Security, Conflict and Cooperation in the Contemporary World

British Policy Towards Poland, 1944–1956

ANDREA MASON

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Contents

Abbreviations

AK	*Armia Krajowa* (Home Army)
GOP	*Grupy Ochronno Propagandowe* (Protection-Propaganda Groups)
KRN	*Krajowa Rada Narodowa* (National Council of the Homeland)
MBN	*Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego* (Ministry of National Security)
NIK	*Najwyższa Izba Kontroli* (Supreme Chamber of Control)
NKVD	*Narodnyi kommissariat vnutrennykh del* (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs)
PKWN	*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego* (Polish National Committee of Liberation)
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PPR	*Polska Partia Robotnicza* (Polish Workers' Party)
PPS	*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna* (Polish Socialist Party)
PSL	*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe* (Polish Peasant Alliance)
RPPS	*Robotnicza Partia Polskich Socjalistów* (Polish Socialist Workers' Party)
SD	*Stronnictwo Demokratyczne* (Democratic Alliance)
SL	*Stronnictwo Ludowe* (Peasant Alliance)
SN	*Stronnictwo Narodowe* (National Alliance)
SP	*Stronnictwo Pracy* (Labour Alliance)
TRJN	*Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej* (Provisional Government of National Unity)
UB	*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa* (Security Office)
WiN	*Wolność i Niezawisłość* (Freedom and Independence)
WRN	*Wolność Równość i Niepodległość* (Freedom, Equality, and Independence)
ZPP	*Związek Patriotów Polskich* (Union of Polish Patriots)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In June 1945, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the former prime minister of the London-based Polish government-in-exile left for Moscow to participate in the negotiations for the establishment of a new Polish government under the auspices of a commission composed of representatives of Britain, the US, and the Soviet Union. Mikołajczyk harboured doubts as to the viability of the negotiations, partly because the Soviet government had allowed very limited representation from the parties affiliated to the government-in-exile. He agreed to go on the strength of a promise of support from the British government and with the understanding that Britain would continue to actively assist in the establishment of a democratic system of government in Poland. The British prime minister, Winston Churchill, assured Mikołajczyk that the British government would be prepared to bring its influence to bear on the Soviet Union in order to secure this outcome.[1]

This book offers an analysis of the origins and outcome of Churchill's June 1945 promise to Mikołajczyk. It assesses the extent to which Britain was able to determine the postwar political settlement in Poland and considers the constraints which ultimately diminished British influence. The final phase of the Second World War and the immediate postwar years saw

[1] The National Archives (hereafter TNA) FO 371/66090/N658, 'Mr Churchill's conversation with M. Mikołajczyk', 15 June 1945.

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the extension of increasing Soviet influence in Poland and across Eastern Europe. Through its wartime commitment to Poland, Britain was drawn into protracted negotiations with the Soviet Union over the Polish question. A study of this process therefore helps to elucidate the broader issues of British expectations regarding the shape of postwar Anglo-Soviet relations, British hopes for ongoing Anglo-Soviet cooperation in Eastern Europe, and the British response to its gradual exclusion from the region as relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated and then collapsed.

This work begins with a study of the relationship between the British government and the London-based Polish government-in-exile during the last year and a half of the war. Britain's involvement in Poland in the immediate postwar period was part of a continuous process which began with the British guarantee of March 1939 to protect Poland against German aggression, and was extended and deepened by a series of political commitments to the restoration of a free and independent Polish state in return for the significant Polish military contribution to the allied war effort.[2] From the time of its arrival in London after the fall of France in June 1940, the Polish government-in-exile had extended to Britain all of its available military resources. In August 1940, the conclusion of the Anglo-Polish military agreement formalised the commitment of the Polish armed forces to the allied war effort and brought the Polish air force under the direct command of the Royal Air Force. In the spring of 1942, the Polish government augmented its military contribution with the addition of almost 80,000 Polish troops evacuated from the Soviet Union. Although Polish leaders had intended for the troops to participate in the liberation of Poland, they consented to their gradual dispersal across several theatres of war, according to the needs and strategic priorities of the British high command. Over the course of the war, Polish troops under British command fought in campaigns in the Middle East, Italy, and northwestern Europe, as well as in the Battle of Britain. These troops represented a valuable source of manpower for Britain, especially during the precarious time between the fall of France and the German invasion of the Soviet Union,

[2] On 31 March 1939, the British prime minister Neville Chamberlain announced a guarantee to defend Poland against German aggression in the House of Commons. This guarantee was formalised in the treaty of mutual assistance between Britain and Poland concluded in August. TNA: FO 371/39436/C11513/62/55, 'Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Polish Government regarding Mutual Assistance', 25 August 1939.

when Britain was without European fighting allies and desperately short of resources.[3]

While the Polish military contribution was a significant reason for Britain's involvement in the negotiations over Poland's future, the extent of that involvement is still surprising: Poland was a relatively minor ally; Britain had no particular strategic interests in Eastern Europe; the British government did not involve itself to the same extent in the affairs of the other European exile governments based in London during the war.[4] Nor had Anglo-Polish relations been close during the interwar period. On the contrary, Britain had generally kept a disdainful distance from Eastern Europe: the multitude of territorial wars and the rapid collapse of democratic governments in the late 1920s and early 1930s seemed to confirm the British impression shaped at the Paris Peace Conference that the region was inherently unstable, populated by quarrelsome, politically immature leaders who were too easily inclined to resort to violence to settle disputes.[5]

Yet Churchill and the foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, persisted in their efforts to secure a settlement for Poland even when negotiations with the Soviet Union became mired in discord. Apart from the sense of obligation engendered by the Polish military contribution, there were two main reasons which explain their focus on the Polish issue. First, the defence of Poland was the reason for Britain's declaration of war against Germany; failure to secure a satisfactory postwar settlement would amount to a public admission of defeat and an acceptance of diminished British influence. Second, the future of Poland was wrapped up in Britain's broader conception of the shape of postwar Europe, which was based on an assumption of ongoing Anglo-Soviet cooperation. Thus, a satisfactory agreement over Poland was equated with confirmation that this outcome would be feasible.

The sincerity of the British commitment to postwar Poland has been subject to much doubt because of the decision in the summer of 1945 to

[3] Anita Prażmowska, 'Churchill and Poland', in *Winston Churchill: Studies in Statesmanship*, ed. R.A.C. Parker (London: Brassey's, 1995), 110, 117.

[4] In addition to that of Poland, the governments-in-exile of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Norway, and Yugoslavia, as well as the Free French authorities were based in London during the Second World War.

[5] Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers: Six Months that Changed the World* (London: John Murray, 2001), chapters 17 and 18; Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking after the First World War, 1919–1923* (London: Palgrave, 2008), chapter 6.

accept Soviet conditions as a basis for the formation of Poland's provisional government: the cession of Polish territory east of the Curzon line[6] and the participation of only a small number of leaders from outside the Polish National Committee of Liberation (*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*—PKWN), the Soviet-sponsored rival to the London-based exile government.[7] This decision has been cast in the existing literature either as a cavalier discarding of an ally whose importance had diminished, or as an example of British naïveté about Soviet postwar intentions vis-à-vis Eastern Europe, or as a regrettable but unavoidable consequence of Soviet military dominance throughout Central and Eastern Europe.[8] All three of these interpretations neglect to consider the analysis and assumptions which formed the basis of the British decision. This work argues that British acceptance of the Soviet terms in the summer of 1945 was based on two main considerations. First, the British expectation was that the inclusion of Mikołajczyk in the provisional government would allow him to establish a secure foothold in the leadership of the country, given the overwhelming support for his party among the Polish population. Second, the British proceeded on the basis that Anglo-Soviet cooperation would endure beyond the end of the war, allowing Britain to exert influence over the final composition of the Polish government and the structure of the country's political system. Further, when Churchill urged Mikołajczyk to return, he did so with a clear sense that Britain continued to bear responsibility for the satisfactory outcome of the negotiations. Churchill's sense

[6] So named because the line was proposed by the British foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, in July 1920 in an attempt to bring about an end to the Polish-Bolshevik war. It had first been proposed as Poland's eastern frontier by the Commission on Polish Affairs at the Paris Peace Conference in April 1919. As a result of differences among the delegations at the conference, there were actually two variants of the southern section of the border: 'A', which assigned the city of Lwów [Lvov] and surrounding area to Russia, and 'B', which assigned it to Poland. It was variant 'A' of the Curzon line that Stalin demanded at the Tehran conference. Sarah Meiklejohn Terry, *Poland's Place in Europe: General Sikorski and the Origin of the Oder-Neisse Line, 1939–1943* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 120, fn. 2.

[7] TNA: FO 371/47595/N7369/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 23 June 1945.

[8] David Dilks, *Epic and Tragedy: Britain and Poland, 1941–1945* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1995), 29–30; Mark Ostrowski, 'To Return to Poland or not to Return: The Dilemma Facing the Polish Armed Forces at the End of the Second World War' (PhD dissertation, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1996), 164–168; Michael Hope, *The Abandoned Legion: A Study of the Background of the Post-War Dissolution of Polish Forces in the West* (London: Veritas, 2005), 14; Evan McGilvray, *A Military Government In Exile: The Polish Government-in-Exile 1939–1945: A Study of Discontent* (Solihull: Helion, 2010), 133, 144–145.

of obligation was shared by the rest of the British political leadership and the officials of the Foreign Office. It was not a commitment that expired with the end of hostilities.

After the war, the new Labour government struggled to fulfil the British commitment to Poland in the midst of the rapid realignment of the international system. The foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, presided over a process of gradual British disengagement from Poland, during which time the Polish communist party, with the support of the Soviet Union, moved to establish one-party rule in the country. At first glance, the rapid decline of British influence in Poland seems to support the orthodox interpretation of the Labour foreign secretary as a committed cold warrior from the time he took office. This interpretation holds that Bevin instantly recognised the gravity of the Soviet threat to Western interests, understood that any attempt at cooperation with the Soviets would be futile, and instead skilfully persuaded an initially reluctant US that an American-backed Western European bloc was the only means of ensuring Western security. The crowning success of Bevin's 'grand design' was the announcement of the Marshall Plan and the establishment of NATO.[9] In order to stave off Soviet interference in Western Europe, it was necessary to concede Soviet dominance over Eastern Europe, implying that Bevin concluded immediately that Poland would fall into the Soviet orbit, beyond the reach of British influence.[10]

[9] Quoted in Martin H. Folly, '"The impression is growing … that the United States is hard when dealing with us": Ernest Bevin and Anglo-American Relations at the Dawn of the Cold War', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2012), 151.

[10] The main text of this school of interpretation is the third volume of Alan Bullock's biography of Bevin: Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945–51* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 102–103. See also: Francis Williams, *Ernest Bevin: Portrait of a Great Englishman* (London: Hutchinson, 1952), 262–269; Elisabeth Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe, 1945–1970* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 54–55; Joseph Frankel, *British Foreign Policy, 1945–1973* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 186–187; Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865–1980* (London: Fontana, 1981), 362–364, 367–369; Peter Weiler, *Ernest Bevin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 153; Mark Phythian, *The Labour Party, War and International Relations, 1945–2006* (London: Routledge, 2007), 24. For a useful overview of the historiographical debate on Bevin's foreign policy, see Oliver Daddow, *Britain and Europe Since 1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 122–134. Also useful is Robert Frazier, 'Did Britain Start the Cold War? Bevin and the Truman Doctrine', *The Historical Journal* 27, no. 3 (September 1984): 715–727.

Far from following a 'grand design', however, British policy towards Poland during the two years after the war unfolded as a series of ad hoc decisions which were often intended as short-term compromises, made in the context of progressively narrowing policy options rather than as part of a predetermined plan founded on a vision of a rigidly divided Europe. This work builds on revisionist scholarship, which shows that Bevin was preoccupied above all with the maintenance of Britain's status as a first rank global power, and was loath to see the pattern of British dependence on the US, which had arisen during the Second World War, become a permanent feature of the postwar reality. Rather than seeking to align Britain with the US, at least until early 1948, Bevin hoped to establish Britain as a "Third Force" in the international system, which would be able to match both the US and the Soviet Union in power and influence, creating the basis for a relationship between equals. Although ill-defined and destined never to come to fruition, this plan formed an important component in Bevin's thinking about Britain's place in the postwar world.[11] Rather than being founded on a vision of a divided Europe, it depended for its success on the maintenance of stable Anglo-Soviet relations. Further, Bevin was deeply sceptical about the longevity of the American commitment to Europe after the war. Facing the possibility of Britain confronting the Soviet Union alone in Europe strengthened Bevin's inclination to keep Anglo-Soviet relations on an even keel. Bevin's response to the sudden deterioration in relations with the Soviet Union after the war was therefore to remove as many sources of tension as possible. He concluded that the Polish issue, which gave rise to such acrimony, would have to be extricated at least temporarily from Anglo-Soviet relations. Bevin's intention when he took office had been to maintain strong British support for Mikołajczyk's Polish Peasant Alliance (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*—PSL). By early 1946, however, Bevin was consider-

[11] John Kent and John W. Young, 'British Policy Overseas, The "Third Force" and the Origins of NATO—In Search of a New Perspective', in *Securing Peace in Europe, 1945–1962: Thoughts for the Post Cold War Era*, eds. Beatrice Heuser and Robert O'Neill (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 48–49; Sean Greenwood, 'The Third Force Policy of Ernest Bevin', in *Plans des temps de guerre pour l'Europe d'apres guerre, 1940–1947: Actes du Colloque de Bruxelles 12–14 mai 1993* [Wartime Plans for Postwar Europe, 1940–1947: Contributions to the Symposium in Brussels May 12–14 1993] ed. Michel Dumoulin (Brussels: Bruylant, 1995), 428–432; Anne Deighton, 'Entente Neo-Coloniale?: Ernest Bevin and the Proposals for an Anglo-French Third World Power, 1945–1949', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* vol. 17, 4 (2006): 841.

ing other means of establishing political plurality in Poland apart from exclusive British support for Mikołajczyk, whose party was increasingly falling out of favour with the Soviet Union.

Domestic political pressure also exerted an influence on Bevin. The prime minister, Clement Attlee, and other members of the Cabinet, as well as the parliamentary party, expected that a Labour government would establish friendly relations with the Soviet Union on the basis of shared socialist principles. Bevin's policy options were further circumscribed by Britain's rapidly deteriorating economic situation after the war. Almost as soon as the war had ended, Bevin was subject to increasing pressure to scale back Britain's costly overseas commitments. The financial imperative dovetailed with Attlee's preference for an internationalist approach to foreign policy and his desire for better relations with the Soviet Union. Attlee was willing to make major concessions—including ceding imperial possessions to international control in key areas such as the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean—to accommodate Soviet geostrategic objectives and divest Britain of responsibilities it could no longer afford. Bevin, on the other hand, refused to accept such a high price for good relations with the Soviet Union. This underlying tension between the prime minister and the foreign secretary reinforced Bevin's inclination to prevent a proliferation of disputes with the Soviet Union. The Polish issue was not one which affected Britain's vital strategic interests, and it could not be allowed to further damage Anglo-Soviet relations. Finally, Britain's straitened economic circumstances led to ever greater reliance on the US for assistance, which forced Bevin to adhere more closely to the American line in foreign policy. Although he resented this limit on British independence, increasingly he accepted the American preference for a less interventionist policy in Poland.[12]

Bevin was often at odds with his officials over policy towards Poland. There was almost complete continuity between the pre- and postwar periods in the Foreign Office personnel. Officials who had been deeply involved in the wartime negotiations for a Polish settlement were very reluctant to withdraw support from the Polish democratic opposition. The two years following the end of hostilities saw a growing divergence between Bevin and his officials. As a result, far from a seamless withdrawal from Polish affairs, British policy was characterised by an overall

[12] For a full analysis of Bevin's attitude towards the US after the Second World War, see Folly, 'Ernest Bevin and Anglo-American Relations'.

inconsistency: sporadic interventions followed by quiet lulls; support for Mikołajczyk which waned and then resumed. Britain's struggle to fulfil its responsibilities towards Poland—with different sections of the policymaking establishment approaching the problem with often incompatible methods and objectives—reflects the wider problem of how the British government managed its overstretched commitments after the war in straitened circumstances and in the context of a rapidly changing, highly unstable international environment.

The late 1940s saw a British withdrawal from involvement in Poland as tension with the Soviet Union spiked sharply. Even at this high point of tension, however, Britain was generally not as rigidly anti-Soviet as the US and some other NATO member states. Economic decline coupled with a determination to maintain Britain's global position meant that détente with the Soviet Union was widely regarded as desirable as a means of easing the problem of Britain's perpetual scarcity of resources by reducing the scale of the British defence commitment in Europe. Particularly for Churchill, who returned to office as prime minister in 1951, achieving a breakthrough in the Cold War conflict was seen as a mark of both personal prestige and an affirmation of Britain's international status.[13] These early détente initiatives reveal the extent to which British thinking and objectives were circumscribed by the parameters of the Cold War. They were explicitly predicated on the basis of a policy of non-intervention in the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. The British objective was limited to achieving a rapprochement with the Soviet Union, which would bolster Britain's international position and ease the pressure on increasingly scarce resources. The aim was not to fundamentally alter the rigidly divided, oppositional structure that had come to define the international system by the early 1950s. In the middle of the decade, however, Poland underwent a liberalisation process which culminated in the October revolution of 1956. The Polish challenge to the Soviet system served as the catalyst for the beginning of a significant shift in British thinking. Rather

[13] On the British détente initiatives in the 1950s, see Spencer W. Mawby, 'Detente deferred: The Attlee government, German rearmament and Anglo-Soviet rapprochement, 1950–51', *Contemporary British History* vol. 12, no. 2 (1998): 1–21; R. Gerald Hughes, *Britain, Germany and the Cold War: The Search for a European Détente, 1949–1967* (London: Routledge, 2007); R. Gerald Hughes, *The Postwar Legacy of Appeasement: British Foreign Policy since 1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), chapter 2; John W. Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign: Britain and the Cold War, 1951–5* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 318–319.

than treating the East European satellite states as an indistinct bloc, Britain began to develop individual policies towards certain states. In Poland, Britain sought to reintroduce Western influence, improve bilateral relations, and ultimately encourage Warsaw to assert its independence from Moscow. This was a tentative process, hampered by Britain's chronic shortage of resources, by other more pressing foreign policy priorities, and by diplomatic obstacles. Nevertheless, it constituted a significant departure—the first steps towards an attempt to reconfigure Cold War Europe by prising the most independently inclined satellite states loose from Moscow.

