Poles residing in Great Britain and eastern Poles in the USSR;

²⁵ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 293-295.

²⁶ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 295.

this went against promises made to the London Poles, which stated that the government-in-exile would always be recognized as the legitimate Polish government. Churchill went on to say that it would be a pity and indeed a disaster if the West were to support one Polish government while the USSR supported another.²⁷

It is clear that the Lublin Government was placed in power by Stalin in an effort to create a roadblock to the status quo antebellum which could not be undone. The Lublin Poles represented a government, recognized by the USSR, which the Polish people could “vote” for in the “free and democratic” elections that the USSR had promised in their adoption of the Atlantic Charter at the Inter-Allied Council in London on 24 September 1941. To this end, in Stalin’s response to Churchill’s letter on 28 July, he claimed that as Poland’s neighbor, the Soviet Union welcomed a Polish government friendly to the USSR. The National Committee, Stalin claimed, was friendlier towards the Soviet government and represented a good starting point for the formation of a new democratic government in Poland. The Committee, he continued, would lead to the unification of those London Poles who support democracy in Poland and would overcome the resistance of those anti-Soviet Poles who had caused the breakdown in relations between the two states. In conclusion, Stalin reiterated the importance of the Polish question to the Allied cause and stated that the Red Army was doing all it could to aid and accelerate the liberation of the Polish nation and assist them in regaining their freedom and prosperity.²⁸ What Stalin failed to mention is that were the Red Army to go, the Red Army would stay. Once his forces had control over the Polish territory, he alone would decide what its future government would look like.

²⁷ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 301.

²⁸ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 305.

On 22 November, in reaction to talks with FDR, during which he declared that he would not guarantee any specific Polish borders, specifically in regards to Wilno and Lwow, the government-in-exile refused to ratify any agreement with the Soviets that did not adhere to the pre-war borders, as agreed upon in numerous past agreements and declarations with the Western Allies.²⁹ With the London Poles refusing to accept Stalin's deal, President Mikolajczyk saw little hope for bettering the Polish position and resigned. After another Socialist minister's attempt was foiled by members of the right wing National Democrats, socialist politician Tomasz Arciszewski managed to form a government, and subsequently became the last war-time PM of the Polish Government-in-Exile.³⁰ This inner turmoil gave the appearance to the outside world that the London Poles were not interested in any deal with the Soviets, only in squabbling with themselves and holding up the workings of inner-Allied unity. Arciszewski's new government was far more firm in defense of Polish rights than Sikorski's or Mikolajczyk had been. Having been backed into a corner, the new Prime minister decided that the Poles could not give anymore. Arciszewski was determined to defend Poland's territorial and political sovereignty to the last. Though this garnered Arciszewski the support of Poles living in the West, as well as the Polish Army, the Western governments were not pleased, believing that they could not force this new government compromise with the Soviets. The British were angered and outraged by this turn of events, with Eden going so far as to recommend pulling their ambassador to the London Poles. Churchill claimed that the new Polish government was inherently weak and that Mikolajczyk would be back in power soon. Until then, he assured Stalin that the British attitude toward the new government would be correct but very cold. For the USSR Arciszewski's government was

²⁹ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. I, 142.

³⁰ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 359.

very convenient. Due to its stubbornness, Stalin could more readily blame the Poles for the lack of compromise, and the West would more readily believe him.³¹ From this point on, the West, for all intents and purposes, ignored the new Polish government. The Soviets were now free to make additional unilateral decisions on Poland.

Stalin took this opportunity to urge the Allies to recognize his Lublin government as legitimate, sighting the perceived stubbornness and intractability of the London Poles. The Western powers asked Stalin to delay in any action concerning a transfer of legitimacy until the Big Three had met early the next year at Yalta.³² There is little doubt that by this time, the Poles were seen as an inconvenient ally for the West to have. The London Poles' refusal to negotiate away half of their nation and the subsequent fall of Mikolajczyk's government caused many in the Allied camp to wash their hands of the Polish problem and turn to other matters they saw as more important, effectively handing the initiative of the settlement of post-war Poland, and indeed eastern Europe, to Stalin.

The conference at Tehran was the beginning of the end for the Second Republic. By the time the Big Three met, it was clear to all that the Polish issue had diminished to secondary status. Victory in the war was to take precedence over all other considerations, and if the West had to sacrifice to Poland achieve the final victory, then so be it. Yet, perhaps the most frightening aspect of the conference was the fact that the Western leaders apparently believed that Stalin would honor all the promises he had made to achieve his goals. The Poles' warnings about Stalin and his promises fell on deaf ears.

³¹ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 318-320.

³² Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 360.

Chapter VII
The Shape of Things to Come
Yalta: 1945

By the time the Three Great Powers met once again at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Red Army was in control of the territory of the Polish nation, and Stalin's puppets, the Lublin Government, in charge of its administration. Indeed, the USSR was already in the process of re-annexing the eastern sections of Poland that it had first taken in 1939. Yalta once again saw the Polish question sidelined as issues more important to leaders took precedence. The conference was a world-shaking event, not just for Poland, but for the entire continent. Yalta has been described as an American revolt against the European order which had dominated world politics for centuries.¹ It transformed the obvious United Kingdom –Soviet Union post-war confrontation into the worldwide Cold War we are familiar with today. Churchill was the spokesman of the old order. What he suggested was the classical European pragmatic solution: the restoration of France and Poland as powerful nations in order to arrange a balance of power such as that created by the Congress of Vienna in 1815.² He also sought to limit reparations that would be paid by Germany at the conclusion of hostilities, as to prevent another treaty of Versailles, and therefore cease the vicious cycle that had begun with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71.³ Yet Churchill was only able to achieve the restoration of France, dooming any idea of a balance of power, insuring Western Europe would become dependent both economically and militarily on American support in the new Cold War. With the new power dynamic in place, Churchill continually sought a showdown with the Soviets in order to create a better post-war

¹ Fraser J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xvi.

² Serhii Plokhy, *Yalta: The Price of Peace* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 30.

³ Plokhy, *Yalta The Price of Peace*, 108-112.

settlement. To facilitate this, he kept focusing on the unresolved Polish situation; he was ignored by the US and the USSR, who were determined to avoid a crisis at any cost.⁴

Stalin, for his part, did nothing to prevent the change in the order of the world. He was primarily determined to keep the Polish territory that he had gained in 1939 while allied with Hitler, and maintain the political control over Eastern Europe given to him by the Red Army's conquests.⁵ Whatever he had to agree to get it was inconsequential; he could change his mind after the fact. Stalin achieved his goals by a process of out-maneuvering Churchill and his aims while manipulating FDR on his own objectives. He was able to push the issue of Poland, knowing that the West was willing to let it go due to the Cambridge Five spy ring, operating in the British government and giving Stalin an immense intelligence advantage, showing definitively that the Allies were not willing to stand for Poland.⁶ Most importantly of all, he had the Red Army, perhaps the strongest bargaining chip in the world at that time. As long as Stalin possessed the Red Army, he would get what he desired. It soon became clear to both sides that whoever controlled a territory would decide its social, economic, and political system.

FDR was the main architect for the shape of the new world, due primarily to his failures rather than his successes. His decisions must not be viewed in the light of the Cold War he helped to create but rather in the light of 1930s American isolationism. FDR's main goal was to get the USSR to support the formation of the United Nations and to intervene in the war against Japan.⁷ FDR saw a Europe divided between the United Kingdom and USSR's spheres of influence as a normal development. After all, it seemed at the time that Stalin and Churchill were

⁴ Harbutt, *Yalta 1945*, 304.

⁵ Plokhy, *Yalta The Price of Peace*, xxvi.

⁶ Plokhy, *Yalta The Price of Peace*, 78-79.

⁷ Plokhy, *Yalta The Price of Peace*, 15-17.

to be the only two European leaders left standing after the war, though in reality Churchill lost his position at the end of July 1945. In truth, Stalin and Churchill did not care about FDR's UN; they cared about future security, and merely agreed to the venture in order to get American support. Stalin, in particular, used discussions on the UN as a negotiating tool.⁸

Stalin also knew that the West was anxious to secure Soviet involvement in the war against Japan and were willing to pay the price for the Red Army's participation in the Pacific Theater.⁹ After FDR had gotten what he desired from the Soviets, he seems to have lost interest in the post-war blueprint of Europe. He merely contented himself with garnering promises from Stalin about free elections in Eastern Europe.¹⁰ Having consoled himself with thinking that Stalin would honor his promises of elections, he informed the American public of his new vision for a free democratic Europe. Unfortunately, his naivety in believing Stalin satisfied the public and turned them away from foreign affairs, which allowed the Soviets a free hand in setting up puppet governments in the east. Due to FDR's wishful thinking, and the failure of his own plan for a European balance of power, Churchill began to push for an Anglo-American front against the Soviets, as the United States was the only nation powerful enough after the war to assume leadership and defend the Western Bloc of nations. By doing this, it was insured that the US had a stake in the future of Europe.¹¹

When the Polish issue was discussed at the conference, Stalin opened by stating that the question of Poland was one of honor and security for the Soviet state. Poland, he argued, had

⁸ Plokhy, *Yalta The Price of Peace*, 153.

⁹ Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), 351.

¹⁰ Harbutt, *Yalta 1945*, 301.

¹¹ Harbutt, *Yalta 1945*, 396-397.

been a corridor for the invasion of Russia far too many times.¹² This necessitated a strong and independent Poland that could defend itself from future aggression. With the Soviets approaching Berlin, any strong stance against the Soviets was hampered by Roosevelt's insistence on seeing Stalin not as the invader of Poland in 1939, but as Uncle Joe, his fraternal ally. He summarized his rationale for his wartime relations with Stalin in 1943 when confronted by US ambassador to the USSR William Bullitt, Jr., who stated that Stalin was a "devil like tyrant leading a vile system".¹³ Roosevelt responded to Bullitt Jr., "I just have a hunch that Stalin is not that kind of a man. ... and I think that if I give him everything I possibly can and ask for nothing from him in return, noblesse oblige, he won't try to annex anything and will work with me for a world of democracy and peace"¹⁴

The Western Allies acquiesce to the Soviet premier's wishes. The Soviets, single handedly carrying the war on the Eastern Front, were more important than the Poles and their half a million fighting men. It was far easier for the West to force the government-in-exile to compromise than it was to prevail over Stalin's desires. At Yalta, the Allies therefore ceded to Stalin the areas of Poland promised to him in his pact with Hitler, legitimizing the pact between the two dictators that had begun the worldwide conflict. The process to facilitate this recognition began on 7 February 1945, when Molotov put forward the following proposals in regard to the Polish question. First, it was the position of the Soviet Union that the Curzon Line should be the final frontier for eastern Poland, with a western border on the Oder and Neisse rivers. Secondly, the Provisional Government of Poland would invite selected democratic, anti-Nazi, (originally

¹² Simon Berthon and Joanna Potts, *Warlords: An Extraordinary Re-creation of World War II through the Eyes and Minds of Hitler, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006), 285.

¹³ Wilson D. Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51.