Structure and Approach

The second chapter charts the course of the relationship between Britain and the London-based Polish government-in-exile during the last year and a half of the war. At the beginning of 1944, the changing military situation compelled Churchill and Eden to accelerate the negotiations aimed at achieving a satisfactory territorial and political settlement for Poland after the war. This chapter is crucial in laying the foundation for the rest of the work by demonstrating that there was considerable continuity in British policy across the wartime and postwar periods, establishing the British government's strong sense of indebtedness to Poland and showing that there was a clear expectation on both sides that British involvement in shaping Poland's postwar political future would continue beyond the end of hostilities.

The second chapter also analyses the way in which British leaders dealt with the conflicting objectives of the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviet Union as they attempted to negotiate a solution that would satisfy both sides. In much of the work on this period, Britain is accused of sacrificing Poland's independence in order to meet Soviet demands. By examining British mediation attempts during the war, this chapter argues that the British position was actually based on a careful and sustained analysis of Soviet motivations and intentions; British policymakers concluded that the Soviet need for Western assistance to meet the cost of its tremendous reconstruction needs would act as a check on any expansionist impulses harboured by the Soviet leader, Josef Stalin.[14] The chapter argues that

[14] Martin H. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 167–168, 171.

British policy towards Poland was conditioned by the expectation of ongoing Anglo-Soviet cooperation in the postwar period, which policymakers believed would ensure that Britain continued to exert influence in determining the terms of the Polish political settlement.

The third chapter analyses the transformation of British policy over the second half of 1945. Initially, Bevin pressed the new Polish leaders to commit to a definite date for elections and the Soviets on the timeline for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Polish territory. By the end of the year, however, as relations with the Soviet Union became increasingly strained, Bevin's response was to try to extricate the Polish issue from British relations with the Soviet Union in an attempt to limit the points of contention and reduce the overall level of tension in the relationship. Bevin's own belief in the importance of maintaining sound Anglo-Soviet relations—particularly when the future of American involvement in Europe seemed very likely to be short-lived—was reinforced by the expectations of the prime minister, some members of the Cabinet, and a significant section of the party that the Labour government would pursue closer relations with the Soviet Union. This chapter analyses the effect of this convergence of pressures on Bevin's policy. It argues that the second half of 1945 marked the beginning of a divergence between the foreign secretary and his officials over the Polish question, with the Foreign Office and the Warsaw embassy urging a robust British defence of Mikołajczyk as the Polish Workers' Party (*Polska Partia Robotnicza*—PPR) attempted to marginalise the PSL.

In early 1946, Mikołajczyk fought for his political survival within the postwar provisional government as the PPR moved to consolidate its hold on power. At precisely this point, Bevin began to reconsider Britain's policy of exclusive support for the PSL. The fourth chapter analyses the set of circumstances that prompted Bevin's doubts about the existing line of policy. Anglo-Soviet relations were deteriorating, thus jeopardising Bevin's plans to create a Western European grouping. Britain's precipitous economic decline pushed the country towards ever greater dependence on American financial assistance, limiting the scope of Bevin's policy options in the process, since the US at this stage was less inclined towards intervention in Poland's political situation. In the circumstances, British support for a broader based Polish opposition movement offered the possibility of resolving the country's political crisis as well as removing one of the most persistent sources of conflict in the Anglo-Soviet relationship. Although Foreign Office officials managed to dissuade Bevin from

dropping the PSL, British criticism of the postponement of the Polish elections and the falsification of the results of a referendum held in June was muted. The circumspection of Bevin's approach sat uneasily with the Foreign Office and generated increasing frustration among the staff of the British embassy in Warsaw as Mikołajczyk struggled to hold his ground.

Chapter five covers the British response as the campaign to destroy the PSL reached a critical point in the months leading up to the general elections in Poland in January 1947. This chapter examines British policy towards Poland within the wider context of the Anglo-American negotiations taking place at the same time on the fusion of the Western occupation zones of Germany. These strategically delicate negotiations marked the first step towards the formal division of the country, and were an unmistakable signal that the Western powers were considering the possibility of abandoning the attempt to achieve a workable system for a regime of joint administration with the Soviet Union. Further, long-running dissatisfaction with Bevin's foreign policy from within the Labour party coalesced in the autumn of 1946 with the introduction of a censure motion against him. Thus, the urgent need to reach a solution to the German problem, which would inevitably lead to a deterioration in Anglo-Soviet relations, coincided with the climax of the internal opposition to the direction of Bevin's policy for its perceived anti-Soviet character. This chapter argues that in these circumstances Bevin became increasingly reluctant to actively support the Polish opposition movement, avoiding any challenge to the Soviet Union or the communist-dominated Polish government.

The sixth chapter covers the period following the Polish elections, which saw a marked British withdrawal from Polish affairs. The Polish opposition had been seriously diminished over the course of the election campaign, leaving Britain without a viable political force to support, and there seemed little chance that any British intervention could disrupt the process of consolidation of communist control in Poland. Bevin had no appetite to enter into another wrangling session over Poland with the Soviet Union, particularly since Britain and the US were about to open a new round of negotiations with the Soviets over Germany. Britain was suffering an acute economic crisis in early 1947, which meant that Bevin urgently needed to finalise the plans for the merger of the Anglo-American occupation zones in Germany and restore the region to self-sufficiency in order to ease Britain's financial burden. Soviet objections made this impossible unless the pretence of four-power cooperation in Germany was abandoned. At

this diplomatically delicate moment, Bevin was particularly careful to avoid interference in the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe. From this point on, he sought to limit relations with the Polish government to a resolution of bilateral issues. Despite the virtually complete British withdrawal from Polish politics, however, the Foreign Office was quick to rally around Mikołajczyk when he faced arrest by the Polish authorities, launching an operation to help him escape. The episode of Mikołajczyk's flight from Poland demonstrates that British officials still considered themselves responsible for ensuring his safety, but at the same time highlights the narrowing of the original British commitment from broad support for the entire Polish democratic opposition movement to protection for the physical safety of one man.

The decisions taken at the end of the war and in the immediate postwar years were crucial in determining Poland's future. Chapter seven considers the longer-term consequences of British policy for Poland, as the country underwent a process of Sovietisation in the late 1940s, which left it virtually cut off from Britain and the West. In the mid-1950s, a process of liberalisation followed by the October 1956 revolution prompted a review of British policy towards Poland and the other satellite states, sparking renewed British interest in Poland as the strategic entry point for the reintroduction of Western influence into Eastern Europe—and even potentially to undermine Soviet control over the satellite states. The British capacity to encourage Warsaw to assert its independence from Moscow was limited by Britain's perpetual scarcity of resources and by its diminished global influence, but also by the consequences of British compromises over Poland's territorial and political sovereignty during and immediately after the war, which left Poland strategically vulnerable in the Cold War context, increasing its dependence on the Soviet Union for its security.

This study addresses the role of the Foreign Office, as well as that of political leaders in determining the direction of British policy. In the second chapter, much of the focus is on Churchill and Eden as the two main protagonists in the negotiations with the Polish exile leaders and the Soviet Union. Churchill's close involvement in foreign affairs was unusual for a prime minister. He frequently conducted diplomacy through direct communication with other heads of state. Much of the negotiations for a Polish–Soviet settlement were conducted by personal telegrams between Churchill and Stalin, on the one hand, and meetings between Churchill and Polish leaders on the other. Although Churchill

tended to seize the initiative when he wanted to push through a proposal or obtain the agreement of Polish leaders at crucial moments, he usually consulted Eden, and his messages were often drafted, or at least reviewed before dispatch, by Foreign Office officials. Eden, Alexander Cadogan, permanent undersecretary, Orme Sargent, deputy undersecretary, Oliver Harvey, assistant undersecretary, Frank Roberts and Christopher Warner, heads of the Central and Northern Departments, respectively, and Owen O'Malley, British ambassador to the exile government, held meetings and were in regular communication with Polish leaders.[15] Churchill tended to erupt into the orderly channels of the Foreign Office when he sought to obtain a particular result; in these cases, he was not content to allow officials to proceed, but rather took control himself in order to speed up the process. For the most part, however, the Foreign Office concurred with the direction of policy towards Poland; it was the work of the officials that ensured underlying consistency and continuity in British policy, since Churchill's involvement often occurred in intense, sporadic bursts. It was officials' assessment of the PSL's strength, for instance, that underpinned the decision to urge Mikołajczyk to join the new provisional government.[16]

Once the Labour government came to power, a more conventional way of conducting foreign policy was restored, in that Attlee's involvement took place behind the scenes. Because Bevin and Attlee had an unusually close relationship, and because Attlee did not make ostentatious public interventions in international diplomacy in the style of Churchill, it is sometimes assumed that there was 'complete unanimity' between them on foreign policy. In fact, however, Bevin and Attlee disagreed on several important issues, including the appropriate response to the Soviet challenge to the British position in areas of key strategic importance.[17] This underlying tension with Attlee converged with the diplomatic, economic, strategic, and domestic political pressures to exert a significant influence on Bevin's policy towards Poland.

[15] The Foreign Office Central Department was responsible for Poland until the beginning of 1945, at which point it was transferred to the purview of the Northern Department.

[16] TNA: FO 371/47594/N7295/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; N7297/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; TNA: FO 371/47595/N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; N7508/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 2 July 1945.

[17] John Bew, *Citizen Clem: A Biography of Attlee* (London: Quercus, 2017), 413–414, 424.

Another point of disagreement in the historiography concerns the extent to which Bevin relied on his officials to formulate policy. As part of an assessment which finds that Bevin's particular combination of skills, experience, and character made him a uniquely successful foreign secretary, a number of historians have argued that Bevin—who was notoriously forceful and forthright—initiated policy and pushed it through almost without reference to the Foreign Office.[18] On the other hand, a number of historians argue that Bevin was not the author of his own policies, instead deferring to his officials, who devised policy on his behalf.[19] Distinguishing with absolute certainty between Bevin's position and that of his officials is complicated by Bevin's tendency not to put his thoughts or instructions in writing. Although the gaps in the written record sometimes make it difficult to arrive at an unshakeable conclusion about the underlying reasons for a particular decision, it is possible to follow the lines of discussion on particular policies between Bevin and his officials in many instances. Bevin did sometimes make short notes in the margins of papers and memoranda. Further, his views were often conveyed by officials to each other in the internal minutes. There is enough evidence to conclude that even as the disagreement between Bevin and his officials over Poland deepened, he continued to consult seriously with them. He was not dismissive of their views and officials were sometimes able to persuade him to reverse or postpone decisions.

[18] Bullock, Bevin, 102–103; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 235–236.

[19] Weiler, *Bevin*, 146; Phythian, *Labour Party, War and International Relations,* 24.

CHAPTER 2

Britain and the Polish Government-in-Exile, January 1944 to June 1945

Introduction

British policy towards the Polish government-in-exile during the last year and a half of the war was influenced by three main considerations. First, there was the need to fulfil Britain's commitment to the restoration of a free and independent Poland. Second, British policymakers were conscious of the potential impact of their decisions on the morale of Polish troops fighting under British command. Third, the overriding importance of the Anglo-Soviet relationship meant that Britain had to accommodate Soviet objectives regarding Poland's political and territorial future. This set of frequently conflicting pressures led to a series of compromises which concluded in the imperfect arrangement of a postwar Polish administration with only limited representation from outside the PKWN.

The tension at the centre of Britain's relationship with its Polish and Soviet allies has given rise to considerable controversy and recrimination in the existing work on the subject. There are three main assessments of British policy towards the Polish government-in-exile in the last year and a half of the war. The first holds that British policymakers had a precise idea of Soviet postwar plans for Poland, but because the Western allies needed to keep Stalin fighting beyond Soviet borders, they made every necessary sacrifice to secure this objective, including that of Poland's political and territorial future. This interpretation suggests that the British

A. Mason, *British Policy Towards Poland, 1944–1956*, Security, Conflict and Cooperation in the Contemporary World,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94241-4_2

policymaking establishment acted with reprehensible cynicism, knowingly pushing the Polish leaders into a disadvantageous settlement. The Polish government-in-exile was simply an irrelevant nuisance to Britain, to be dispensed with as quickly as possible.[1] The second assessment concludes that the British attempted to fulfil their commitments to Poland but were overtaken by the progress of the war as the Red Army occupied the country, leaving no reasonable alternative but to allow the Soviets to dictate Poland's future. This interpretation, first set out by Churchill in his memoirs, implies that Britain was overwhelmed by sheer helplessness, with no means to exert influence on the course of events.[2] The third contends that the British were ridiculously naïve to trust that Stalin would allow the existence of an independent Poland after the war, ignoring all the warning signals because they were so determined to preserve the alliance with the Soviet Union beyond the end of the war.[3]

There are elements of truth in all of these interpretations. British policy vis-à-vis Poland was formulated within the larger context of

[1] See, for instance, Dilks, *Epic and Tragedy*, 29–30; Ostrowski, 'To Return to Poland', 164–168; Hope, *Abandoned Legion*, 14; McGilvray, *Military Government In Exile*, 133, 144–145; Michael Alfred Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity in World War II* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2005), 7; Jonathan Walker, *Poland Alone: Britain, SOE and the Collapse of the Polish Resistance, 1944* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010), 49, 213.

[2] Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume VI: Triumph and Tragedy* (London: Cassell, 1954), 367–368, 373. Other British leaders and policymakers offered similar accounts. For example, Anthony Eden [Earl of Avon], *The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning* (London: Cassell, 1965), 465; Frank Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators: The Destruction and Revival of Europe, 1930–1970* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), 75–77. A substantial number of secondary works take their cue from these early memoirs in arguing that the British tried their best against impossible odds to secure a satisfactory agreement before the Red Army had established complete control over Poland but were simply overtaken by the course of events. For example, Barker, *Churchill and Eden at War*, 247, 260; Victor Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War 1941–1947* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 358, 361; Martin Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 272–273; Geir Lundestad, 'The United States, Great Britain and Eastern Europe: The Period from Yalta to Potsdam', in *Yalta: un mito che resiste; relazioni e comunicazioni presentate al convegno internazionale organizzato dalla Provincia di Cagliari, 23–26 aprile 1987*, ed. Paola Brundu Olla (Rome: Ateneo, 1987), 191; Sean Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War, 1945–91* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 8.

[3] John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory. A Political Biography.* (London: John Curtis, 1992), 558–561, 591, 614–615; Norman Davies, *Rising'44: 'The Battle for Warsaw'* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 160–161; Sean Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office: Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the Modern World* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2008), 189.

Anglo-Soviet relations. British accommodation of Soviet demands was partly dictated by the military situation. The absence of a British military presence in Eastern Europe did inevitably limit British influence in the region. Finally, Britain did misinterpret Soviet intentions vis-à-vis Poland, particularly towards the end of the war. None of the three arguments, however, provides a complete picture of British policy and none takes into account the analysis and assumptions which underpinned that policy. Further, all three rely on the clarity of hindsight, on the assumption that British policymakers foresaw—or should have foreseen—that the continuation of the Grand Alliance was doomed to failure even before the war was over, that the British simply tried to work with the Soviets as constructively as possible until victory over Germany had been achieved but were under no illusion that cooperation would continue once this shared objective had been secured. This approach, however, assumes that the highly negative Cold War British perception of Stalin's practices and intentions had already taken shape by the early 1940s.[4]

In his study of British wartime policy towards the Soviet Union, Martin Folly persuasively argues that a set of assumptions about Soviet motivations and intentions developed over the course of the war which was largely shared across the British policymaking establishment. First, the British understood the Soviet Union to be driven by an obsession with security, which explained its insistence on establishing a large buffer zone between its western frontier and Germany, as well as "friendly" governments in neighbouring states. This does not mean that British policymakers were not anxious about the lengths to which the Soviets might go to satisfy these security concerns, particularly as the Red Army's westward advance opened up new possibilities for expansion in 1944. But it was hoped that these expansionist instincts could be reined in. The expectation that Britain would be able to exert a restraining influence on the Soviet Union rested on the second fundamental assumption about Soviet policy: the thesis of a 'cooperative Soviet Union', which held that the Soviets had opted to pursue a policy of ongoing collaboration with the Western powers. The Soviets would have little choice but to opt for cooperation because of the immensity of the country's reconstruction needs, which, the British assumed, would require Western assistance after hostilities had ended. This conclusion in turn rested on the British assessment of

[4] Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 1–3.

Stalin as a realist who grasped that lasting cooperation with the Western powers was in the interests of the Soviet state.[5]

These perceptions of the Soviet Union had clear implications for British policy towards Poland. Britain saw the Soviet security obsession as the main impetus behind its foreign policy; Britain accepted that Poland was of particular strategic significance for the Soviet Union and therefore regarded the Soviet demand for territorial, and limited political, concessions from the government-in-exile as understandable. In attempting to negotiate a postwar settlement for Poland on this basis, however, British policymakers ran up against the deep, long-standing distrust of the Polish government-in-exile towards the Soviet Union. The immediate cause of this distrust was Soviet collaboration with Nazi Germany in the division and occupation of Poland in September 1939. Its deeper roots, however, lay in the period of Russian imperial rule over Poland, as well as in the interwar years, which began with the Polish–Bolshevik war of 1919–1921. Throughout this time, relations remained uneasy at best.[6] An independent Polish state was re-established in November 1918 at the end of the First World War. In early 1919, the Polish–Bolshevik war began with a clash in Vilnius [Wilno] as both sides vied for control of the city after the withdrawal of German troops.[7] Polish military leaders sought to extend the country's border eastward to reconstruct the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth; the Bolsheviks aimed to export their revolution to Western Europe.[8] Peace was formally concluded in March 1921 under the terms of the Treaty of Riga, but the conflict gave rise to lingering hostility on both sides. The Poles remained profoundly suspicious of Soviet territorial ambitions; the fledgling Bolshevik state regarded Poland as an unfriendly power on its western border, a perception heightened by the dominant role in interwar Polish politics of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, head

[5] Ibid., 6. Melvyn Leffler argues that Truman and some of his closest advisors, including Averell Harriman, were also 'favorably disposed' towards Stalin at the end of the war. 'Bringing it Together: The Parts and the Whole', in *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*, ed. Odd Arne Westad (London, 2000), 43.

[6] Between 1772 and 1795, Poland was partitioned in three stages between Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

[7] Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War 1919–20 and 'The Miracle on the Vistula'* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 25–27.

[8] Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 62–64; Alexander V. Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 80–84.

of state and supreme commander at the time of the Polish–Bolshevik war, whose authoritarian *Sanacja* regime, established after a coup in 1926, was stridently anti-communist and generally maintained a wary distance from the Soviet Union.[9]

During the war, Stalin frequently levelled the accusation that the Polish exile administration was composed of the remnants of the fascist interwar regime. The Polish peasant movement, however,[10] had opposed the 1926 coup as a violation of the democratic system. Its leaders, along with those of the other opposition parties, were subject to persecution and imprisonment during a clampdown by the *Sanacja* regime against its political opponents in 1930. Mikołajczyk himself was first elected to the *Sejm* in 1929, becoming leader of the Peasant Party (*Stronnictwo Ludowe*—SL) in 1937. In August 1937, he organised a peasant strike, which Antony Polonsky has referred to as 'probably the most serious outbreak of social unrest in Poland in the whole of the inter-war period.' The strike was intended to force a confrontation with the regime: its manifesto called for the '"liquidation of the Sanacja system" [and] the re-establishment of democracy'. Mikołajczyk's political record during the interwar period thus placed him squarely in the anti-fascist camp.[11]

In August 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany concluded a treaty of nonaggression, commonly known as the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, which included a secret protocol providing for the division of Polish territory. On 17 September, shortly after the German invasion of Poland,

[9] Poland and the Soviet Union did conclude a non-aggression pact in January 1932, although Piłsudski remained doubtful about Stalin's sincerity about the agreement. John S. Micgiel, 'In the Shadow of the Second Republic' in *Polish Foreign Policy Reconsidered: Challenges of Independence*, eds. Ilya Prizel and Andrew A. Michta (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 7. On Polish–Soviet interwar relations see Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland, 1921–1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 219–220, 380–382. On the legacy of the war of 1919–1921 on Polish–Soviet relations, see: Anita J. Prażmowska, *Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 4; Anita J. Prażmowska, *Ignacy Paderewski: Poland* (London: Haus Publishing, 2009), 157; Gregor Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions*, trans. Tom Lampert and Allison Brown (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 30; Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 19; Micgiel, 'In the Shadow of the Second Republic', 2; Macmillan, *Peacemakers*, 238–239.

[10] There were three Polish peasant parties during the interwar period. In 1931, they came together to form the Stronnictwo Ludowe.

[11] Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 428–429.

which marked the beginning of the Second World War, the Soviet Union invaded eastern Poland. After the defeat of the Polish army, the western half of Poland was ceded to German sovereignty and the eastern half to the Soviet Union.[12] Although driven by different ideological motivations, both Germany and the Soviet Union aimed to eliminate Poland as an independent state. The Soviet authorities sought to destroy Poland's state system and Sovietise the region. Their first aim was to eliminate the groups most likely to oppose the Sovietisation process, the Polish elite, comprising mainly military officers, but also the intelligentsia, entrepreneurs, landowners, police officers, border agents, and clergymen. This was carried out with great brutality, through deportations, imprisonments, beatings, and mass killings. Red Army troops carried out attacks against the civilian population, as well as encouraging and sometimes organising armed mobs of local Ukrainians and Byelorussians to attack Polish landowners and state employees. During the period of Soviet occupation, from September 1939 to the outbreak of war between the Soviet Union and Germany in June 1941, the Soviet authorities deported approximately 1.25 million Polish citizens (amounting to roughly 9 per cent of the local population) to the Soviet interior, mainly to Siberia, Kazakhstan, and the remote far eastern and northern regions. In the spring of 1940, approximately 15,000 Polish army officers who had been taken prisoner during the September 1939 campaign were shot by the NKVD (Soviet secret police) in the vicinity of the small hamlet of Katyń and buried in mass graves.[13]

There was a short period of improved Polish–Soviet relations after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. At the end of July 1941, a Polish–Soviet agreement was concluded which included an 'amnesty' for all Polish citizens detained in the Soviet Union and provided

[12] The division of Poland took place according to the terms of the 'Boundary and Friendship Treaty' concluded between Germany and the Soviet Union on 28 September 1939, which modified the territorial division agreed in the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. In exchange for a boundary further to the east, Lithuania fell to the sphere of the Soviet Union.

[13] Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Penguin, 2009), 71, 96–97; Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), xiii, 35–40; Victor Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing: The Massacre at Katyn*, trans. Kizer Walker (New York: Telos Press, 2008), 1, 34–35; Natalia Sergeevna Lebedeva, 'The Deportation of the Polish Population to the USSR, 1939–41', in *Forced Migration in Central and Eastern Europe, 1939–1950*, ed. Alfred J. Rieber (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 28; Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2013), 120–121; Prusin, *The Lands Between*, 128–131.

for the establishment of a Polish army on Soviet territory, which was subsequently transferred out of the Soviet Union to fight in the Middle East under British command.[14] The agreement was not sufficient, however, to bring about a lasting improvement in Polish–Soviet relations. Stalin had refused to include a renunciation of the Soviet territorial acquisitions of 1939 in the terms of the agreement, and no further progress was made towards a border settlement in 1941–1942. Another point of tension was the Soviet refusal to provide information on the whereabouts of the missing Polish officers who had vanished after being taken into Soviet captivity.[15] After the German announcement of the discovery of mass graves of Polish officers near Katyń on 12 April 1943,[16] the Soviet Union responded to the exile government's demand for an International Red Cross investigation by severing diplomatic relations altogether. Shortly thereafter came the announcement of the establishment of a Polish political authority in the Soviet Union, the Union of Polish Patriots (*Związek Patriotów Polskich*—ZPP), as well as a Polish Division, led by General Zygmunt Berling, which rivalled the government- and army-in-exile.[17] These developments heightened Polish exile leaders' fears about Soviet postwar intentions vis-à-vis Poland.

In these circumstances, Polish leaders were unwilling to acquiesce to British pressure to accommodate Soviet security concerns. As Mikołajczyk explained to Eden, Polish suffering and sacrifice, coupled with its military contribution to the allied war effort, had generated expectations about the position the country would occupy after the war.[18] There was a deeply rooted resistance to accepting an outcome so profoundly unfair. It seemed both morally indefensible and politically impossible to be forced by the ally to whom the Polish government had committed all its military forces to cede territory and to make political concessions to their old enemy.

British mediation efforts collided with this Polish refusal to make concessions to the Soviet Union. Churchill, Eden, and the Foreign Office

[14] *Documents on Polish–Soviet Relations, 1939–1945* (hereafter *DOPSR*), (London: Heinemann, 1961) vol. 1, doc. 106. On the transfer of Polish soldiers and their families out of the Soviet Union in the spring of 1942, see Prażmowska, *Britain and Poland*, 126–134.

[15] Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 328–329, 334–335, 339; Prażmowska, *Britain and Poland*, 120–121; Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, xiv.

[16] The graves of approximately one-third of the missing officers were found. The bodies of the remaining 10,000 were never found. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 244, fn. 3.

[17] Prażmowska, *Britain and Poland*, 166–168.

[18] TNA: FO 954/19B/587, Eden to Churchill, 24 December 1943.

campaigned throughout the first half of 1944 to persuade the government-in-exile to accept Soviet demands for frontier changes in exchange for a guarantee of Poland's political independence. The refusal of the Polish government to proceed on this basis was a source of great frustration to British leaders. Nevertheless, British policymakers retained a clear sense of obligation to the Polish government-in-exile, arising both from the 1939 guarantee and from the significant Polish military contribution to the British war effort. British officials were particularly conscious of the sacrifice made by the Polish government in agreeing to British requests for the dispersal of Polish forces across various far-flung theatres of command and away from Poland. British officials were aware of the hopes and expectations with which the Polish government had extended the entirety of its military resources to Britain; they were equally aware of the impossibility of Britain fulfilling these expectations. Apart from this uncomfortable sense of an unmet moral obligation, the British military, with its perpetual scarcity of resources, continued to rely on the large contingent of Polish forces under its command. As the negotiations for a Polish–Soviet agreement dragged on throughout 1944 and tensions escalated commensurately, the need to retain the participation of these troops was an additional source of pressure on British policy. This influence was particularly evident at certain key junctures: first, during the Warsaw uprising; second, at the time of Mikołajczyk's resignation in November 1944, when the British government was at pains to emphasise its continuing loyalty to the exile government; and third, in Churchill's post-Yalta promise that no Polish servicemen serving under British command would be repatriated against their will after the war.

Britain is often accused of the worst kind of cynicism for accepting Polish military assistance, only to circumvent or ignore the debt to Poland once it became incompatible with Britain's relationship with its more important Soviet ally.[19] This interpretation either overlooks entirely British analysis of the Soviet Union, which was such a crucial element in the formulation of policy towards Poland, or dismisses the underlying assumptions on which this policy was based as preposterous or insincere.[20] British leaders recognised that the terms proposed for a resolution of the

[19] See for example, Ostrowski, 'Return to Poland', 216; Davies, *Rising'44*, 161.

[20] Folly describes this inclination in the historiography to dismiss statements of trust or confidence by British leaders and policymakers in the Soviet Union as purely cosmetic, intended only for the purpose of keeping the alliance together, and not sincerely meant. *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 3, 6.

Polish–Soviet dispute fell far short of Polish expectations; indeed the terms fell short of Britain's own earlier conditions. Partly, British willingness to accommodate the additional Soviet demands reflected the changing military situation as the year 1944 progressed, but it was also based on extensive analysis of Soviet motivations, actions, and intentions. Although British interpretations of Soviet behaviour fluctuated continually, ultimately the thesis of a 'cooperative Soviet Union' held up beyond the end of the war. The buoyant period following the Moscow and Tehran conferences in late 1943 was a key turning point, when British leaders felt that they had succeeded in establishing a greater degree of trust with Stalin. This stage was marked by optimism that a satisfactory resolution of the Polish–Soviet dispute was within reach. Over the course of the year, as the initial round of negotiations failed and Soviet demands augmented steadily, British doubts about Soviet intentions towards Poland deepened. Particularly after the Yalta conference in February 1945, it became increasingly clear that the Soviet Union intended to exert greater control over the political future of Poland than Britain had anticipated a year earlier. Nevertheless, the British assumption that the Soviet need for postwar assistance would have a restraining influence on its foreign policy continued to have a powerful influence on official British thinking. This interpretation of future Soviet intentions coloured British policy towards Poland, even in June 1945, when the Soviets insisted on limiting political representation from outside the PKWN in the provisional Polish government. The British acknowledged that this limited representation was an unsatisfactory outcome, but these misgivings coexisted alongside the conviction that the Soviet need for ongoing Anglo–Soviet cooperation would allow Britain to continue to exert influence over Poland's political future.

British Mediation Attempts, December 1943 to March 1944

Poland's postwar territorial settlement was discussed at the Tehran conference, the first meeting of the leaders of the three major Allied powers, held from 28 November to 1 December 1943. Churchill and Roosevelt agreed in principle that Polish territory should be shifted westward at German expense. It was agreed that the Curzon line should become Poland's new eastern border, while its western border would be defined by the Oder

River.[21] This meant that the Soviet Union would regain roughly the same territory it had annexed under the terms of the Molotov–Ribbentrop agreement. The British were not averse to these territorial changes, partly because they did not consider them to contravene Polish interests provided that Poland was compensated fairly with territory in the west, and partly because they saw the changes in the context of the Soviet preoccupation with security. Over the course of the war, as British leaders and diplomats had developed closer relations with the Soviet regime, British analysis had concluded that Soviet foreign policy was largely conditioned by security fears. Poland was a particular source of concern for the Soviet Union because of its geographical position as the bulwark against German aggression; therefore, it was not entirely surprising that Soviet demands would be more far-reaching there.[22] British policymakers also considered it important to show the Soviets that they understood and were prepared to accommodate these security concerns. The conclusion was that if Soviet distrust could be broken down, they would have less reason to fear for their security and would exercise restraint in their handling of the Polish situation.[23]

After Tehran, Churchill assumed responsibility for persuading the Poles to accept the territorial agreement reached by the Big Three at the conference.[24] The prevailing view among British policymakers was that rapid and wholesale acceptance by the Polish government of the proposed territorial changes could stave off Soviet interference in Polish internal affairs. In November, Eden had submitted a memorandum to the War Cabinet which argued that the issue of frontiers was the 'main difficulty' in the

[21] The southern section of the border was not clearly defined. The Oder River has two tributaries, the Western Neisse, which runs more or less due south to the border of the Czech Republic (at the time Czechoslovakia), and the Eastern Neisse considerably further to the southeast. At the Potsdam conference in the summer of 1945, the Soviet Union and the Polish provisional government insisted that the Western Neisse should form the southern section of the border, which meant Poland would gain all of Lower Silesia. The British and the Americans agreed reluctantly that this should become the provisional border.

[22] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1944.

[23] TNA: CAB 65/45, WM(44)11th CA, 25 January 1944; Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 114. Mikołajczyk observed Churchill's desire to 'gain the trust' of the Soviet Union. PISM PRM/121, 6 March 1944.

[24] *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers. The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943* (hereafter *FRUS Tehran*) (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1961), 604; Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, vol. 2 (London: HMSO, 1971), 650.

Polish–Soviet conflict. He predicted that Stalin would not insist on the inclusion in the new Polish government of members of the Soviet-based ZPP, the rival Polish authority to the London government.[25] Eden disregarded hints that Stalin would be unwilling to resume relations with the Polish government in its present form, including his declaration at Tehran that he 'separated Poland from the Polish Government in exile', and doubted that the Polish government in London 'was ever likely to become the kind of government it ought to be'.[26] Eden judged that immediate Polish acquiescence to the territorial changes would still suffice to placate Stalin, whose rumblings about the Polish government Eden hoped were simply empty threats designed to ensure that he obtained his territorial desiderata.

The British interpretation of Soviet intentions towards Poland derived in part from the mood of cautious optimism which prevailed following the Moscow and Tehran conferences, both of which had been productive and successful overall, with the Soviets appearing more inclined towards collaboration with the US and Britain. Particularly encouraging had been Molotov's pronouncement that the Soviet Union did not favour the division of Europe into spheres of influence. This shift in Soviet behaviour towards the end of 1943 seemed to confirm the British analysis that the Soviet Union was edging towards a policy of closer cooperation with the Western allies. Eden and his officials believed that they had reached a better understanding of the always difficult to fathom Soviet mindset at the Moscow Foreign Ministers Conference in October 1943.[27] They concluded that British and American exclusion of the Soviet Union from strategic planning and other important decisions had stoked Soviet distrust and been the cause of much of the obstreperousness and hostility exhibited by the Soviet leadership—what Folly terms the 'sensitivities thesis'.[28] The willingness of Eden and the American secretary of state, Cordell Hull,

[25] TNA: CAB 66/43/28, WP(43)528, 22 November 1943.

[26] *FR US Tehran*, 598.

[27] Oliver Harvey, Eden's private secretary, recorded in his diary that Stalin had been 'bearish but mellowed' in a meeting with Eden on the issue of supply convoys, which had been a long-running source of Anglo-Soviet discord. John Harvey, ed., *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey* (London: Collins, 1978), 311. On the convoy issue see Martin Gilbert, *Road to Victory: Winston S. Churchill, 1941–1945* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 289–290, 311–312.

[28] For example, Clark Kerr attributed the more cooperative Soviet attitude at the conference to the sense that they were included for the first time on an equal basis by their British and American counterparts. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 96, 89.

to make the long journey to Moscow to meet Molotov, as well as Anglo-American frankness over the course of the discussions had helped to assuage Soviet insecurity and boost their confidence; their more cooperative approach was seen as the direct consequence.[29]

Eden came away from Moscow with a strong sense of the importance of treating the Soviets as equals. The Foreign Office believed that Stalin was dabbling with the possibility of cooperating with the Western powers; his frontier demands were designed to test whether his allies were prepared to accept Soviet security needs.[30] British optimism about Soviet intentions was strengthened by Stalin's generally more agreeable demeanour at Tehran,[31] and by the positive Soviet press and radio coverage of the conference, which proclaimed a 'new spirit of Allied cooperation'.[32] The British concluded that the Soviets had opted for cooperation at the end of 1943, but that this decision was still a provisional one, and could be reversed. While the nascent spirit of cooperation was still fragile, it therefore was important for the British to tread carefully, and not to stumble into a misunderstanding which might cause the Soviets to retreat again.[33] A resolution of the Soviet–Polish dispute that accommodated Soviet territorial demands would go some way towards showing the Soviets that Britain was sensitive to their security concerns. At the same time, the more cooperative Soviet approach suggested to the British that the Soviets might finally be ready to compromise and restore relations if the Poles would concede the territorial issue.[34]

At the end of December 1943, while convalescing from a bout of pneumonia in Marrakech, Churchill asked Eden to open talks with the Polish government-in-exile aimed at resolving the conflict. Churchill emphasised that it was of 'the utmost consequence to have friendly recognition by Russia of the Polish Government and a broad understanding of the post

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 104–105.

[31] Reynolds describes, for instance, how Stalin moderated his negotiating style from Tehran onward. In 1941–1942, visitors including Harriman, Beaverbrook, Eden, and Churchill 'were all subject to the one, two, three treatment, in which a bruising middle meeting was sandwiched between cordial opening and closing sessions'. This tactic was less in evidence after Tehran. David Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 240.

[32] Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 132.