¹⁴ Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, 52.

stated as non-fascist) Western émigrés to join with them in a unity government. This organization would then be recognized by the UN as the legitimate government of Poland until the Polish people could be called to the polls for general voting on a permanent government.¹⁵ Stalin claimed that the elections would be held about one month after the Germans defeat. In reality it would be almost two years.¹⁶

On 11 February, the final decisions on post-war Poland were reached at Yalta, almost completely in step with the Soviet position. They stated that the Allied powers were still committed to a free, independent, and democratic Poland. Due to the fact that the Red Army, not the Western Allies had liberated Poland, it needed a government that was more accessible and broadly based on the will of the Polish people. In light of this, the Committee of National Liberation would invite certain democratic leaders from the London Poles and form a Provisional Government of Poland. This would then be recognized by the UN and the Great Powers as the legitimate government of the Polish state. The Provisional government would help to finalize the decision on German cessions of territory to form Poland's western border at the future post-war peace conference.¹⁷ As for the final border of the post-war Polish state, the Curzon Line was definitively and officially stated to be the eastern frontier of Poland. Throughout the entire conference Stalin had treated Poland's eastern border as a *fait accompli*.¹⁸ He was sure that the West would give him the territory he desired, and therefore directed the majority of the conversation to discussions on Poland's western border. The only "serious" challenge to Stalin's territorial acquisitions was when FDR pressed Stalin for a gesture, to help

¹⁵ Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations. 1939-1945. [Edited by Count Edward Raczyński and Stanisław Biegański.]*. Vol. II. (London: Heinemann, 1961), 518.

¹⁶ Herbert Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957), 527.

¹⁷ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 520.

¹⁸ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 340.

the London Poles save face. FDR requested that the USSR send Lwow, a city with a Polish majority east of the Curzon Line, to the Poles. Stalin curtly refused stating that it was the British who had drawn the Curzon line, not the USSR, and they had left Lwow in Soviet hands.¹⁹ He failed to mention that at the time of the Curzon Lines creation neither the Poles nor the Soviets recognized its legitimacy.

In return for the acceptance of the Soviet position, Stalin promised Churchill free elections not only in Poland but in all of Eastern Europe in accordance with the Atlantic Charter. In reality the agreement at Yalta included no mechanism for enforcing this promise of free elections. Molotov managed to remove the language calling for supervised elections from the documents.²⁰ This meant that the Western Allies trusted the Soviets to honor their promises without any verification, which gave the USSR a free hand in determining the future government of the Polish state. In effect, this led to a de-facto recognition of the Lublin Government by the West, due to the weakness of the agreement's language, and allowed the Soviets to stretch their promises to fit any need that might arise.

The London Poles protested the outcome of the Yalta conference vehemently, as shown in a conversation between the Count Raczynski and Eden on 20 February 1945. In his protest, Raczynski pointed out that the decisions made at Yalta were taken without Poland's knowledge or agreement, an offense so unprecedented that had not even been done to liberated Axis satellite states such as Romania and Hungary. Yet the offense was not unprecedented, as illustrated by the Munich Conference of 1938, indeed it had become the custom for the Great Powers to unilaterally decide the fate of "lesser" nations. Raczynski continued saying that the decision

¹⁹ Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin*, 523.

²⁰ Melvyn P. Leffler, "Adherence to Agreements: Yalta and the Experiences of the Early Cold War," *International Security*, 11, no. 1 (1986): 88–123.

was contrary to the declaration made by Churchill on 5 August 1940, and also to several documented statements by Mr. Eden himself that there would be no territorial changes to Poland without the agreement of all interested parties. In addition, the result of the Yalta conference was contrary to statements by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin on their desire for a sovereign and independent Poland. Raczynski stated definitively that if governance of the Polish nation was left to the Lublin government, it meant that it would, in fact, be governed by the NKVD. Eden responded by stating that the decisions arrived at in Yalta were unavoidable in light of the Allies' overall plan for post-war Europe. In addition, he denied Raczynski's accusations that Yalta was a Soviet success, claiming that Stalin had originally pushed for total recognition of the Lublin government, not a unity party. When pressed on the final composition of the post-war provisional government, Eden stated that no date had been set for elections.²¹

On this point, Stalin was adamant in refusing to admit foreign observers to Poland for any election or plebiscite that might be held in the future. On 7 April 1945 in a letter to Churchill, he masked this in an attack on England's dealings with the new Polish Provisional Government. He claimed that the provisional government wanted no foreign observers on its soil. Stalin continued that this was not surprising given the unfriendly attitude the West had adopted toward them in questioning their (mostly Soviet backed communist) composition. In addition, he stated that the British government's attempts to force the provisional government to accept Mr. Mikolajczyk (the recognized Polish Prime Minister) into the organization when the Prime Minister had attacked the decisions of Yalta and the provisional government's forerunner, the Lublin government, had angered the Committees leaders. Stalin then pointed out that the provisional government had allowed foreign observers and other parties into their nation from other

²¹ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 528-532.

friendlier countries such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Stalin neglected to point out that these were both nations with Soviet imposed communist governments.²² This lack of effort on the part of the Allies is often seen as Western acceptance of Eastern Europe falling firmly under the Soviet sphere of control. Yalta is seen as truly ushering in the era of Soviet dominance that would last fifty years.²³ Through all of this, the London Poles were again excluded from the talks at Stalin's insistence, and their objections were brushed aside for political expediency. As a final blow to their position, the government-in-exile was told by the Allies to join the Lublin Government in the Party of National Unity, that is, to abandon what they saw as their legitimate yet unraveling claim as the true government of Poland. Seeing the writing on the wall and hoping that they would have at least some chance to influence affairs of state, a few of the London Poles including former Prime Minister Mikołajczyk eventually decided to take up the Soviet offer. Though publicly and in theory it was stated that they were equal partners in practice, the London Poles that went east were outnumbered in the party by Soviet backed leftist and were quickly rendered irrelevant.²⁴

Yalta proved that by 1945 the Polish issue had become nothing more than a bargaining chip on the map of post-war Europe. With the war coming to a close, the shape of things to come was the question on the mind of the Big Three. Each leader had his own agenda; FDR had the UN, and Churchill had his Anglo-American front against the USSR. Only Stalin was concerned with the Polish question, i.e. assuring his control over the broken nation. Remarkably, after all that had happened - after Katyn and the stranding of the Warsaw Uprising - the West still believed that Stalin would keep his word regarding free elections in the Soviet sphere. Whether it

²² Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 563.