[33] Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 114, 118.

[34] Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 135.

war frontiers' before the Soviet armies crossed the frontiers of prewar Poland.[35] More sceptical of the 'Soviet sensitivities thesis' to which Eden and the Foreign Office subscribed, Churchill worried that the possibilities for territorial expansion would prove too tempting and eventually outweigh the Soviet desire for cooperation with the Western powers.[36] Churchill believed that only a small window of time remained before the arrival of the Soviet armies onto prewar Polish territory. This period offered the best chance to conclude a fair territorial settlement and thereby obtain a firm assurance that the Polish government-in-exile would be allowed to assume responsibility in Poland after the war.[37] The longer the London Poles prevaricated on the frontier issue, the higher the risk of Stalin establishing a rival Polish government in Warsaw.[38]

Churchill instructed Eden to proceed on the basis of the agreement reached at Tehran.[39] Eden set out the proposed territorial changes at the first of a series of meetings with Polish leaders on 20 December.[40] Mikołajczyk's attempts to negotiate the terms of a settlement were hampered by a deep division within the exile government, with one faction, grouped around the president, Władysław Raczkiewicz, and the commander-in-chief of the Polish armed forces, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, implacably opposed to any compromise with the Soviet Union. This faction insisted that Poland must have its prewar borders restored; and they would accept no challenge to the authority of the government-in-exile. Mikołajczyk and the foreign secretary, Tadeusz Romer, on the other hand, believed that concessions to the Soviet Union would be necessary. Mikołajczyk concluded that Poland had very little leverage in the circumstances. He was prepared to cede some territory in eastern Poland in return for a Soviet guarantee of Polish sovereignty.

[35] TNA: FO 371/34590/C15105/258/55, Churchill to Eden, 20 December 1943.

[36] Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 91; Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 237.

[37] After Stalingrad, the Red Army had managed—slowly and with staggering losses—to reverse the German advance and begin to regain the territory lost in 1941–1942. By the autumn, Soviet victory over Germany in Eastern Europe appeared imminent. Soviet troops crossed the prewar Polish frontier on the night of 3–4 January 1944. John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany* (London: Cassell, 2003), 38, 141–142, 148–149.

[38] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1944.

[39] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Churchill to Eden, 4 January 1944.

[40] Eden had held meetings with Mikołajczyk, Romer, and Raczyński on 20 and 24 December 1943, and 11 and 13 January 1944. He met separately with Raczyński on 4 and 17 January and with Romer on 5 January. Raczyński, *In Allied London*, 178–190.

Mikołajczyk's views were deeply unpopular both with his own government and with the Polish military authorities. Even within his own party, a splinter group emerged which threatened to break off and bring Wincenty Witos, the prewar Peasant Party (SL)[41] leader to London to replace Mikołajczyk.[42] Thus, Mikołajczyk's position was tightly circumscribed and the talks dragged on inconclusively for several weeks.[43]

The cession of the city of Lwów, which had a majority Polish population, and had been incorporated into the Polish state under the terms of the Treaty of Riga only after brutal clashes against Ukrainian and Bolshevik forces between 1918 and 1920, proved to be a sticking point for the Polish government-in-exile.[44] A worried Eden resorted to requesting assistance from Churchill, who sent a strongly worded message.[45] If the Polish government did not accept the settlement, Churchill would 'certainly not take any further responsibility for what will happen in the future'. Churchill cautioned the Polish government not to expect Britain to enter into a dispute with the Soviet Union if they were to reject reasonable proposals.[46] Churchill adopted a similarly uncompromising approach when he returned from Marrakech, determined to push the stalled negotiations forward.[47]

This type of strong, slightly threatening language from Churchill has contributed to the perception that he treated the Poles callously. I would argue, however, that his tough approach in early 1944 reflected his belief that the Polish government-in-exile needed to act quickly to secure a firm agreement with the Soviet Union. Churchill's messages to Eden during this period serve as a kind of barometer of his fluctuating confidence in Soviet intentions. Right up until the end of the European war a strong

[41] Mikołajczyk later changed the name of the wartime SL to Polish Peasant Alliance (PSL). Anita J. Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland, 1942–1948* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 137–138.

[42] Ibid., 70–71; Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 350.

[43] TNA: FO 954/19B/587, Eden to Churchill, 24 December 1943; PREM 3/355/7, Eden to Churchill, 6 January 1944.

[44] On the importance of the city of Lwów in Polish history see: Robert Traba, *The Past in the Present: The Construction of Polish History*, trans. Alex Shannon (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 89–91.

[45] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Eden to Churchill, 8 January 1944; Eden to Churchill, 24 December 1943; Eden to Churchill, 9 January 1944; Eden to Churchill, 12 January 1944.

[46] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1944.

[47] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Churchill to Roosevelt, 6 January 1944; Record of a meeting attended by Eden, Cadogan, Mikołajczyk, Romer, and Raczyński, 20 January 1944.

Anglo-Soviet partnership remained Churchill's objective, but he did not always share Eden's ideas about how best to elicit Soviet cooperation. Whereas Eden favoured 'an open-handed approach as opposed to tough quid pro quo bargaining as the better way to achieve a working partnership … Churchill wavered between the two poles'.[48] Churchill's conviction that Stalin was subject to 'dark forces' within the Politburo also played on his mind. Churchill considered Stalin to be reasonable and reliable, but worried that he would not be able to resist domestic pressure to take advantage of the possibilities for expansion which were beginning to open up as the Red Army advanced westward.[49] These underlying doubts compelled Churchill to err on the side of caution and insist that the Polish exile government reach an agreement without delay. The Poles' apparent failure to grasp the logic of his approach and respond in the way he wanted caused Churchill to lose patience and resort to threats in the hope that fear would push them towards an agreement, where reason (as he saw it) had failed.

In early January, the British government received a series of indications that the Soviets were planning to recognise the ZPP as the new Polish government.[50] The hints appeared to be confirmed on 11 January, when the Soviet Union released a statement attacking the exile government as unrepresentative of the Polish people, levelling the accusation that it had 'proved incapable of establishing friendly relations with the USSR' and of failing to 'organis[e] an active struggle against the German invaders in Poland itself'.[51] These hints that the Soviet Union was preparing to recognise the ZPP served to heighten the British conviction of the need to reach a settlement, although it was not clear to policymakers at this stage whether the Soviets were simply resorting to pressure tactics. Over the

[48] Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 238.

[49] Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 134–135.

[50] The ZPP issued a statement referring to the need to replace reactionaries with new leaders. Then, Oskar Lange, the Polish economist who had acted as Roosevelt's envoy to Stalin in 1943, expressed support for the ZPP. TNA: FO 371/39385/C424/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 10 January 1944.

[51] The Soviet Union issued this statement in response to a Polish statement of 5 January, which was intended to signal the Polish government's desire for improved relations with the Soviet Union. Sargent had rearranged the Polish statement 'to avoid any suggestion of a challenge' and Eden removed the last sentence, which appealed to the allied governments to uphold the principles of international law. TNA: FO 371/39387/C995/8/G55, Declaration of the Polish Government, 5 January 1944; Soviet Statement of 11 January 1944; Edward Raczyński, *In Allied London* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), 181.

course of two difficult meetings with Mikołajczyk, Romer, and the Polish ambassador to Britain, Edward Raczyński, Eden managed to persuade the Polish government to issue a conciliatory response to the Soviet statement of 11 January. The Polish reply, issued four days later, was extremely restrained, suggesting only that Poland and the Soviet Union convene for discussions with the participation of Britain and the US. Eden was pleased with the Polish communiqué, commending the 'sensible and courageous decision' taken by the Polish leaders.[52] Instead of responding in kind to the Polish message, however, the Soviets issued a harsh rejoinder. Since the Poles had 'avoided and ignored' the frontier question in their statement, the Soviet Union understood this as a rejection of the Curzon line and refused to open official negotiations with the Polish exile government.[53]

Eden was initially infuriated by the Soviet response. Having succeeded—with difficulty—in persuading the Polish government to issue a moderate statement, he 'had received … a blow in the face from the Soviet Government'.[54] The British embassy in Moscow, however, offered a more reassuring analysis of the Soviet response which chimed with the overarching British interpretation of the post-Tehran Soviet attitude. John Balfour, deputy to the British ambassador to Moscow, Archibald Clark Kerr, maintained that the Soviet government had not ruled out negotiations with any of the London Poles but only with the exile government in its present form. Balfour argued that it would be in the Soviets' long-term interest to reach a settlement with representatives of the London government such as Mikołajczyk or Romer, rather than impose 'a solution of their own through the medium of a small group of dissident Poles' in the Soviet Union, which would breed Polish discontent and defeat the Soviet objective of ensuring the establishment of a friendly Poland on its border. Further, the Soviets knew that the imposition of a unilateral settlement would have 'a very deleterious effect' on relations with Britain and the US. According to Balfour, 'thanks to the atmosphere of confidence now established', the maintenance of strong Big Three relations was a priority for the Soviets.[55]

Over the next few days, however, the Soviet demand for changes in the composition of the Polish government caused consternation as British policymakers struggled to interpret the increasingly hostile messages

[52] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Eden to Churchill, 15 January 1944.

[53] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Moscow to Foreign Office, 16 January 1944.

[54] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Foreign Office to Moscow, 17 January 1944; CAB 65/45, WM(44)7th Conclusions, Minute 2, Confidential Annex, 17 January 1944.

[55] TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Moscow to Foreign Office, 17 January 1944.

emanating from Moscow. During an anxious discussion of the problem in the Cabinet, ministers questioned whether the Soviet Union really intended to allow the establishment of an independent Polish state. Eden observed that the Soviets were exhibiting 'a progressive stiffening' in their attitude towards the Polish government. Ministers worried that if a Polish–Soviet settlement were not reached soon, the consequence would be strained relations, or even 'estrangement' between the Soviet Union and the Western powers. It fell to the British government to facilitate an agreement as quickly as possible, before the advance of Soviet troops weakened the bargaining position of the Polish government. The Cabinet judged that if an agreement could be concluded quickly, 'there was no ground for holding that Russia would not in fact adhere' to it, primarily because the Soviets 'had much to gain by maintaining the good relations established at the Moscow and Teheran Conferences'. Ministers concluded that there was good reason to think that the Polish problem was resolvable because '[g]enerally … Russia wanted to co-operate with the United States, and with this country'.[56]

The Cabinet discussion sheds light on the way assumptions about the Soviet Union affected British policy towards Poland, specifically, the influence of the thesis of a cooperative Soviet Union. Doubts generated by a particular Soviet action were outweighed by the conclusion that the ultimate Soviet intention was to establish a collaborative relationship with the Western powers. More specifically, the British believed that the Soviets understood that any aggressively expansionist moves in Poland would undermine the chances of this collaboration; on this basis, the British concluded that Soviet behaviour could be moderated. This view was particularly in evidence in the optimistic post-Tehran months.

The Cabinet agreed that a direct approach from Churchill to Stalin would have the highest chance of persuading the Soviets to moderate their approach towards the Polish exile government.[57] Churchill continued to follow the strategy of acknowledging Soviet security concerns and providing reassurance that these would be taken into account in any agreement, while emphasising Britain's objections to Soviet interference in Poland's political affairs and attempting to persuade Stalin to withdraw his demand for changes in the Polish government.[58] Stalin responded that the frontier

[56] TNA: CAB 65/45, WM(44)11th CA, 25 January 1944.
[57] TNA: CAB 65/45, WM(44)11th CA, 25 January 1944.
[58] TNA: PREM 3/355/8, Churchill to Stalin, 28 January 1944.

issue was the overriding Soviet preoccupation; limited changes to the composition of the Polish government would be sufficient to allay Soviet concerns.[59] Churchill and Eden found Stalin's response 'more favourable than might have been expected'. In particular, Eden found the limited scope of the changes to the Polish government reassuring: Stalin had requested the removal of Sosnkowski, the commander of the Polish armed forces; Stanisław Kot, the minister of information; and General Marian Kukiel, the minister of defence.[60] Eden also noted that for the first time the Soviet Union seemed prepared to offer the Poles a firm commitment regarding compensation in the west in return for acceptance of the Curzon line.[61]

Thus, British policy shifted—albeit somewhat reluctantly—to accommodate the Soviet demand for changes in the Polish government. Acceptance of this new Soviet condition actually amounted to a reversal of British policy, although this was not openly acknowledged. Two months earlier, the memorandum submitted by Eden to the Cabinet had rejected changes to the composition of the Polish government as unjustifiable. The memo had concluded that Britain should accede neither to Soviet demands for the removal of any members of the Polish government nor to the inclusion of representatives of the ZPP. Eden's memo concluded that the Polish exile government did not contain any members 'to whom the Soviet Government could legitimately object'.[62]

The shift in the British position was partly due to the changed military situation. The advance of the Red Army weighed on British minds, lending a sense of urgency to the need for a settlement, as Churchill, Eden, the Foreign Office, and the Cabinet all noted at different times. The position of Soviet forces was not, however, the only consideration that shaped British policy. Churchill and Eden continued to regard the Polish issue within the larger context of Anglo-Soviet relations, believing that the Soviet commitment to postwar cooperation meant that they would not push past what the British considered to be acceptable in Poland. The addition of political demands was an unwelcome development, but the changes requested were fairly limited, and could therefore be understood as part of the Soviet preoccupation with security and accommodated

[59] TNA: PREM 3/355/8, Stalin to Churchill, 4 February 1944.

[60] TNA: PREM 3/355/8, Eden to Churchill, 5 February 1944.

[61] TNA: FO 371/39392/C2567/8/55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 13 February 1944.

[62] TNA: FO 371/39385/C409/8/G55, Foreign Office Minutes, 11 January 1944; FO 371/34589/C14592/258/55 Memorandum submitted to the War Cabinet by Eden: 'Possible Lines of a Polish-Soviet Settlement', Annex, WP(43)528, 22 November 1943.

without too much fear that the Soviets were actually intent on pursuing more far-reaching aims.

This assessment of Soviet intentions towards Poland was also in evidence in the thinking of the Foreign Office. Overall, the Central Department was inclined to be slightly more reticent about agreeing to Soviet conditions regarding Poland's future, preferring whenever possible to delay taking final decisions on both territorial and political matters until after hostilities had ended. Officials considered it impractical to expect the Polish government to reconstruct itself until after the liberation of Warsaw, and they had stronger reservations about the Soviet demands for the removal of Sosnkowski, Kukiel, and Kot. Nevertheless, officials shared the view of Churchill and Eden that Stalin's desire for good relations with his Western allies would ultimately require him to act with restraint in Poland. They believed that Stalin understood that acting with impunity in Poland would come 'at the cost of fostering distrust of Soviet policy and methods in this country and throughout the world'.[63] The British also envisaged their own close ongoing involvement in whatever settlement was reached. Eden, for instance, commented that he appreciated that the British government was asking the Polish exile government 'to take [a] very big leap in the dark' by acceding to the Soviet conditions in return only for 'the intangible benefits' offered by Stalin in the future. British responsibility to the Polish government obliged them to remain closely involved in the negotiations for a settlement and to provide a guarantee of whatever agreement was reached between Poland and the Soviet Union.[64]

Churchill and Eden felt a keen sense of urgency to secure an agreement as soon as possible; Stalin had seemed amenable in his message of 4 February; the British must not allow the momentum to lapse. Accordingly, they resumed discussions with Polish leaders on 6 February. Since the last meeting with Churchill and Eden, Mikołajczyk had received news that the PPR had established a National Council (*Polski Komitet Narodowy*—PKN) in Warsaw under Soviet auspices to represent the pro-Soviet underground groups in opposition to the Polish underground loyal to the exile government. This clearly constituted a challenge to the authority of the London government and Mikołajczyk feared that the PKN would set up a Polish government after Soviet troops had crossed the Curzon line. He suggested that this step revealed 'the real intentions of the Soviet

[63] TNA: FO 371/39392/C2793/8/G55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 23 February 1944.
[64] TNA: PREM 3/355/8, Eden to Churchill, 5 February 1944.

Government with regard to Poland'. Herein lay the biggest obstacle to an agreement. As far as Mikołajczyk was concerned, the establishment of the PKN was an obvious act of Soviet treachery. This sign of Soviet untrustworthiness increased Mikołajczyk's reluctance to enter into a territorial agreement, which the Soviets would be liable to break at will. Mikołajczyk did not believe that it was 'only the frontier line … in question, he was convinced that his Government were in reality defending the independence of Poland itself'. In the view of Churchill and Eden, on the other hand, the best strategy was for the exile government to come quickly to an agreement with the Soviets in order to forestall the possible establishment of a rival government. Eden commented that 'all this talk about a Committee would automatically cease if agreement were reached on the lines of Stalin's latest telegram'. Churchill warned that 'if matters were allowed to drift, such a Committee would undoubtedly be established and the Polish Government would have no say in the matter'. He remained convinced that the territorial issue was the overriding Soviet concern. He was sure that the 'demands for a reconstitution of the Polish Government were trifles compared with the frontier question and would fade away if the latter were settled'.[65]

On 16 February, Churchill and Eden succeeded in extracting the agreement of the Polish government to the redrawing of the frontier between Poland and the Soviet Union with the caveat that the final demarcation of frontiers would be settled at the peace conference. The Polish government refused to make any public declaration about its willingness to cede territory, particularly since the territory which Poland was to receive as compensation in the north and west could not be announced publicly or even defined precisely. Privately, however, they agreed to accept the Curzon line as the new frontier. The Polish government also agreed to issue orders to the underground army, the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*—AK) instructing local commanders to reveal themselves to the Soviet commanders upon the arrival of the Red Army, and to cooperate in operations against the German forces. Finally, the Polish government pledged to 'include among themselves none but persons fully determined to cooperate with the Soviet Union'.[66]

[65] TNA: PREM 3/355/8, Record of a Meeting Held at Chequers, 6 February 1944; Raczyński, *In Allied London*, 193–194.

[66] TNA: PREM 3/355/8, Record of a Meeting Held at 10 Downing Street attended by Churchill, Eden, Cadogan, O'Malley, Mikołajczyk, Romer, and Raczyński, 16 February 1944; Foreign Office to Chequers, 19 February 1944; Colville to Foreign Office, 20 February 1944.