²³ Harbutt, *Yalta 1945*, 23.

²⁴ John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds. *Poland, 1939-1947*. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 107.

was born out of ignorance, naivety, or indifference, Yalta effectively doomed Eastern Europe to a further five decades of occupation with the hammer and sickle replacing the swastika.

CHAPTER VIII
The Price of Victory
Potsdam and Beyond: 1945-1947

With the European war's end in May 1945, the Polish Government-in-Exile's world was collapsing around them. Though the Western Allies entered into the Second World War, supposedly, to defend Polish national sovereignty, the pre-war Polish government had been sidelined and replaced by the Western Allies, quick to please Stalin. The West had traded Poland to Stalin for the promise of stability, just as they had Czechoslovakia to Hitler, the only difference being the six million Polish dead, including 600,000 that fell fighting for the Allied cause.¹ In a note from Count Raczynski to Eden on 6 July 1945, the London Poles protested the violation of the rights of Polish nation by the recognition of the Provisional Government of National Unity by the Three Great Powers. This, coupled with the withdrawal of recognition of London Poles, represented an unprecedented abandonment of one of Britain's allies. In response to a call by the British government to transfer his position to a member of the Polish provisional government, Raczynski stated he had been made the ambassador by order of the constitutional government of the Polish Second Republic, and he would not surrender that authority. Raczynski put forward the fact that the government-in-exile had signed agreements with the United Kingdom, France, and the United States, as well as numerous multilateral agreements such as the Atlantic Charter, which prove that they were the legitimate government of the Polish nation. He went on to state that for the past six years, the Polish Armed Forces had been sacrificing themselves for the Allied cause under the authority of the London Poles, but at the war's victorious conclusion, Poland remained under foreign occupation. Raczynski reminded Eden that

¹ Steven J Zaloga, *The Polish Army: 1939-1945*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 28.

the Second World War was started to preserve the sovereignty of Poland, and now, even though Poland found itself on the winning side, the Polish people, were still deprived of their freedom and independence and were still under the control of hostile alien power. The Lublin Government had been forced upon Poland and did not represent the will of the Polish people. Once more in its history, Poland found itself deprived of its independence, but its people, he stated, resolved to never give up the struggle for liberation. Because of this, Raczynski once again refused to delegate his authority to the provisional government unless he was ordered to by the constitutional leaders of the Polish nation: i.e. the government-in-exile.²

Ignoring the stance of the London Poles, the Three Great Powers met at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945. Potsdam once again showed how truly unimportant the Polish question had become as the war had run its course in Europe and was then in its final months in the Pacific. The world had changed so completely as a result of the war as to make the matter of Poland a dead issue. The Soviet Union was occupying Central and Eastern Europe with the Red Army encamped on the border of the Soviet occupation zone of Germany. Refugees were fleeing out of Eastern Europe fearing the imminent, and in some places well implemented, Stalinist takeover. The United Kingdom had a new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, who lacked Churchill's vehement ant-communist furor, and was far more interested in rebuilding his country and standing up to future Soviet threats than with the all but settled politics of Eastern Europe.³ The United States had a new President, Harry Truman, who was also unlike his predecessor. In this case it was his distrust of the Soviets which set him apart. With the war ending and the Germans defeated, the usefulness of inter-Allied unity, in regards to the USSR was fading, and the

² Edward Raczynski and Stanisław Biegański. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations. 1939-1945. [Edited by Count Edward Raczynski and Stanisław Biegański.]* Vol. II. (London: Heinemann, 1961), 626-628.

³ Serhii Plokhyy, *Yalta: The Price of Peace* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 385.

American government was becoming much more suspicious of communists than it had been the past decade under FDR.⁴ Post-war Germany and East-West cooperation was the main thrust of the conference. Truman and his advisers saw the Soviets' actions in Eastern Europe as aggressive expansionism which was a violation of the agreements Stalin had committed to at Yalta in February. Stalin insisted that his control of Eastern Europe was a defensive measure against possible future attacks (by whom he declined to say). Furthermore, he expressed that Eastern Europe was a legitimate sphere of Soviet influence.⁵

In regards to Poland, its fate was a foregone conclusion, its freedom signed away by FDR at Yalta to gain Soviet acceptance of the UN and support against the Japanese, support that came when Japan was all but defeated by the power of the American's Atom Bomb.⁶ Despite the death of FDR, with the loss of Churchill, no major leader was willing to use force to defend the sovereignty of the Polish nation as they had sworn to do in 1939. The most devastating war in human history had just ended and nobody wished to initiate another one. Even with the power of the atomic bomb, Truman was unwilling to fight the Soviets for control of Eastern Europe. Six years of war had been enough for the West, and the Pacific conflict was still raging. Truman became more concerned with halting further Soviet expansion than with overturning that which had already taken place. Additionally, he was consumed with assuming leadership of the Western European bloc that had begun to form in opposition to the USSR after Yalta.

On 8 July 1945 the Western Leaders completed their abandonment of the London Poles which had begun at Tehran. The Soviet Union flushed with victory on the issue proposed three

⁴ George Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East* (Durham [N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), 7-13.

⁵ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 31.

⁶ John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 584.

points on issues regarding diplomatic relations with new Polish government and the surrender of government property held by London Poles. First, the Soviets stated that in view of the establishment and recognition of the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity, the Three Great Powers should immediately sever all relations with the London Poles. Next, the government-in-exile should transfer all official assets to the new government and the Allies should forbid the transfer of governmental property and assets to any private person. Not only would this grant the provisional government the various Polish symbols of office, but would also grant them access to the finances of the government-in-exile, increasing their claims to legitimacy while eviscerating the London Poles claim. Finally, the Polish Army, Navy, and Air Force should immediately subordinate themselves to the authority of the new Polish government that would then determine any further measures to be taken on the issue (i.e. the return of Polish servicemen).⁷

On 2 August, the concluding communiqué of the Potsdam Conference was issued containing final resolutions on Polish affairs. The communiqué reads that the decisions made at Potsdam were joint decisions between the Three Great Powers and served to confirm the decisions made at the Yalta conference in February 1945. The powers agreed to the establishment of diplomatic relations with new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity and the severing of relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile. In addition, the United Kingdom and the United States would insure measures were taken to protect the interests of provisional government and would work to obtain property of the Polish state and insure that it had not been relocated into private hands, pending transfer to the Provisional government. The communiqué went on to say that the Allies wished to facilitate the return of all Poles abroad that

⁷ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 631.

desired return to their nation, including servicemen from the Polish Armed Forces and Merchant Marine. Those who chose to return, it was expected, would be given personal and property rights on the same basis as all Polish citizens. Finally, the Provisional Government agreed to future, free, unfettered elections with universal suffrage and a secret ballot. All democratic, anti-Nazi parties would have the right to take part in such an election and to put forward candidates for office. The Allied press would also be allowed into the country to report on the process before and during the elections, a promise that was later denied.⁸

The meeting of the Three Great Powers at Potsdam was the final nail in the coffin of the Polish Second Republic. The portion of the conference on Poland was merely a further ratification of what had been agreed upon at Yalta. The Three Great Powers, once again without the presence of the government-in-exile, conclusively established and recognized a Polish provisional government to be formed in Poland by the Party of National Unity, dominated by the Lublin Poles, pending future elections. In addition, the meeting finalized the territorial reshaping of Eastern Europe with the final western borders of post-war Poland agreed upon, situated on the Oder-Neisse line.⁹

Potsdam and the western border issue can be described as the first instance of Polish-Soviet unity during the war,¹⁰ though they approached the issue with different motivations. For the Poles, with the loss of their eastern territory there was a need to make up for it in the West, in the areas of the medieval Polish Kingdom. For the Soviets, it was an effort to lengthen their reach further into Western Europe. Additionally, by having the Poles take as much German

⁸ Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 634.

⁹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground, a History of Poland: In Two Volumes: Volume II, 1795 to the Present*. (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 2005), 364-365.

¹⁰ Anna M. Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939* (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1968), 255.

territory as possible, Stalin would ensure that the Poles were forced to ally with the USSR. Who else could be counted upon to defend the Poles' new territory in the face of a resurgent German threat?¹¹ Therefore Stalin pushed for Poland's border to be as far west as possible, against the reticence of the Western Allies. In doing so he attempted to show that the Soviets were the Poles true allies while the West was oriented towards the Germans. The Soviets made ample use of the West's near-constant retreat from their promises to the Poles, to capitalize on the Poles' sense of resentment and abandonment. The Soviets used the idea of the "Western Betrayal" to prove that Polish nation could not trust the West in the future and instead should ally with the nation that "liberated" their country from the German invaders.

Regardless, the Potsdam decision was the final, unequivocal abandonment of the London Poles by the Western Allies, which would doom Poland to a half century of Soviet oppression. In effect, the territory of the Polish nation had rolled half of its total area to the west. In doing so, they lost much of their ancestral heartland from which the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had drawn much of its wealth and power.

The creation of the various Polish combat units was done with the notion that if the Allies saw that the Poles were taking an active role in the fighting of the war, they would treat Poland as a full member of the Allied camp. By war's end, the Polish Armed Forces represented the fourth largest Allied contingent in the European war.¹² On every front - land, air, and sea - wherever the Allies were fighting the Germans, the Poles were there actively participating, many times playing crucial roles. Yet, all the Poles fighting and dying for the Allied cause did nothing to save their country as it was sold to the Soviets for vague guaranties. Despite the sacrifices

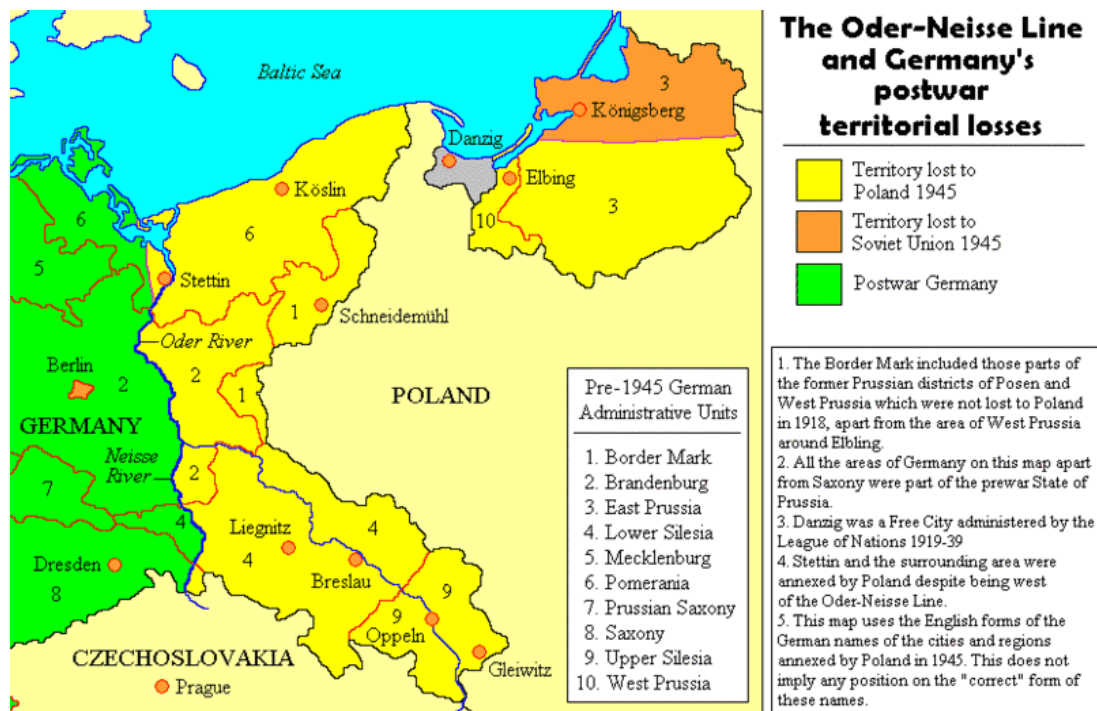
¹¹ Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), 405.