In spite of these concessions, the Soviet Union rejected the Polish proposals at the end of February. Clark Kerr reported that he had spent a 'dreary and exasperating' evening in discussions with Stalin and Molotov. Stalin had dismissed the Polish reply with a 'snigger' and periodic snorts of derision. In particular, he protested that the Polish government still had not explicitly accepted the Curzon line. Stalin understood the omission of a specific reference to Lwów and Wilno to mean that the Poles were not prepared to make this concession. He declared that he had little hope of settling the matter on the basis of Churchill's message. When Clark Kerr asked Stalin if he had any constructive suggestions, he maintained that his position had not changed; he sought only two things: clear and open acceptance of the Curzon line and reconstruction of the Polish government.[67] As far as Clark Kerr was concerned, the only positive sign to emerge from this discussion was that Stalin had 'left the door still open' to further talks. Also, he had not actually departed from his original demands. Clark Kerr noted, however, that 'in refusing to budge an inch to meet the Polish case he had ranged himself with the more extremist of his advisers'.[68] Clark Kerr's reference here to 'extremists' within the Kremlin shows the persistence of the British view that Stalin was essentially realistic and reasonable but was subject to the influence of hard-line elements within the Soviet administration. It was partly this analysis of the workings of the Soviet regime that encouraged Churchill to keep chipping away at Stalin in the hope that he could detach the Soviet leader from his supposedly more difficult colleagues.[69]

The period of intense negotiations in late 1943 and early 1944 highlights the gulf which separated the Polish government-in-exile from its British ally. British policymakers wanted to secure a good settlement for Poland. Had they been indifferent, they would not have devoted such considerable effort to the issue; Churchill, for instance, would not have persisted in his efforts in February and March in the face of repeated rebuffs by Stalin. The British believed that a reasonable agreement was within reach, but they also feared that the window of opportunity might close. They were optimistic that the Soviet desire for ongoing collaboration meant that Stalin would agree to a fair settlement with the Polish

[67] TNA: FO 371/39392/C2793/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 28 February 1944; Foreign Office Minutes, 29 February 1944.

[68] TNA: FO 371/39392/C2884/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 29 February 1944.

[69] Soviet Union Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman, 1941–45*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1958, vol. 1, docs. 249–250.

government-in-exile, but this optimism was always edged with doubt. Protracted negotiations, with a concomitant rise in tensions would not increase the chances of a good deal. Thus, Churchill and Eden grew increasingly frustrated by the Polish leaders' unwillingness to accommodate Soviet demands, and particularly by their apparent refusal to acknowledge the limits of British power to determine the final outcome of the situation. Without a military presence in the region, British influence was circumscribed. Likewise, Britain could exert pressure on the Soviet Union to offer fair terms to Poland, but there could be no question of allowing the Polish issue to weaken the Anglo-Soviet alliance, which, in turn, would undermine the successful prosecution of the war. Churchill and Eden often felt that the Poles were 'ask[ing] too much', rendering the British task 'impossible'.[70]

What Churchill and Eden underestimated or simply disregarded—although Foreign Office officials understood better—was the difficulty of Mikołajczyk's position.[71] His legitimacy in the eyes of both the Polish underground movement and the population would be undermined by acquiescence to the Soviet demands. What struck Eden and Churchill as Polish stubbornness or unreasonableness was a reflection of this intractable difficulty. Mikołajczyk and Romer themselves understood that a territorial concession was probably the only way of securing a Soviet guarantee to respect Polish political independence—even if they had little faith in Soviet promises. But they also understood that the strength of popular resistance to such a concession meant that they could not announce acceptance of the Curzon line publicly and hope to retain their political legitimacy. By agreeing to the Soviet conditions in mid-February, Mikołajczyk and Romer actually went beyond what their own government was prepared to accept. Three of the four political parties represented in the exile government (i.e. all except the SL) had refused to authorise Mikołajczyk to accept the terms proposed by the British as the basis for a Polish–Soviet agreement. He and Romer accepted the proposals anyway in the hope that they would be able to secure the agreement of the government and the underground authorities later on.[72]

[70] TNA: FO PREM 3/355/8, Record of a Meeting Held at 10 Downing Street, 16 February 1944; TNA: PREM 3/355/7, Eden to Churchill, 22 January 1944.

[71] The Foreign Office had a sharper awareness of the situation: 'The Polish Ministers … are showing realism and courage in enabling us to proceed on the present basis despite the contrary view held by large sections of the Polish Government and population in Poland'. TNA: FO 371/39392/C2793/8/G55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 20 February 1944.

[72] TNA: FO 371/39392/C2793/8/G55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 20 February 1944.

The Negotiations Lapse, March to July 1944

More serious misgivings began to set in about Soviet intentions in Poland in the spring of 1944.[73] In a Cabinet discussion on 6 March, it was pointed out that Stalin's most recent telegrams seemed 'to confirm the doubts that had originally been felt' as to Soviet sincerity in the negotiations with the Polish government. The Cabinet agreed that it was important that Churchill clarify the British position: the Soviet Union should have no doubt that Britain would continue to recognise the Polish government in London. Moreover, Britain bore responsibility for persuading the Polish leaders to make concessions to the Soviet Union. Having 'taken the line that certain of the Russian demands were reasonable', the British government 'were now under an obligation to protect the Polish position against Russian intransigence'. The Cabinet recognised that Mikołajczyk and Romer had agreed to the Soviet conditions as a result of British pressure. Now that the Soviet attitude had 'stiffened' just 'as the Poles moved towards a compromise', Britain had to stand by the terms agreed.[74] The Cabinet decision indicates that the British approach to the Polish–Soviet dispute was not merely one of acquiescence to each new Soviet demand. The sense of responsibility towards the Polish government exerted a discernible pressure on British policymakers.

Concern about the morale of Polish troops reinforced British resolve to maintain support for the exile government. At the beginning of March, General Harold Alexander, supreme allied commander in Italy, reported that Churchill's speech in the House of Commons on 22 February concerning the possibility of changes to Poland's borders had caused disquiet among Polish troops at a time when the Second Corps was holding 30 miles of the front. Eighty per cent of the troops came from homes located east of the Curzon line. The commander of the Polish Second Corps, General Władysław Anders, had threatened that he would reject the authority of the Polish government if it made any territorial concessions to the Soviet Union. 'In such a case', warned Alexander, '[Anders's] supporters might be numerous enough to necessitate removal of the Corps from the line'.[75] In response, Churchill reaffirmed British support for the Polish government-in-exile in the House of Commons. He denied

[73] *Stalin's Correspondence*, vol. 1, docs. 249–250.

[74] TNA: CAB 65/45, WM(44) 28th Conclusions, Minute 1, Confidential Annex, 6 March 1944.

[75] TNA: WO 214/54, General Alexander to CIGS, 8 March 1944.

that Britain had recognised any of the territorial changes which had occurred in Poland since the outbreak of the war and stated that if no amicable agreement on Poland's future frontiers could be reached, a settlement would have to await the peace conference at the end of the war.[76]

Churchill continued his correspondence with Stalin throughout March and April on the Polish issue, pressing the Soviet leader to reconsider his refusal to reach a settlement with the government-in-exile. On 11 April, Churchill announced to the Cabinet that the Red Army had concluded an agreement with Polish underground forces with the approval of their respective governments providing for operational subordination of the Polish underground to Soviet forces, but also containing provisions which recognised the existence of the Polish authorities in London and Warsaw. Churchill regarded this development 'as full of hope'. He was sure that the 'stiff terms' of his last communication to Stalin had influenced the Soviet leader. Churchill felt that his views about the Soviet Union had been vindicated: 'despite the somewhat intransigent tone adopted by the Russians in their diplomatic correspondence … they might in practice prove much more accommodating'.[77] The rather triumphant tone of Churchill's announcement to Cabinet underscores the resilience of his belief that the Soviets ultimately intended to pursue cooperation with Britain; the Soviet regime was liable to succumb to the temptations of expansionism as opportunities opened up but once Stalin realised that he had overstepped Britain's limits, he would pull back. This was a view broadly shared by the Central Department. In a memorandum of 27 March summing up the British position on the Polish–Soviet dispute, Roberts argued that Britain had made its attitude 'crystal clear' to the Russians in the March exchanges. Although no firm agreement had been secured, Roberts thought Churchill had probably 'succeeded in impressing upon Stalin the need for restrained Soviet behaviour'.[78]

This interpretation of Soviet intentions was reinforced by reports from the Moscow embassy in May. Following several meetings with Stalin and Molotov, the Polish intermediary, Oskar Lange,[79] reported to Clark Kerr that the '[w]hole tenour' of Stalin's remarks about Poland led him to

[76] TNA: FO 371/39397/C4302/8/G55, 27 March 1944.

[77] TNA: CAB 65/46, W.M.(44) 47th Conclusions, Minute 2, Confidential Annex, 11 April 1944.

[78] TNA: FO 371/39397/C4302/8/G55, Minute by Roberts, 27 March 1944.

[79] Lange was a University of Chicago economist who had acted as Roosevelt's envoy to Stalin in 1943 and later returned to Poland to join the provisional government in 1945.

conclude that the Soviet leader regarded 'the question of Poland's future strictly from [the] standpoint of Soviet security'.[80] Stalin had remarked frequently that 'he had no intention of interfering in the domestic affairs of Poland', and declared that 'the door to an understanding' with the existing Polish government was 'never closed'.[81] The other crucial piece of information to emerge from Lange's discussion with Stalin was his understanding that the ZPP was too weak to garner enough support among the Polish population to form a viable administration. The Foreign Office thus concluded that the ZPP's shortcomings would prevent Stalin from shutting the London Poles out of the postwar political settlement altogether. Officials judged that the Soviet Union was still prepared to collaborate with Mikołajczyk and with other 'well-disposed members' of the exile administration'.[82]

As a result of this analysis, the Foreign Office concluded that the possibility of a Polish–Soviet rapprochement was 'much more favourable than it ha[d] been for some time past'. Officials concluded that with a renewed Red Army advance in Poland imminent, the Soviets needed a Polish administration with a substantial support base in the country with whom they could cooperate. In the view of both Mikołajczyk and the Foreign Office, the Soviets had realised that the ZPP could not count on the necessary local support. Mikołajczyk received reports from fellow SL members inside Poland which described the ZPP's influence as 'non-existent'.[83] The time had come therefore to give Mikołajczyk 'a judicious push'. The

[80] Both the Moscow embassy and the Central Department considered Lange to be a reliable source. Allen referred to Lange as 'shrewd'. TNA: FO 371/39400/C6694/8/G55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20–21 May 1944. Similarly, Clark Kerr commented that both he and a colleague had been 'much struck by [Lange's] quiet good sense'. Lange offered to stop in the UK to visit Mikołajczyk and discuss his meetings with Stalin and Molotov. Clark Kerr supported this plan, commenting that he was 'convinced that nothing but good could come from such a visit by a patently sincere and level-headed observer who has been able to gain insight into the situation as it looks from here'. TNA: FO 371/39400/C6755/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 19 May 1944; FO 371/39400/C6766/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 19 May 1944.

[81] TNA: FO 371/39400/C6758/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 19 May 1944; FO 371/39400/C6755/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 19 May 1944; FO 371/39400/C6694/8/G55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20–21 May 1944.

[82] TNA: FO 371/39400/C6694/8/G55, Minute by Allen, 20 May 1944; FO 371/39400/C6694/8/G55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20–21 May 1944; WO 214/54, Allied Force Headquarters, Office of the Supreme Allied Commander-in-Chief to Commander-in-Chief, Allied Armies in Italy (AAI), 9 June 1944.

[83] Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (PISM), PRM 124, 15 May 1944.

Foreign Office recognised that Mikołajczyk himself understood the need to reach an accommodation with the Soviets, but continued to face strong opposition from within his government.[84] Churchill and Eden urged Mikołajczyk to push ahead with plans to remove Sosnkowski as a sign of the London government's desire to cooperate with the Soviet Union. Mikołajczyk promised that an announcement to this effect would be made within a week's time.[85]

Another promising sign of a possible Polish–Soviet rapprochement was an approach at the end of May by Moscow to Mikołajczyk proposing direct negotiations to try to resolve the differences between the two governments. The talks, initially conducted between the chairman of the Polish National Council, Stanisław Grabski, and Viktor Lebedev, the Soviet ambassador to the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, were held in secret; of the Polish exile administration, Mikołajczyk and Romer alone knew they were underway. Romer informed only Churchill and Eden of the talks; the Foreign Office was also aware that they were happening. In early June, it appeared that the negotiations were nearing a successful conclusion. At the request of the Soviets, the leader of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, Eduard Beneš, confirmed the terms reached between Grabski and Lebedev, and reassured Mikołajczyk that the Soviet government had 'full confidence' in him and intended to reach an agreement before the resumption of the offensive on the eastern front. Moscow repeated its reservations about certain members of the London government, but also stated that the ZPP and the PPR would 'present no obstacle' to an agreement with the exile government. Churchill was clearly delighted, commenting that the news was 'almost too good to be true' and 'the best we have ever had' from Poland. He was certain that the newly cooperative Soviet attitude was a result of the opening of the second front in northwestern Europe. 'I have good hopes that the Second Front will bring about better relations between Russia and the Western Allies than has ever been possible before', he commented.[86]

[84] TNA: FO 371/39400/C7370/8/G55, Minute by Roberts, 30 May 1944; FO 371/39402/C8476/8/G55, Foreign Office Minutes, 30 May 1944.

[85] TNA: FO 371/39402/C8477/8/G55, Record of Meeting at No. 10 Downing Street on Wednesday, 31 May 1944.

[86] Eden, *The Reckoning*, 439–440; TNA: FO 371/39402/C8479/8/G55, Eden to Churchill, 6 June 1944; Churchill to Eden 11 June 1944; FO 371/39403/C8860/8/55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 8 July 1944.

This promising news did not, however, translate into the much desired agreement. Upon his return from a trip to the US, Mikołajczyk took over from Grabski. Mikołajczyk requested an immediate resumption of diplomatic relations, a joint strategy for the Polish underground and the Red Army, administrative cooperation between representatives of the Polish government in Poland and the incoming Soviet military authorities, and a postponement of frontier changes until after the war. Lebedev initially suggested that the Soviet government would accommodate these requests, although he repeated that the Curzon line was the only acceptable frontier. Mikołajczyk told Eden that up to this stage the discussions had been 'friendly and even cordial'. Lebedev had shown 'every desire to reach agreement and confidence that this would be possible'. At a further meeting on 23 June, however, Lebedev's 'tone completely changed', and he presented a new set of terms on a 'take it or leave it' basis, after which there had been no further contact. Neither Eden nor the Polish ministers could account for the sudden change in Lebedev's attitude, which 'was clearly the result of fresh instructions from Moscow'. The situation was complicated by the secrecy in which the talks had taken place, which made a public intervention by Britain impossible.[87]

Review of British Commitments to Poland

In July 1944, with the Polish–Soviet negotiations foundering once again, Eden and the Foreign Office conducted a review of their commitments to the Polish government. In April, after the British-mediated talks had broken down, Eden had requested a review of the secret protocol of the Anglo-Polish Treaty of August 1939 with a view to its possible publication. At the same time, Central Department officials undertook a review of the correspondence with the Polish government concerning the interpretation of the secret protocol. These exchanges had taken place at the time of the negotiations for the Anglo-Soviet Treaty in the spring of 1942 and during later talks with the Polish government regarding their proposal for a new Anglo-Polish agreement to replace that of 1939. During the course of the review, officials unearthed forgotten commitments to the

[87] TNA: FO 371/39403/C8860/8/55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 8 July 1944; FO 371/39404/C9097/8/G55, 'Record by O'Malley of a Conversation at Dinner at the Foreign Office on the 29th June [1944]'; FO 371/39404/C9172/8/G55, Eden to O'Malley, 11 July 1944.

Polish government. Eden was dismayed by the accumulation of promises, which included a reaffirmation of Britain's commitment to a postwar settlement based on the principles of the Atlantic Charter and a pledge not to enter into an agreement with a third party injurious to Polish interests. Article 3 of the protocol itself specified that any undertakings of assistance against aggression given by either of the signatories 'should at no time prejudice either the sovereignty or territorial inviolability of the other Contracting Party'.

Even more worrying from the point of view of the Foreign Office was Eden's more recent assurance of 17 April 1942 to Raczyński that 'His Majesty's Government do not propose to conclude any agreement affecting or compromising the territorial status of the Polish Republic'. Eden had also reassured Raczyński that Britain would not recognise any territorial changes effected in Poland since August 1939 in any future agreement with the Soviet Union. Eden had repeated these assurances to Mikołajczyk's predecessor, General Władysław Sikorski, a few days later, adding that under no circumstances would the Soviet–German demarcation line of 1940 be confirmed in the proposed Anglo-Soviet agreement.[88] In August, Eden submitted a brief to the War Cabinet advising against the publication of the protocol. Officials feared that publication would raise Soviet suspicions about British policy generally. They also worried that in Soviet eyes, Article 3 would undermine British legitimacy as mediator in the Polish–Soviet territorial dispute. Of grave concern was the likelihood that if the secret protocol were published, the Polish government would press for the publication of the subsequent exchanges, with deeply damaging consequences for Anglo-Soviet relations.[89]

The Central Department's policy review in the summer of 1944 highlights the haphazard way in which British commitments to the Polish exile government had accumulated over the course of the war. The commitments to Poland, often extended in moments of crisis, or in response to specific objections and concerns raised by the Polish government, were not particularly well recorded, remembered, or incorporated into overall policy planning by the Foreign Office. Further, there was a

[88] TNA: FO 371/39436/C11513/62/55, Minute by Allen, 4 August 1944.