¹² Kenneth K. Koskodan, *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland's Forces in World War II*. (Oxford, UK: Osprey Pub., 2009), 7-9.

made by the Polish fighting men, when the Three Great Powers met to discuss the future of post-war Europe, they did so without the presence of the Polish Government-in-Exile, and forgetting the thousands of Poles on the war's front lines.

Indeed, almost as an afterthought, the conference considered the fate of the Polish soldiers who had been fighting in the West since 1940. The Three Great Powers decided to allow the Poles in the West to return home to Poland and resettle. The issue was discussed on 13 July 1945 by General Anders and Field Marshal Alexander. In the conversation, Anders begged Alexander to not force any Pole who wished to stay in the West to return to Poland. Alexander responded favorably, yet he stated that something like that was a question for Allied Forces Supreme Headquarters. Anders went on to request that, due to statements of Soviet propaganda, the refugee camps for the now demobilized Polish servicemen should be British run so that the USSR could not say that Anders had forced any of his 110,000 men to remain in the West.¹³ As it happened, the option to return to Poland was rejected by the vast majority of the Polish servicemen as many of their homes had been in the eastern territories annexed by the USSR. Additionally, it was feared that the Soviets would attack the returning soldiers as infected with Western ideas and therefore dangerous to the USSR's hold on the nation.

¹³ Raczyński and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 630.



Map 5. "The Oder-Neisse Line"

Carr, Adam. <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/Oder-neisse.gif>, (accessed April 1, 2013)

With the Oder-Neisse line decided upon as the Western border of Poland, the large numbers of Germans in the new Polish territories would have to be removed. The communist-backed Government of National Unity, as well as the Soviet authorities wanted them removed in order to facilitate a more homogenous Polish nation state mirroring the National Democrat's position at the creation of the Second Republic.¹⁴ This continuity was latched onto by the Government of National Unity in an attempt to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the Polish people. By claiming they were carrying out the same mission as some of the Second Republics founding figures and its government in the early 1920s, they laid claim to being the legitimate

¹⁴ Norman Davies, *God's Playground, a History of Poland: In Two Volumes: Volume II, 1795 to the Present*. (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 2005), 367-368.

successors to the Polish nation, as opposed to the London Poles who they painted as being the successors to the “fascist” *Sanjaca* regime.

Over the next six years from 1944 to 1945, over seven million Germans were forcibly removed from what the new Polish government called, the “recovered territories,” based on the notion that they had historically belonged to Poland in the medieval period, before German encroachment to the east.¹⁵

This was accomplished by both legal, i.e. government sponsored, and non-legal, i.e. popular violence and mob justice, methods.¹⁶ The Germans were not the only victims of a forced exodus. During the same time period, from 1944 to 1946, millions of Poles were forced from their homes in the eastern portions of pre-war Poland, now under the control of the USSR and split between the Soviet Republics of Belorussia, Ukraine, and Lithuania.¹⁷ Even more troubling, almost half of the Polish populations in these territories were not allowed to leave; rather they were forced to retain the Soviet citizenship which had been foisted on them during the Soviet occupation of 1939-1941.¹⁸ Indeed many of the Poles residing in these regions had been drafted into the Red Army during the course of the war. Perhaps most heartbreaking of all, because they had been captured by the Soviets during the September campaign and subsequently released after the signing of the 30 July 1941 Sikorski-Mayski Agreement the majority of the soldiers in the Polish Armed Forces in the West had come from the eastern areas of Poland. This made the Polish Provisional Government’s demands that they be forcibly repatriated all the more insulting

¹⁵ Steffen Prauser and Arfon Rees, “*The Expulsion of 'German' Communities from Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War*,” (European University Institute, Florence. HEC No. 2004/1.): 22, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/2599/HEC04-01.pdf;jsessionid=B39D3A552E3B75F8B45FA5E1EDAD1CE1?sequence=1>

¹⁶ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 320-323.

¹⁷ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 545.

¹⁸ Edward Raczynski and Stanislaw Biegański. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations. 1939-1945. [Edited by Count Edward Raczynski and Stanislaw Biegański.]*. Vol. II. (London: Heinemann, 1961), 227.

as the men in many cases had no home to return to. Indeed, some 30 officers in the Polish II Corps committed suicide upon learning that their homes had been given to the Soviets.¹⁹

Poland was the nation that lost more of its population and territory than any other state, while supposedly on the victorious side. Additionally, they had suffered six years of German occupation and were facing fifty years of Soviet domination. Despite this, they were not to be given any reparations of their own by the Germans. It was agreed at Potsdam that they would be given only 15% of the Soviet Union's reparations at Stalin's insistence.²⁰ This pitiful amount can be seen as an effort by Stalin to keep the Poles reliant of the USSR and control what aid Poland received.