[89] TNA: FO 371/39435/C5598/62/55, Foreign Office Minutes, May–June 1944; 'Correspondence with the Polish Government Concerning the Anglo-Soviet Negotiations for a Political Agreement' and Foreign Office Minutes, May–June 1944; FO 371/39435/C9311/62/55, Foreign Office Minutes, July 1944; FO 371/39436/C11513/62/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 4–6 August 1944; Memorandum submitted to the War Cabinet by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 10 August 1944.

clear sense that Polish concerns must not be allowed to intrude upon the priority of maintaining strong Anglo-Soviet relations. On the other hand, Eden and the Foreign Office officials were not cavalier about Britain's obligations to Poland either. The review served as a reminder to policymakers of the extent of British commitments to Poland. That this sense of obligation continued to be an important factor in shaping British policy towards Poland emerges in an important Foreign Office paper, prepared by Warner, analysing Soviet policy across Europe, which was submitted to the Cabinet on 9 August. The section on Eastern Europe noted Britain's particular responsibility towards Poland, and asserted the importance of maintaining British support for Mikołajczyk. Britain also needed to make clear to the Soviets that 'a fair deal for Poland' was 'essential to future good relations between Britain and Russia'.[90]

The Warsaw Uprising

On 26 July, Mikołajczyk and Romer flew to Moscow to meet with Stalin.[91] Mikołajczyk was convinced that he had to make an attempt to re-establish Polish–Soviet relations himself, without resorting to intermediaries. Existing concerns about the Soviet military presence in Poland were now compounded by worries about relations between the Red Army and the AK in the liberated territories.[92] Stalin agreed to Mikołajczyk's visit, but then immediately proceeded to recognise the PKWN as the only lawful administration in Poland and insisted that Mikołajczyk meet with its leaders when he arrived in Moscow. This step made plain that Mikołajczyk would have to reach an accommodation with the PKWN; there could be no possibility of a wholesale reinstatement of the exile government.[93]

Nevertheless, the talks began reasonably well. The PKWN representatives and the Soviet leaders agreed to Mikołajczyk remaining prime minister, and seemed prepared to compromise on the number of Cabinet posts

[90] TNA: CAB 66/53, WP(44)436, 9 August 1944.

[91] Roosevelt proposed the idea during Mikołajczyk's visit to the US; Mikołajczyk asked Churchill to act as intermediary and suggest the idea to the Soviets. TNA: FO 371/39404/C9289/8/G55, Report by O'Malley, 13 July 1944; Foreign Office Minutes, 13–14 July 1944; Eden to Churchill, 17 July 1944; *Stalin's Correspondence*, vol. 1, doc. 299.

[92] In Wołynia, the Red Army had already disarmed the local AK units and arrested their leaders. Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 98.

[93] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 98–100.

to be allocated to representatives of the London government.[94] Churchill was encouraged by the initial results of the talks. At the top of a message from Stalin that Churchill forwarded to Roosevelt, Churchill commented: 'This seems to me the best ever received from U[ncle] J[oe]'.[95] Stalin reported that the talks were proceeding well; he stressed the importance of a Polish regime which would be well-disposed towards the Soviet Union but he also acknowledged 'the importance of the Polish question for the common cause of the allies'.[96] Mikołajczyk too was reasonably optimistic, reporting back to London that Stalin seemed to want a broad-based Polish government. He also promised more extensive territorial compensation in the west than Mikołajczyk had anticipated.[97]

This apparently promising beginning collapsed because the political talks were eclipsed by the Warsaw uprising, which began on 1 August while Mikołajczyk was still in Moscow. The uprising diminished Mikołajczyk's bargaining power in the negotiations regarding Poland's future government, since he was obliged to shift his focus to the military situation and attempt to persuade Stalin to assist the AK.[98] The outbreak of the uprising stoked Polish–Soviet antagonism: the Soviets objected to the AK's failure to inform Soviet headquarters about the action beforehand; the Soviets provided almost no help to the AK, even though Soviet troops had reached the outskirts of Warsaw by the time the uprising began.[99] The AK was counting on the continuation of the Red Army's offensive but instead Soviet forces halted to regroup, citing supply problems and the German reinforcements sent in to re-establish control of the city.[100] The Soviet decision to halt its advance has been the subject of

[94] Harvey, ed., *War Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, 349.

[95] 'Uncle Joe' was Churchill and Roosevelt's nickname for Stalin. Eden, *The Reckoning*, 466.

[96] Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*. vol. 3*: Alliance Declining, February 1944—April 1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), doc. C-740.

[97] PISM, A/48/2/C4, 5 August 1944.

[98] *Stalin's Correspondence*, vol. 1, doc. 321.

[99] *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers, 1944. The British Commonwealth and Europe*, vol. 3 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1965), 1374–1377.

[100] Over 63 days of fighting, 15,000 insurgents and between 120,000–200,000 civilians were killed; 17,443 AK fighters were taken prisoner, along with their commander-in-chief and five generals. Once the Germans had retaken Warsaw, all its remaining residents were rounded up and forcibly removed or executed, and the Germans began to systematically raze the city to the ground. Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 102–106; *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, s.v. 'Warsaw Uprising' (by Christopher Bellamy) http://www.oxfordreference.com [accessed 4 January 2014].

intense controversy ever since. A number of historians argue that Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky's army group was actually dangerously exposed with overstretched communication and supply lines, at least during the first two weeks of the uprising.[101] It is difficult to see, however, how the stoppage and Stalin's refusal to make ammunition drops to the insurgents[102]—in spite of his promise to Mikołajczyk that he would do so[103]—could have been other than politically motivated.

The British government regarded the uprising mainly as an ill-timed inconvenience, which would spoil Mikołajczyk's chances of reaching an agreement with Stalin and the PKWN. Britain had harboured reservations about plans for a Polish national uprising since the subject had first been broached, warning the Poles that any action should be coordinated with the Red Army. The Polish liaison officer to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Leon Mitkiewicz, had concluded by the end of 1943 that neither Britain nor the US was prepared to provide support, let alone agree to joint military action, with the AK. Nevertheless, the Poles had continued to press for assistance periodically throughout the first half of 1944.[104]

The uprising put a strain on Anglo-Polish relations. Britain refused Polish requests for military assistance for the AK while at the same time British military authorities continued to make full use of Polish manpower across several theatres of war.[105] Further, shortly before the uprising began, General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, the AK commander, asked that the Independent Polish Parachute Brigade be sent to Warsaw to support the insurgents. The parachute brigade was an elite unit of 2,000 men, which the Polish government had always intended to participate in the liberation of Poland in conjunction with the national uprising. At the beginning of

[101] The following historians put forward the argument that Soviet lines were overstretched: Jan Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 250–251; Antony Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles, 1941–7', *European History Quarterly* 17 (1987): 469; Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, 280–281. Others contest this conclusion, asserting that the Red Army rebuilt the railway lines quickly enough to facilitate the delivery of supplies to the troops: Alexandra Richie, *Warsaw, 1944: The Fateful Uprising* (London: William Collins, 2013), 490–493; Davies, *Rising'44*, 298, 301–302.

[102] Up until mid-September.

[103] *DOPSR*, vol. 2, doc. 189.

[104] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 97; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 203.

[105] The Polish second armoured division under General Stanisław Maczek numbering 25,000 men (at the time of the Normandy landings) was in action in France at the time of the uprising; in May, the Second Polish army corps under Anders had succeeded in capturing the monastery at Monte Cassino, suffering such high losses in the process that it was virtually wiped out. Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 94.

1944, however, the British War Office had requested permission to use the parachute brigade in the invasion of France. Sosnkowski had agreed only reluctantly to the request, as the Polish high command had planned to reserve the brigade for the invasion of Poland. It was the only military unit reserved solely for action in Poland. Sosnkowski did not, however, want to pass up the chance for Polish soldiers to take part in what was likely to be an important military operation, in keeping with the Polish government's strategy of seeking political guarantees in exchange for its military contributions. The British military authorities refused Bór-Komorowski's request to release the brigade because it was already designated for use in operations in northwest Europe.[106] Britain also rejected Bór-Komorowski's request that the Royal Air Force bomb German airfields around Warsaw on the grounds of the high potential losses involved in flying over German-held territory as far as Warsaw.[107]

Polish military leaders deeply resented the withholding of the parachute brigade and the suspension of supply flights from Italy. The news of the lack of British support for the uprising also rippled through the ranks. In early August, the British commander-in-chief of the allied armies in Italy reported that the situation in Warsaw was 'affecting the whole state of mind and morale of the Polish Corps who are at this moment undertaking an important operation and one on which a great deal of my future plans depends.'[108] On 8 August, the Foreign Office warned that the Polish military authorities had threatened to withdraw their cooperation. These reports of unrest among the troops were instrumental in the reversal of the initial British decision not to attempt Warsaw operational flights.[109]

The uprising also complicated Anglo-Soviet relations. Stalin termed the uprising 'a reckless and fearful gamble' and refused Churchill's increasingly

[106] The British eventually used it in a poorly planned operation at Arnhem in September, which ended in retreat and the loss of nearly a quarter of the brigade. Ibid., 95–96.

[107] Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 204; Raczyński, *In Allied London*, 303–304, 320–321; Ciechanowski, *Warsaw Rising*, 67; Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 95–96.

[108] TNA: WO 214/54, ADV HQ AAI to AFHQ, 1 August 1944.

[109] Kitchen argues that the 'British Government was determined to give every possible help to the insurgents' but this contention does not correspond to the evidence in the Foreign Office files, which suggests that it was the Polish threat to withdraw military cooperation that persuaded the British government to override the objections of the chiefs of staff. Harvey, for instance, noted that two sorties were made from Bari 'as a result of Polish appeals and pressure'. Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union*, 221; TNA: CAB 121/454, Foreign Office to Central Mediterranean, 8 August 1944.

urgent pleas for arms and ammunition drops to the insurgents.[110] The Soviets also refused to allow British and American planes to use Soviet landing strips to stop and refuel.[111] Churchill struggled to accept the Soviet refusal to fly in supplies when their armies were 'only a few score miles away'. He warned Roosevelt that if 'the German triumph in Warsaw is followed by a wholesale massacre no measure can be put upon the full consequences that will arise'. After Stalin refused permission for American and British planes to use Soviet airstrips, Churchill wanted to apply heavier pressure on the Soviets. In a message to Roosevelt, he argued that the success of the military operations in Western Europe gave the US and Britain more leeway to take a strong approach.[112] He also suggested to the Foreign Office that all further supply convoys to the Soviet Union be suspended until the use of the airfields was permitted.[113] On 4 September, Churchill went so far as to plead with Roosevelt to authorise the US air force to drop supplies on Warsaw using Soviet airfields without formal consent.[114] On 9 September, the Soviets finally agreed to cooperate in assisting the insurgents, and beginning on 13 September Soviet planes did make some small drops of supplies. On 18 September, American aircraft also dropped supplies and were permitted to fly on to Soviet bases. After that, however, the Soviet government refused to permit further shuttle flights to land at Soviet bases.[115] This assistance came too late to alter the outcome of the Warsaw rising, which collapsed at the beginning of October.

The Warsaw uprising is frequently cited as the juncture at which British policymakers' perceptions of the Soviet Union took a sharp downturn.[116] Ultimately, however, and with varying degrees of confidence, officials

[110] *FRUS, 1944*, vol. 3, 1374–1377; *Stalin's Correspondence*, vol. 1, docs. 321, 311, 316, 317.

[111] Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 221.

[112] Roosevelt deemed the dispatch of a second message disadvantageous 'to the long-range general war prospect' given Stalin's strenuous objections to the use of the airfields and 'in view of the current American conversations in regard to the subsequent use of other Soviet bases'. In view of the American objection, the British government chose not to send the proposed message. F.L. Lowenheim, ed., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975), docs. 424, 426; Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, doc. C-760.

[113] The Foreign Office persuaded Churchill that this step would be counterproductive. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, fn. 215.

[114] *Secret Wartime Correspondence*, doc. 431.

[115] Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 218–221.

[116] For example, Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union*, 232.

continued to adhere to the belief that Britain would be able to bring about a satisfactory settlement for Poland. Soviet actions during the uprising certainly aroused anger and consternation in the Foreign Office, and raised doubts about long-term Soviet intentions. Roberts was worried by the deliberate Soviet attempt to use the uprising to undermine Mikołajczyk's position.[117] The uprising led other officials to rethink their ideas about the most effective negotiating style to employ in the face of Soviet intransigence. Warner, for instance, advocated the adoption of a harder approach. He recommended that the British government inform Stalin that Soviet 'behaviour in this matter [was] totally lacking in the spirit of collaboration which we would expect from Allies'. Continued British silence in the face of Soviet actions would only encourage further 'uncollaborativeness'.[118] British policymakers credited the stiffly worded note from the Cabinet with persuading the Soviets to make supply drops over Warsaw and lift the restriction on Anglo-American use of their airstrips. Eden commented to Churchill that the Soviet policy reversal was 'really a great triumph for our persistence in hammering at the Russians'. Eden complimented Churchill on his sound judgement in perceiving that Stalin had not 'understood the significance of his refusal on world opinion. The violence of our representations has made him understand and he has now come round'.[119]

As far as Churchill himself is concerned, there is no doubt that he was genuinely distressed by the situation in Warsaw. His messages to Roosevelt vividly convey his dismay at how little the Soviets were prepared to do to help—although, contrary to the version of events given in his memoirs, in October he accepted Stalin's insistence that military difficulties alone had prevented the Soviets from liberating Warsaw.[120] The uprising did not, however, profoundly alter Churchill's assessment of Soviet postwar intentions in Poland. Folly argues that Churchill continued to hope that 'an appeal to Stalin, backed by the increase in prestige brought by victories in

[117] TNA: FO 371/39410/C11186/8/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 25 August 1944.

[118] TNA: FO 371/39410/C11277/8/G55, Minute by Warner, 29 August 1944.

[119] TNA: FO 371/39499/C12788/1077/G55, Eden to Churchill, 13 September 1944.

[120] In his memoirs, Churchill records that the Soviets halted in Praga because they 'wished to have the non-Communist Poles destroyed'. Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 127. Harvey, on the other hand, records that at the time Churchill accepted Stalin's assurances about the purely military considerations behind Soviet inaction. 'P.M. accepted this and said he had never believed the reports to this effect.' Harvey, ed., *War Diaries of Oliver Harvey*. 360.

Normandy, would bring success'.[121] Churchill's own statements in the late summer and autumn of 1944 support this interpretation. As he argued in his message to Roosevelt on 18 August, he thought that 'the glorious and gigantic victories' in France gave the Western allies greater leverage to take a firmer line with Stalin.[122] This argument was in accordance with his existing view that Stalin responded better to a tougher approach.[123]

Thus, British perceptions of Soviet policy towards Poland remained essentially intact even after the uprising. The Cabinet paper on Soviet policy in Europe set out the British position in the late summer of 1944: while acknowledging that the Soviets would apply stringent conditions to the postwar settlement in Poland, there had been 'signs that the Russians [were] ready to welcome a new régime in Poland with a broad basis of popular support in the democratic Peasant and Socialist parties'.[124] The main shift in British policy was a greater inclination to employ a tougher, less accommodating approach in negotiations with the Soviets. Rather than feeling disillusioned, the British drew reassurance about long-term Soviet intentions from their rapid about-face in response to the firmly worded Cabinet message. Far from a sense of despair setting in, Churchill and Eden set off for Moscow in October 1944 believing that 'this was the moment to push ahead with the Polish-Russian business'.[125]

The Moscow Conference: Britain Pushes for a Settlement

In Moscow, Churchill and Eden resolved to bring the months of inconclusive negotiations, stony silences, and diplomatic spats to a final conclusion. This time, they were determined that a firm agreement should not again elude them. At the first meeting attended by Mikołajczyk on 13 October, Stalin laid out the Soviet terms for an agreement: the London government would have to be prepared to cooperate with the PKWN and accept the Curzon line.[126] In a private meeting with the Polish leaders the next day,

[121] Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 136.
[122] Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, doc. C-760.
[123] Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 137.
[124] TNA: CAB 66/53, WP(44)436, 9 August 1944.
[125] TNA: FO 371/39499/C12788/1077/G55, Eden to Churchill, 13 September 1944.
[126] TNA: PREM 3/434/2, 'Record of Meeting at Spiridonovka House', 13 October 1944; CAB 121/454, Eden to Sargent, 12 October 1944; Eden to Foreign Office, 14 October 1944.

Churchill adopted an unusually harsh approach. If the Poles accepted the border change, all the other issues, including the composition of the Polish government, could be easily resolved as 'Stalin clearly regarded these as subsidiary and would be able to persuade the Lublin Poles to adopt a reasonable attitude'. Churchill maintained that this was Mikołajczyk's 'last chance of retrieving the situation' and warned that Britain would not extend further assistance to the exile government if he failed to seize this opportunity.

When Mikołajczyk resisted, Churchill lost his temper. He castigated Mikołajczyk for having scuppered the agreement which had so nearly been reached at the beginning of 1944, warning that '[t]he world was growing tired of Polish quarrels'; there were more important issues at stake than Poland's eastern provinces. Then he raged: 'You're no Government … You're a callous people who want to wreck Europe. I shall leave you to your own troubles… You have only your miserable, petty, selfish interests in mind'.[127] Churchill eventually managed to persuade Mikołajczyk to accept the Curzon line without Lwów, but he refused to formalise an agreement with the Soviets on the spot, choosing to return to London to consult his government. Churchill and Eden, who had been hoping that Mikołajczyk would proceed directly to Lublin, impressed upon Mikołajczyk 'the urgent necessity of speed'.[128]

There is a virtual consensus that the prime minister behaved with 'peculiar harshness' towards the Polish leaders in Moscow.[129] There is no question that Churchill tried to bully Mikołajczyk. As in early 1944,

[127] *DOPSR*, vol. 2, doc. 241; Stanisław Mikołajczyk, *The Pattern of Soviet Domination* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1948), 108–111. The Polish record of this conversation is borne out, minus the more colourful language, by Eden's account of the same meeting to the Foreign Office. Harvey includes a summary in his diary, which also corresponds, albeit with far less detail, to the Polish version. TNA: CAB 121/454, Eden to Foreign Office, 16 October 1944; Harvey, ed., *War Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, 361. Both Martin Gilbert and Roy Jenkins quote directly from the Polish record. Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, 1015; Roy Jenkins, *Churchill* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2001), 762. In his memoirs, Moran recalls asking Churchill in 1953 if Mikołajczyk's account was accurate. According to Moran, Churchill replied: '"You see we were both very angry"'. Lord Moran, *Churchill at War 1940–45* (London: Robinson, 2002), 244.