Aside from the death sentence the Second Republic received at the conference, an even deeper insult to the Poles also arose from Potsdam. In the agreement, the decision was made on how the Allies were to try the Germans for war crimes. The Germans were to be judged for the crimes against humanity at a special tribunal and their evil exposed to the world. Yet, sitting in judgment alongside the Western Allies would be delegates from the USSR, the perpetrators of innumerable crimes and savageries against the Polish people. As if to add even further insult, the Soviets then tried to place the blame for the worst of their crimes, Katyn, on the shoulders of the Germans, as they had been attempting to do since the Germans had first discovered the killing grounds.²¹

Throughout this entire process, the remaining London Poles tried desperately to reason with the Western leaders. To this end, they issued a statement on 14 August 1945, protesting the

¹⁹ Lynne Olson and Stanley Cloud, *A Question of Honor: The Kościuszko. Squadron: The Forgotten Heroes of World War II* (New York: Arrow, 2004), 374-383.

²⁰ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 544.

²¹ Telford Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials*. (New York: Little Brown & Co, 1993), 466-72.

Potsdam conference on the principles of freedom and equality among the nations of the world. The statement proclaimed that the secret diplomacy at Potsdam could not be considered a democratic method of conducting international affairs. The Three Great Powers passed resolutions affecting other states and arrogated to themselves the exclusive right of organizing post-war Europe along lines fixed by themselves and themselves alone. The arbitrary method with which they went about this was particularly striking with regards to Poland. It continued by saying that the statement from the final communiqué that, "those who chose to return, it was expected, would be given personal and property rights on the same basis as all Polish citizens," in light of the arrests and deportations of those Poles the Soviets saw as dangerous to their rule, was blatantly false. Furthermore, the newly recognized government was nothing but the Lublin government with the addition of two London Poles who were relegated to the sidelines and held no actual power; it was not, as stated, an expression of national unity. It was in fact a Polish Communist Party who received its orders from Moscow, headed by Boleslaw Bierut, a Soviet citizen and noted Comintern member. In addition, the decisions of the Potsdam conference did not contain a guarantee of elections, merely a statement that the elections would be held at some unspecified time at some unspecified place. The statement then reminded the Allies that the government-in-exile had put forth a plan which stated that the election should be held under Western supervision after Soviet troops and authorities had left Poland. This plan was rejected due to pressure from Stalin. In regards to Poland the Potsdam conference amounted to an inclusion of Poland (the war's most victimized nation) in the USSR reparations and left the Polish people at the mercy of the Soviets. All border issues, they said, had fallen in the Soviet's favor: the acceptance of the Curzon line, the loss of Lwow, and the Soviet annexation of Koenigsberg. Finally, the decision had not contained any mention of the release of the sixteen

Polish leaders being held by USSR. These men had headed the Polish underground through six years of war and had suffered and fought for the Allied cause along with many others imprisoned by the Soviets. These heroes had been abandoned by the West out of political expediency. The position of the Polish Government-in-Exile was that there could be no lasting peace in the world unless it was based on equality, freedom, justice, and the rule of international law. The legitimate Polish government would continue to do everything in its power to achieve the triumph of these principles.²² As usual, their last cries were ignored as the issues, it was explained, had already been settled.

In the end, Churchill tried to argue that the Polish tragedy was the fault of the government-in-exile, insisting that had the Poles given into Soviets territorial demands early on they would have been able to salvaged political control of whatever Polish nation was left.²³ Churchill's argument disregards one crucial factor, that expansion of Soviet power was the primary goal of the USSR. The post-war fate of Czechoslovakia proves this point. While the Soviets argued that Poland needed to be within the Soviet sphere for many reasons, such as its use as an avenue of invasion into the USSR, its non-Polish minorities, and its historic negative attitude towards the Russians, none of these rationales applied to the Czechs. Indeed the democratically-elected Czech President Benes had tried long and hard to establish friendly relations with the USSR. Yet despite this, when the Soviets had the chance, they conquered Czechoslovakia, just as they did the rest of Eastern Europe.

The elections long promised by Stalin never materialized, only a fixed referendum in 1946. Even so, the original returns from the polls showed that less than 20 percent of the

²² Raczynski and Biegański, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. II, 635-637.

²³ Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), 445.

populace voted in favor of the communists. In typical Stalinist fashion, this was changed to show overwhelming support for the Soviet backed government.²⁴ Despite the obvious foul play involved in the referendum, it was recognized by the West out of political expediency. The Western Allies agreed that Poland was not worth fighting a second, potentially more destructive war over. The time for resisting Stalin's territorial demands was over. It would have taken a strong show of force by the Western Allies at the time when Stalin was at his weakest for a favorable outcome to the Polish question to be wrested from him. Yet throughout the war, Stalin knew that the West would not attempt such action, due to the value they placed on the Red Army.

With Stalin now assured the West would not interfere, the process of nationalizing Poland's economy began, and the start of land reform was implemented. Additionally, Soviet authorities started the transfer of Poland to a single party Soviet state. All right wing parties were outlawed, leaving no choice in future elections except for the state-sponsored party. Opposition leaders were rounded up and executed after show trials or exiled far to the east. Resistance was brutally put down, and members of the Home Army, still fighting the same fight they began in 1939, were routed out and destroyed.²⁵ Foreign states began to recognize the new communist government as the legitimate government of Poland, and the government-in-exile was evicted from the Polish consulate in London.²⁶ The same process was repeating itself all over Eastern Europe as the Iron Curtin began to descend across the continent. The Allies' indifference to the Soviets actions in Eastern Europe sealed its fate for the next half century. Had Truman reacted to Stalin's violations of Yalta in the east, as he did later in the case of Communist incursions into

²⁴ Davies, *God's Playground*, 424.

²⁵ Davies, *God's Playground*, 415-416.

²⁶ Peter D. Stachura, *The Poles in Britain, 1940-2000: From Betrayal to Assimilation*. (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 8.