[128] TNA: CAB 121/454, Eden to Foreign Office, 16 October 1944; Churchill to War Cabinet, 17 October 1944; Eden to Foreign Office, 17 October 1944; Eden to Cadogan, 19 October 1944;.*DOPSR*, vol. 2 docs. 239, 245; Raczyński, *In Allied London*, 239.

[129] Jenkins, *Churchill*, 762. John Charmley equates Churchill's treatment of Mikołajczyk in October 1944 with the pressure to which the Czech president Hacha was subjected in 1939. Charmley, *Churchill*, 590–591.

however, the source of Churchill's outburst seems to have been great frustration. He continued to have faith in Stalin's word at this point, and Mikołajczyk's ongoing reluctance to reach a settlement after all the months of squabbles and setbacks infuriated him.[130] With hindsight, it is clear that Churchill misjudged Stalin's intentions, but he seems to have genuinely believed that the Curzon line remained the crucial issue for the Soviet leader.[131] He was also contemptuous of the PKWN, dismissing them as incapable of governing. He believed that Stalin did not actually intend to install them in power but was just using their presence in Moscow to apply pressure on the London Poles to accept his territorial conditions. He told Mikołajczyk that if the Polish government agreed to the frontier, Stalin would withdraw support for the Lublin group.[132] Similarly, Eden reported to the Foreign Office that the PKWN had made a very bad impression, and implied that they did not have Stalin's full support. Eden described how Churchill had 'chided them' and appealed to them 'to adopt a less cantankerous and more friendly and constructive attitude', and had been supported by Stalin.[133] Arthur Birse, who served as interpreter at the meeting, also recalled that as the Polish leaders spoke at length, 'Stalin kept looking at Churchill and smiling mischievously'. According to Birse's account, when Churchill grew so impatient that he stood up and deliberately clattered the glasses and plates on the tea tray, 'Stalin laughed outright and told the Poles that we had had enough'.[134]

Mikołajczyk's refusal to accept the Curzon line without caveats or further consultation both infuriated and bewildered Churchill. Contemporary accounts of his behaviour at the meeting on 14 October seem consistent with the reaction of someone who cared about the problem, believed that a solution was possible, and could not quite believe that he was still unable

[130] Churchill, quoted in Jenkins, *Churchill*, 762.

[131] Churchill reported back to the War Cabinet that he and Stalin had 'talked with an ease, freedom and beau geste never before attained between our two countries. Stalin has made several expressions of personal regard which I feel sure were sincere'. As Folly notes, Churchill's tests of Stalin's sincerity were 'sometimes trivial', and he took Stalin's conviviality in Moscow as a sign that he was prepared to reach a fair settlement. TNA: CAB 121/454, Churchill to War Cabinet, 17 October 1944; Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 138.

[132] *DOPSR*, vol. 2, doc. 239.

[133] TNA: CAB 121/454, Eden to Foreign Office, 14 October 1944.

[134] A.H. Birse, *Memoirs of an Interpreter* (London: Joseph, 1967), 172.

to bring the Poles round to seeing the situation from his point of view.[135] Mikołajczyk records that at the end of a particularly angry exchange, Churchill turned and left the room. Returning after a few minutes, he put his arm around Mikołajczyk's shoulders. '[W]e were both on the point of tears', recalls Mikołajczyk.[136] A tearful Churchill might simply have been an appealing dramatic device for Mikołajczyk's memoirs, but Lord Moran, Churchill's personal physician, also recorded in his diary: 'It is plain that the P.M. has got the Poles on his conscience'. Churchill told Moran: 'I was pretty rough with Mikolajczyk … He was obstinate and I lost my temper'. Moran's account supports the suggestion that Churchill grew angry because he felt that the Polish leaders were letting their last chance at an agreement slip away.[137]

It is worth pointing out that the extent of Churchill's involvement with the Polish exile leaders was unusual. Notoriously mercurial and easily bored, it was not easy to sustain Churchill's interest in any particular issue for long.[138] Yet he remained closely involved with Polish affairs throughout his entire time in office. It is difficult to pinpoint precisely, but it seems that Churchill's particularly attentive interest in Polish affairs originated with events at the beginning of the war, starting with the evacuation of Polish troops from France in June 1940. The Polish military contribution at a time when Britain was desperately short of resources lent special importance to the Polish government-in-exile. Further, it is possible that for Churchill personally, this demonstration of support might have held particular significance. Churchill had not yet established his position as unassailable war leader in 1940. On the contrary, having only just taken on the premiership—and not by any means as the favourite to succeed Neville Chamberlain—Churchill was in a weak position within the Cabinet.[139] At the end of May, as France's defeat appeared imminent and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was trapped around Dunkirk with the initial

[135] Churchill summarises the Polish–Soviet negotiations in Moscow in his memoirs but does not make specific reference to this particular meeting.

[136] Mikołajczyk, *Pattern of Soviet Domination*, 111.

[137] Moran, *Churchill at War*, 245.

[138] Anthony P. Adamthwaite, 'British Diplomacy Before the Conference in the Crimea', in *Yalta: un mito che resiste*, ed. Olla, 46; Prażmowska, 'Churchill and Poland', 117.

[139] Lord Halifax, then foreign secretary had been the first choice of Chamberlain, the king, and the Conservative party. David Reynolds, 'Churchill and the British "Decision" to Fight On in 1940: Right Policy, Wrong Reasons', in *Diplomacy and Intelligence During the Second World War: Essays in Honour of F.H. Hinsley*, ed. Richard Langhorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 148.

expectation that only 30,000–50,000 men would be rescued, Churchill only just managed to persuade the rest of the Cabinet that Britain should fight on, rather than seeking a negotiated peace with Germany.[140] Thus, the Polish offer of assistance, with the commitment to the British war effort that it carried, must have served to bolster Churchill at least to some extent at a moment when he was particularly beleaguered. Further, Churchill held Sikorski in particularly high regard and the two leaders developed a close relationship.[141] In any case, the Polish exile leaders and servicemen captured Churchill's attention and remained part of his thinking throughout the war. This is not to suggest that Churchill behaved irreproachably towards the Polish government: he was certainly motivated by a degree of cynicism in his attempts to mediate a Polish–Soviet settlement. He did not want the British government to be accused of having reneged on its promises to an ally; nor did he want to risk losing the participation of Polish troops. Nevertheless, Churchill did assume virtually complete responsibility for reaching a settlement and continued to push for a resolution right up to the end of his time in office.

Moscow to Yalta, November 1944 to February 1945

Upon his return to London, Mikołajczyk encountered greater than anticipated hostility to the Moscow proposals from his government. He was obliged to resign on 24 November.[142] A new government was formed under the socialist Tomasz Arciszewski, which maintained an entirely uncompromising stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Although Churchill hoped that this government would collapse, recognition was nevertheless granted.[143] Arciszewski's adamant refusal to negotiate with the Soviet Union meant that the British government maintained only the stiffest formal contact. Churchill's decision to recognise the new government belied all his threats to dispense with Mikołajczyk, who was infinitely preferable to Arciszewski in the British view. The Polish troops were a key factor in this decision. Ignoring a warning from Clark Kerr that British recognition

[140] Important members of the government, including Halifax and David Lloyd George, believed Britain ought to seriously consider a negotiated peace. Ibid., 149–150.

[141] Prażmowska, 'Churchill and Poland', 117.

[142] Mikołajczyk diary, 16 December 1944, Stanisław Mikołajczyk Papers, Box 13, Folder 17, Hoover Institution Archives; *DOPSR*, vol. 2, docs. 248, 250, 259; TNA: CAB 121/454, Foreign Office to Moscow, 24 November 1944; *FRUS, 1944*, vol. 3, 1335–1336.

[143] TNA: CAB 121/454, Churchill to Roosevelt, 16 December 1944.

of the new Polish government would lead to serious difficulties with Stalin, Churchill maintained that Britain could not avoid granting recognition to the new government as long as Polish forces were fighting under British command. Eden agreed, noting that it was in Britain's 'own interests' to maintain relations with the government to which Polish forces owed allegiance.[144] Churchill explained to Stalin: 'We have practical matters to handle with the Polish Government, and more especially the control of the considerable Polish armed forces, over 80,000 excellent fighting men, under our operational command'.[145] As long as the British government continued to rely on these troops, it could not break off relations with the exile government.

On 4 January 1945, the Soviet Union recognised the PKWN as the provisional government of Poland, a clear signal that the Soviet authorities intended to have nothing more to do with the London government.[146] Britain publicly announced that it would continue to recognise the exile government, although it was anxious not to prolong circumstances in which Britain and the Soviet Union maintained relations with different Polish governments.[147] The Foreign Office briefly considered the possibility of pushing for Mikołajczyk's return to power in order to strengthen the exile administration. Officials quickly rejected this idea, concluding that since the Soviet recognition of the PKWN as the provisional government, an agreement between the Lublin and London governments was probably now out of the question. Sargent argued that in the circumstances the rebuilding of the London government would 'be throwing down the gauntlet to Stalin'. Instead he proposed that Britain ought to try to secure the inclusion in the Lublin government of Mikołajczyk and other political leaders while that still remained an option. 'This would mean', concluded Sargent, 'that instead of reinforcing the present London Government we would be prepared to see it disintegrate'.[148]

British policy was set out in a brief prepared by Warner just before the Yalta conference. He argued that with the Red Army on the verge of occupying all of Poland and placing the administration of the country in the

[144] TNA: FO 371/39418/C16777/8/G55, Churchill to Eden, 26 November 1944; Eden to Churchill, 26 November 1944.

[145] *Stalin's Correspondence*, vol. 1, doc. 362.

[146] TNA: FO 371/47576/N568/6/55, Soviet Communiqué of 5 January 1945.

[147] *DOPSR*, vol. 2, doc. 797, fn. 293.

[148] TNA: FO 371/47575/N198/6/G55, Foreign Office, Minutes, 8 January 1945.

hands of the Lublin government, Britain needed to reach an arrangement with the Soviets which would include some of the London Poles. Otherwise, he warned, 'we may expect that a ring-fence will be put round Poland and neither we nor the rest of the world will have any say in, or even any knowledge of, what happens there'. Britain's 'ultimate objective must clearly be to secure eventual free elections in Poland'. In order to achieve this, Britain must not be cut off from access to information from inside Poland. Secondly, it was essential that Britain reach an agreement with the Soviet Union on an interim regime in Poland which would be broadly representative and stable enough to avoid the risk of the country sliding into civil war. The interim government would also have to be 'sufficiently respectable and satisfactory … to enable us and the U.S… to transfer recognition to them without shocking public opinion here and in the States and without losing the loyalty of the Polish forces fighting with us'. Britain's objective should therefore be to secure Soviet agreement to a government containing adequate representation from the three centre and left-wing parties in Poland, including Mikołajczyk and a few other members of the London government.[149]

By the time of the Yalta conference, British policymakers were moving towards an acceptance that there would be some kind of postwar division in Europe into eastern and western spheres of interest. The rigidly divided, tightly controlled system which emerged by the late 1940s, however, was not envisioned. Eduard Mark and Warren Kimball argue that Roosevelt was willing to accept some form of 'open spheres', in which the Soviet Union would 'exercise only enough authority to protect its physical security' rather than establish a traditional sphere of influence, which would imply that it would also dominate the 'internal policies and economic affairs' of the constituent countries.[150] Folly argues that Churchill broadly shared this view. The percentages agreement concluded by Stalin and Churchill at Moscow is an indication of Churchill's thinking. Rather than an outright surrender to Soviet demands, the percentages agreement was

[149] Eden approved this memo, requesting that a copy be sent to Churchill and that another be brought to Yalta. TNA: FO 371/47577/N1038/6/G55, 'Brief on Poland', 27 January 1945.

[150] Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 169; Eduard Mark, 'American Policy Toward Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1946: An Alternative Interpretation', *Journal of American History* 68 (1981): 316–317.

intended to ensure that Britain and the US would continue to have some influence in the areas which were acknowledged as being of primary importance to the Soviets.[151] Although Poland had not been included in the percentages agreement, the British and the Americans adopted a similar approach here.

At Yalta, the issue of the Polish–Soviet frontier was finalised: the Curzon line with the exception of Lwów would constitute the border. The three powers established that Poland would receive substantial territorial compensation in the west, although the precise border was to be determined at the peace conference. The main dispute centred on the composition of the Polish government. The Soviet Union insisted that the provisional government form the nucleus of the new regime, with the addition of some representatives from the London government, while the British and Americans hoped to assemble an entirely new government.[152] The communiqué issued at the end of the conference was a compromise between the two positions, which stated that the provisional government already functioning in Poland should be reorganised 'on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad'. This new 'Polish Provisional Government of National Unity' would be pledged to hold 'free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot'.[153] Molotov, Averell Harriman (now US ambassador to Moscow), and Clark Kerr were to form a Three Power Commission to oversee the formation of the new government.[154]

The publication of the Yalta communiqué gave rise to serious protests from the Polish military authorities. Anders warned that the effect on troop morale in the Second Corps might be so serious as to necessitate their withdrawal from the line. Churchill responded by promising that no Polish troops would be repatriated against their will. He pledged that British citizenship would be granted and a 'refuge … somewhere in the

[151] Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 135; Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 67, 238–239.

[152] Churchill and Roosevelt had agreed at Malta that the Polish government should be entirely reconstituted. Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, doc. C-910.

[153] *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers. The Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1955), 508–509, 716–721, 842–843, 846–848, 850–854, 869–871, 973–974; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 252–271.

[154] TNA: FO 371/N1745/6/G55, Foreign Office to Moscow, February 18 1945.

British empire' for those soldiers who did not wish to return to Poland.[155] Churchill's promise has been interpreted—both at the time and in later historical accounts—as a tacit admission that Polish servicemen had good reason to fear returning home.[156] I would argue, however, that Churchill's promise arose from the mixture of personal obligation and political cynicism that characterised his approach to the Polish issue. Anders had threatened to withdraw his troops; Churchill knew this would be costly and disruptive to Allied military operations at a time when preparations were underway for the final push to defeat German forces in Italy. His promise regarding repatriation was an attempt to avert this outcome. His subsequent insistence that the pledge be upheld, on the other hand, suggests that his sense of moral duty—if unmet—was genuinely felt.

The Final Stage of Negotiations, Spring 1945

The Three Power Commission, set up at Yalta to iron out the details of the Polish settlement, encountered difficulties from the outset. Part of the problem lay in the vague language of the Yalta declaration, which the Soviet Union interpreted differently than did the Western allies. Stalin saw the agreement as 'a face-saving formula by which the Western powers accepted his control of Poland',[157] whereas Britain and the US considered the terms to constitute a genuine agreement.[158] From the first meeting, Molotov threw up a series of obstacles, including attempting to block Mikołajczyk from joining the new administration.[159] Churchill feared that Soviet obstructionism was a tactic to 'drag the business out

[155] TNA: WO 106/3973, VCIGS to Field Marshal Alexander, 13 February 1945; General Harding to Alexander, 14 February 1945; WO 214/54, General Paget to VCIGS, February 1945; Alexander to CIGS, February 1945; FO 371/47579/N1884/6/55, Record of a meeting between Churchill and Anders, 21 February 1945.

[156] For example, Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 507–508.

[157] Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 472. Kimball puts forth a similar argument. Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, 585–587.

[158] Churchill referred to 'misunderstandings … about the interpretation of the Yalta decisions' in a message to Roosevelt in late March, 1945. Similarly, he complained that Stalin 'persists in his view that the Yalta Communique merely meant the addition of a few other Poles to the existing administration of Russian puppets'. Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, docs. C-925, C-926.

[159] *FR US: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, Europe*, vol. 5 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 123–124, 134, 142–144, 147–150; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 490.

while the Lublin Committee consolidate their power',[160] that Molotov intended 'to make a farce of consultations with the "Non-Lublin Poles"—which means that the new government in Poland would be merely the present one dressed up to look more respectable'. Finally, he warned that if the British and American governments 'do not get things right now, it will soon be seen by the world that you and I by putting our signatures to the Crimea settlement have under-written a fraudulent prospectus'.[161]

The disagreement over the composition of the Polish government was exacerbated by the news that the Red Army had arrested 16 leaders of the underground, including the AK's former commander-in-chief, Colonel Leopold Okulicki.[162] With these arrests, the Soviet Union eliminated in one swoop the leaders of the non-communist political parties of the Polish underground. After Molotov confirmed the arrests, Eden and the US secretary of state, Edward Stettinius, announced on 5 May that in the circumstances, the Three Power Commission would not continue discussions on the Polish issue.[163] At the end of May, Roosevelt's successor, Harry Truman, sent his adviser, Harry Hopkins, to Moscow to try to breach the impasse. Hopkins succeeded in obtaining Stalin's agreement to invite Mikołajczyk, Grabski, or Jan Stańczyk,[164] as well as five independent Poles from inside the country, to Moscow for consultations with the Three Power Commission.[165] Mikołajczyk tentatively agreed to go to Moscow

[160] Messages to Stalin were sent on 29 March by the Americans and on 31 March by the British. Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, docs. R-730, C-929.

[161] Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, docs. C-925, C-926; *FRUS*, *1945*, vol. 5, 123–124, 134, 142–144, 147–150.

[162] The underground leaders went voluntarily to meet with NKVD representatives. According to Prażmowska, they hoped to secure the legalisation of the underground, so that it could take part in the political life of the liberated territories. The leaders included Jan Stanisław Jankowski and the chairman of the Council of National Unity, Kazimierz Pużak. On 27 and 28 March, they went to Pruszków, from where they were immediately taken to Moscow. Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 115–116.

[163] TNA: FO 371/47590/5247/6/55, Foreign Office Report, 7 May 1945; *DOPSR*, vol. 2, doc. 353.

[164] Stańczyk was the former minister of Labour and Social Welfare in the exile government.