Turkey and Greece, the Soviets may have had no choice but to honor their promise of free elections rather than risk a confrontation with the West.²⁷ Instead Stalin violated his promises from the Atlantic Charter, Yalta, and Potsdam, while the West, seeing Poland as a lost cause, moved on to the next battlefield of the Cold War.

With the European conflict at an end, the conference at Potsdam showed that the issue of Poland was dead-on-arrival. The decision as to Poland's future had been hammered out at Yalta months before; Potsdam merely made the deal official. Despite the change in leadership from the open FDR to the suspicious anticommunist Truman, the concern was with the looming Cold War, not in trying to wrest Poland back to the western side of the Iron Curtain. Within months, Stalin's promises were shown to be worthless in rigged elections, NKVD arrests, and show trials all over Europe. For Poland, the occupation continued with great forced migrations of peoples and the territory of the Polish nation itself to the West. The Polish soldiers, sailors, and airmen in the West had, it seemed, been fighting and sacrifice for their Allies' freedom, not theirs, as they were left nationless and forgotten. The government-in-exile, a hollow shell of what it had been even in 1940, pledged to remain and keep the torch burning, but already the governments of the world were recognizing the council from Lublin as the legitimate voice of the Polish people.

²⁷ Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, 444.

Conclusion

As this thesis has demonstrated, the Second Polish Republic was in many ways doomed from the start. Reestablished in November 1918, after 123 years of foreign domination, it lay isolated in Eastern Europe between its two large and powerful traditional foes. The hostility of Germany and the USSR, coupled with the precariousness of the Poles' newly-won independence, left few options for the Poles' survival. The Second Republic therefore spent its twenty-year existence searching for a place on the European stage while seeking legitimacy as a Great Power both at home and abroad.

From the beginning, there were arguments about the borders of a Polish state and how it should fit into the framework of Europe. Pilsudski's *Intermarium* federation vied with Dmowski's Polish nation state, but due to wars, treaties, and infighting, the Second Republic fell in between the two concepts, and in the process, failed to accomplish either. The unstable politics of the Second Republic were a byproduct of the attempt to form a functioning state from the remnants of three empires after more than a century of foreign domination, magnified by the treacherousness of the Poles' position in Europe. The Polish *Sejm*'s inability to reconcile these problems, combined with insufficient time to establish a culture of democracy within Poland, resulted in the nation turning to authoritarianism to ensure its economic and diplomatic security. Pilsudski's coup in May 1926, and the subsequent *Sanacja* government did much to strengthen the inner workings of the Polish nation, but at the cost of foreign disapproval, harming the standing of not only the Polish government but also the Polish state. The Marshal's death in 1935 and the loss of his guiding hand left Poland's government adrift, causing it to shift further towards open authoritarianism. The Second Republic's foreign policy mirrored their internal

struggles. Based on a misguided view of their own strength and importance to their allies, Pilsudski and subsequently Beck's policy of equilibrium could not stand without secure guaranties from the Western powers that were content to give in to Hitler's demands rather than risk war. Every instance of Western appeasement to Hitler was a crack in the foundation of the Poles' foreign policy.

The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, revealed how the Poles' inter-war efforts to establish themselves within the "concert of Europe" failed. Used by the Western Allies and the Soviets alike to buy time for their own inevitable conflict with Hitler, the inauguration of the conflict proved the beginning of the end for the Second Republic. The new Polish Government-in-Exile was formed primarily from the pre-war opposition to *Sanacja*, who, while claiming to represent the original government of the Second Republic, were a break with the regime that Pilsudski had instituted in 1926. Therefore their actions during the war embodied an attempt to legitimize their claims by lending all the support at their disposal to the Allied cause. Half a million Polish servicemen fought and died to ensure Poland's survival after the defeat of the Nazi Germany. Yet, the Poles' sacrifices were undermined in one fell swoop by the entry of the Soviet Union into the Allied war effort in June 1941. In comparison with the strength of the Red Army, all of the Poles' contributions shrank into obscurity.

Yet above all else, Stalin's demands proved a death sentence to the Second Republic. From the beginning of the war, Stalin's goal had been the annexation of Polish territory, be it through an agreement with Hitler, the Western Allies, or by brute force. As the conflict dragged on, his aim changed to the total political control of not only Poland, but the whole of Eastern Europe. Stalin's actions, his murder of the Polish officer corps at Katyn, his obstinacy in the forming of the Polish II Corps, his creation of the Lublin Committee, and his complacency in the

failure of the Warsaw Uprising all offer clear evidence that in the latter half of the conflict, the USSR was striving for control of Poland and all of Eastern Europe in the post-war world. The Polish Government-in-Exile's resistance to Stalin's plans engendered resentment on the part of the Western Allies, desperate for Soviet aid against the Germans, causing them to see the London Poles as inconvenient and obstinate. Stalin in the negotiations at the Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam conferences demanded concessions from the Poles and the Western Allies unilaterally granted them. When the time came, they were willing to sacrifice the London Poles to appease Stalin and ensure his continued pledge to inter-allied Unity and the armed struggle to defeat Nazism.

The government-in-exile, still grappled with the problem of legitimacy inherited from its pre-war predecessors. Its continued inability to establish itself with the current framework allowed the West to come-to-terms with transferring legitimacy, along with the Polish nation, from the London Poles to Stalin's Committee of National Unity. Despite the fact that Polish soldiers, sailors, and airmen had been instrumental in the Allies' success, by war's end Stalin had achieved his goal of a Poland which took its orders from Moscow. By this means, Poland had finally found its "legitimate" place on the European stage, though not at the hands of the Second Republic. Rather, for the next half century, the position of the People's Republic of Poland would be defined by an alliance with the USSR and a place within the Soviet sphere.

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