[165] This list consisted of Adam Sapieha, archbishop of Kraków or Wincenty Witos, leader of the Peasant Party in Poland, Zygmunt Żuławski, Stanisław Kutrzeba, President of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Letters who had been imprisoned in Sachsenhausen, Henryk Kołodziejski, director of the *Sejm* Library and Adam Krzyżanowski, professor of economics at Jagellonian University.

under these terms but the matter of the underground leaders remained an obstacle.[166] Clark Kerr reported that Stalin could not be persuaded to release any of the arrested leaders in advance of consultations. The British government elected to proceed with the consultations anyway.[167]

Churchill pushed Mikołajczyk to go through with his decision to join the new Polish government. On 2 June, Churchill assured Truman that he was 'quite ready to put additional pressure on Mikołajczyk if he makes needless difficulties'.[168] On 6 June, Hopkins and Harriman reached a final agreement on the list of Poles to be invited to Moscow for consultations. Stalin refused to allow any of the substitutions requested by Mikołajczyk, and he would accept no more than three representatives from London.[169] Of these Mikołajczyk was the only politician of any standing.[170] Although the Foreign Office acknowledged that these terms represented a 'marked retreat from the position that we have hitherto held', Britain elected to approve the consultations anyway. Mikołajczyk and Stańczyk confirmed that they were still prepared to go, although Mikołajczyk declared that he had little hope for the Moscow discussions. He believed Stalin's exclusion of two of the four main political parties was an indication of the unlikelihood that a settlement would be reached. Privately, Foreign Office officials shared his doubts. Clark Kerr was instructed to give Mikołajczyk 'all the support we properly can in his difficult negotiations in Moscow'. Officials surmised that this was the least they could do given that 'this settlement will inevitably be "based upon" the present Warsaw Government'. Sargent noted: 'I do feel that we owe it to Mikołajczyk to see that he does receive encouragement and support from H.M. Ambassador in this forlorn adventure on which he is embarking at our instance'.[171] Just days before Mikołajczyk was due to leave for Moscow, the trial of the underground leaders opened. When

[166] TNA: FO 371/47592/N6293/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 1 June 1945 [first telegram]; Foreign Office to Washington, 2 June 1945; Churchill to Truman, 2 June 1945; N6381/6/55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 4 June 1945; *FRUS, 1945*, vol. 5, 299–317.

[167] TNA: FO 371/47592/N6293/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 1 June 1945 [second telegram]; N6369, Moscow to Foreign Office, 3 June 1945.

[168] TNA: FO 371/47592/N6293/6/55, Churchill to Truman, 2 June 1945.

[169] TNA: FO 371/47592/N6535/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 6 June 1945.

[170] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 114.

[171] TNA: FO 371/47593/N6696/6/55, Richard Law to Churchill, 8 June 1945; Foreign Office to Moscow, 9 June 1945; 10 Downing Street to Foreign Office, 9 June 1945; N6840/6/55, Foreign Office Minute, 13 June 1945.

Mikołajczyk baulked at this point, Churchill offered him the continued support of the British government if he went through with his plan to join the new Polish government.[172]

Formation of the New Polish Government

On 21 June, agreement was reached in the negotiations for the formation of the reorganised Polish provisional government of national unity (*Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej*—TRJN). It was to be composed of 20 members, with Mikołajczyk holding the positions of both vice-premier and minister of agriculture. In total, only six ministerial portfolios were assigned to Mikołajczyk and his supporters.[173] Bolesław Bierut, the leading member of the PPR central committee and chairman of the KRN, refused Mikołajczyk's appeal to eliminate the Ministry of Public Security (*Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego*—MBN), which had been established by the Soviet authorities and was supervised by an NKVD general, Ivan Alexandrovich Serov.[174] The MBN controlled the newly established security police (*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*—UB).[175]

Britain did not press harder for greater representation from opposition politicians for several reasons. First, Churchill, Eden, and the Northern Department believed that the PPR lacked popular support, was weak, and could not afford to exclude Mikołajczyk due to the overwhelming popularity of his party among the Polish population. This view was

[172] TNA: FO 371/66090/N658, Annex to 'British Policy Towards Poland—Mr Churchill's Conversation with M. Mikołajczyk, 15 June 1945'.

[173] Mikołajczyk also secured a promise that Karol Popiel, leader of the Labour Alliance (*Stronnictwo Pracy*—SP), which had been excluded from the talks at Soviet insistence, would be able to join the government at a later date. The National Alliance (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*—SN), which had also been excluded from the Moscow negotiations, was not represented in the new government. TNA: FO 371/47594/N7298/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; N7299/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; N7310/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; FO 371/47595/N7537/6/G55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 25 June 1945.

[174] The MBN's nominal head was the minister for public security, Stanisław Radkiewicz. He was considered ineffective, hence Serov's appointment as advisor. Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 121.

[175] John Micgiel, '"Bandits and Reactionaries": The Suppression of the Opposition in Poland, 1944–1946', in *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–1949*, eds. Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii (Oxford: Westview, 1997), 94.

strengthened by an admission by Bierut and Edward Osóbka-Morawski[176] that their position within Poland was not secure and that they needed Mikołajczyk and his party to lend legitimacy to the government. Bierut acknowledged—with considerable understatement—that 'the enthusiasm with which the Poles had welcomed [the] liberating Red Army had waned', giving way to discontent with the Soviets. Osóbka-Morawski, disclosed that conditions in Poland were 'chaotic'. Within the last few weeks, 700 Red Army men and 2,000 Warsaw government militiamen had been killed.[177]

Second, the Foreign Office believed that the inclusion of Mikołajczyk and his supporters would alter the character of the provisional government. While officials would have preferred a more even distribution of power between the two factions, they predicted that the inclusion of the opposition politicians would have the effect of moderating the approach of the PPR. Third, Mikołajczyk himself was satisfied with the arrangements.[178] He was 'facing the situation with calm confidence', wrote Clark Kerr. Foreign Office officials regarded Mikołajczyk as reasonable and practical; his conviction that popular support would allow the PSL to become the strongest political party in Poland reassured British officials that the Moscow agreement did not simply constitute a PPR takeover with a few cosmetic trimmings. Fourth, officials drew reassurance from apparent Soviet acceptance that Mikołajczyk would have an important and ongoing role in the future Polish government. Clark Kerr reported that Molotov had 'seemed well pleased with developments' and had been 'most affable to Mikolajczyk'. Northern Department officials thought that they detected the beginning of a change in the Soviet attitude towards Poland, although they were more cautious than Clark Kerr, and remained worried by reports of widespread arrests by the NKVD in Poland.[179] Finally, acceptance of the new government was the first step in the process of phasing out the former

[176] Osóbka-Morawski belonged to the Workers' Party of the Polish Socialists (RPPS—*Robotnicza Partia Polskich Socalistów*)—a splinter group of the PPS which had allied itself with the PPR. He was leader of the PKWN, 1944–1945.

[177] Bierut and Osóbka-Morawski made this statement to Mikołajczyk. Osóbka-Morawski repeated it to Clark Kerr directly. TNA: FO 371/47594/N7295/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; N7297/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945.

[178] TNA: FO 371/47595/N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 475; Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 142, 148.

[179] TNA: FO 371/47595/N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; N7508/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 2 July 1945.

Polish government-in-exile, whose continued presence in London was beginning to give rise to a range of difficulties for the British authorities. Britain granted recognition to the new government with effect from 6 July. Churchill's note specified that Britain considered recognition of the Yalta decisions to include the provision to hold free elections as soon as possible with the participation of all the democratic parties.[180]

Sargent's 'Stocktaking' Memorandum

In light of the ruthlessness with which Stalin later extended control over Poland, Churchill's decision to push Mikołajczyk into returning has been cast as a cynical act of sacrifice designed to ensure a superficially acceptable settlement of the Polish issue in order to avoid a political scandal for Britain. Again, however, this interpretation assumes that the pattern of Cold War hostility was already firmly set by the spring of 1945, usually as part of a narrative arc which sees the immediate post-Yalta period as the beginning of the end of the Grand Alliance, the point at which unilateral Soviet action in Red Army-occupied areas led the British to realise that collaboration with the Soviet Union would not extend past the end of the war.[181] There was a change in the language used both by Churchill and in the Foreign Office after Yalta, which has been interpreted as an indication that Britain was ready to break with the Soviets.[182] Officials began to refer to the need for a 'showdown' with the Soviet Union; Churchill made highly critical comments about the Soviets in his messages to Roosevelt.[183]

In the months following the Yalta conference, doubts certainly set in within the British policymaking establishment about Soviet intentions across Eastern Europe. It was here that Soviet actions 'generated most doubts and pessimism' and called into question the British thesis of a 'cooperative Soviet Union' most sharply. Misgivings about Soviet actions multiplied but did not bring about an abrupt reversal of British policy.

[180] TNA: FO 371/47596/N7711/6/55, Churchill to Osóbka-Morawski, 5 July 1945.

[181] For a summary of the evolution of the 'Yalta myth' in the British historiography of the origins of the Cold War see Donald Cameron Watt, 'Britain and the Historiography of the Yalta Conference and the Cold War', in *Yalta: un mito che resiste*, ed. Olla, 411–455.

[182] Warren Kimball, for instance, argues that the immediate post-Yalta period was a key juncture for Churchill. He argues that March 1945 was the point at which Churchill's 'ambivalence' towards the Soviet Union 'disappeared'. As evidence, Kimball cites Churchill's calls for the US and Britain to 'confront' the Soviets. *Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman*, 174, 181.

[183] Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 142–143, 158–159.

Rather, there was a reassessment and modification of the existing line of policy. The Foreign Office concluded that Soviet security objectives were more far-reaching than had initially been anticipated. But the extension of Soviet control over Poland was interpreted in the same way it had been for months: as the lynchpin in the Soviet *cordon sanitaire* against the possible resurgence of Germany, the Soviets could not risk an "unfriendly" Polish government, but now they were going to extreme lengths to prevent such an outcome. The Foreign Office concluded that the solution was to handle the Soviets more firmly. Britain needed to make clear to the Soviets that they could not simply disregard the views and interests of their allies. Soviet behaviour in the post-Yalta months generated considerable concern and uncertainty, but ultimately policymakers believed that a more robust approach could still succeed in compelling Soviet moderation, primarily because it was counting on allied assistance for its postwar reconstruction needs.[184]

This line of analysis is evident in Sargent's influential and much-scrutinised 'Stocktaking after VE Day' memorandum. Sargent's memo is sometimes regarded as an early milestone in the emergence of a Cold War mentality within the British policymaking establishment. Sargent did clearly acknowledge that relations with the Soviet Union had become more difficult, and that the Soviet military occupation of a large part of Eastern Europe was causing concern. He also cited the risk that Stalin's security obsession would drive him to establish 'an ideological Lebensraum in those countries he considers strategically important'. For the moment, however, the Soviet Union had 'been so weakened by the war' that Stalin was 'hardly in a position to force through ruthlessly his policy of ideological penetration against definite opposition'. Sargent saw evidence of Soviet restraint in Poland, where Stalin had 'not pressed matters to extreme and [had] actually compromised, though it may well be that he has only made a temporary retreat'. Sargent's recommendation was not for Britain to end the pursuit of cooperation with the Soviet Union, or to withdraw from involvement in Eastern Europe, but rather to take the initiative and challenge the Soviet Union over their actions across the region, in order to 'prevent the situation crystallising to our permanent detriment'.[185] Sargent also adamantly rejected the idea of a compromise agreement involving

[184] Ibid., 148–150, 160–161, 166.

[185] Sargent specifically referred to Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. He noted that 'perhaps for the moment Roumania and Hungary [are] beyond our reach'. TNA: FO 371/50912/U5471/5471/70, 'Memorandum by Sir O. Sargent', 11 July 1945.

British recognition of exclusive Soviet interests in certain countries: 'it is inconceivable that we should adopt this course'. In Sargent's view, Britain had to '[make] it abundantly clear to the Soviet Government that the policy of Anglo-Soviet co-operation must apply fully in Central and South-Eastern Europe as in the rest of the world'. At the same time, Britain should emphasise to the Soviets that 'this plain-speaking' was necessary in order to effect a change in Soviet behaviour precisely because Britain attached such great importance to continuing Anglo-Soviet cooperation.

Sargent's memorandum highlights the core assumptions that underpinned British policy towards Poland immediately after the war. First, it shows that the British were banking on ongoing cooperation with the Soviet Union. Although they were frankly worried about the direction of Soviet policy, the belief persisted that Soviet economic weakness would act as a kind of restraining hand on its foreign policy.[186] Sargent thought he already detected evidence of Soviet restraint in Poland, which suggests that Clark Kerr and the Foreign Office officials were sincere in their belief that the Soviet admission of Mikołajczyk into the provisional Polish government did constitute a shift—or at least the possibility of a shift—in Soviet policy towards Poland. Finally, in its outright rejection of the creation of exclusive spheres of interest in Europe, the memorandum clearly shows that Britain assumed that it still had a significant role in Eastern Europe generally and Poland specifically.

[186] Although Eden did begin to worry that the assumption that the Soviet Union was counting on Western assistance for its reconstruction needs had begun to be taken for granted. TNA: FO 371/50912/U5471/5471/70, Minute by Cadogan, 11 July 1945.

CHAPTER 3

From Potsdam to the Moscow Council of Foreign Ministers, July to December 1945

Introduction

At the end of July 1945 came a dramatic change in British politics with Labour's victory in the general election. Attlee and Bevin replaced Churchill and Eden part way through the Potsdam conference. Initially, Bevin took up exactly where his Conservative predecessors had left off as he continued to press the new Polish leaders to commit to a definite date for elections and the Soviets for a withdrawal of their troops from Polish territory.[1] By the end of the year, however, as relations with the Soviet Union became increasingly strained, Bevin sought to extricate the Polish issue from Anglo-Soviet relations. The orthodox interpretation of Bevin's policy holds that the foreign secretary was already edging towards the conclusion that ongoing cooperation with the Soviet Union would be impossible, and the only route to peaceful coexistence would be to accept the division of the continent into separate blocs, with Poland falling into that of the Soviets.[2] The reason for Bevin's rapid policy reversal is difficult

[1] TNA: FO 934/2/10, 'Record of a Meeting at the Prime Minister's Residence, Potsdam', 29 July 1945; 'Record of a Meeting at the Foreign Secretary's House, Potsdam', 31 July 1945.

[2] Francis Williams, *Ernest Bevin: Portrait of a Great Englishman* (London: Hutchinson, 1952), 262; Weiler, *Ernest* Bevin, 153; Harris, *Attlee*, 292–293; Bill Jones, *The Russia Complex: the British Labour Party and the Soviet Union* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 115–116; Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe*, 50–51, 54–55; Deighton, 'Entente Neo-Coloniale', 843.

A. Mason, *British Policy Towards Poland, 1944–1956*, Security, Conflict and Cooperation in the Contemporary World,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94241-4_3

to explain with absolute certainty, but it is possible to piece together a picture of the constraints and considerations that influenced his approach to the Polish issue. Rather than resigning himself immediately to the establishment of spheres of interest, at this stage Bevin still hoped that better Anglo-Soviet relations could be restored. Until then it was prudent to limit the number of points of contention between the two states. The importance of avoiding conflict with the Soviet Union seemed essential to Bevin, particularly given the uncertainty regarding American postwar intentions. At this point, Bevin had very low expectations of long-term American involvement in Europe. The abrupt termination of Lend–Lease in August 1945 seemed to signal a US intention to withdraw back into semi-isolation. Uncertainty about American intentions heightened Bevin's sense of the importance of keeping relations with the Soviets on an even keel.[3] Further, although imprecise, Bevin was pursuing some form of cooperation with the European states, a plan whose success depended on the maintenance of a working relationship with the Soviet Union.

The second half of 1945 marked the beginning of a divergence between the foreign secretary and his officials over the Polish question. Bevin's move to compartmentalise the Polish issue was at odds with the views of the Foreign Office and the British embassy in Warsaw. Both the embassy and the Northern Department strongly urged that the issue be raised directly with the Soviets. Already by the end of the summer the course of events in Poland had become a source of serious concern for the Foreign Office. Once staff had been dispatched to the newly re-established embassy in Warsaw,[4] British diplomats could observe first-hand what was happening in Poland, rather than relying on reports from the Polish underground. Soviet involvement in Poland was evident: NKVD officers were attached to the Polish security police and the Red Army was an obvious presence.[5]

[3] Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, 277; Anne Deighton, *The Impossible Peace: Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 41; Trevor Burridge, *Clement Attlee: A Political Biography* (London: Cape, 1985), 221.

[4] Due to the systematic destruction of Warsaw during the war, there was an extreme shortage of space and the British embassy was initially a makeshift arrangement on the fourth floor of the Hotel Polonia. The hotel had been used as a German military headquarters and had therefore not been destroyed after the uprising. Patrick Howarth, *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary: The Life of the Ninth Duke of Portland* (London: The Bodley Head, 1986), 206.

[5] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 119–122.

The embassy staff, led by some very senior diplomats with prewar experience of Poland, including the ambassador, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck,[6] and Robin Hankey, the chargé d'affaires,[7] were quick to perceive the ruthlessness with which the Soviet-backed PPR was suppressing its political opponents.[8] The Foreign Office Northern Department concurred with the Warsaw embassy that political freedom in Poland was eroding rapidly. Although they initially believed that the PPR's slim proportion of popular support would oblige the party to cooperate with the PSL, they soon recognised that if left unchecked, it meant to exclude its opponents from government and establish one-party rule.

The more interventionist policy advocated by the Foreign Office was at odds with Bevin's insistence on dealing with the Polish issue outside the framework of Anglo-Soviet relations. The Foreign Office files reveal the emergence of a "tug-of-war" dynamic between Bevin and his officials, with the Northern Department and the Warsaw embassy continually pushing Bevin towards a direct approach to the Soviets over the Polish issue, while the Foreign Secretary repeatedly pulled back. Ultimately, in spite of repeated attempts and sometimes considerable frustration, officials were obliged to defer to Bevin.

Potsdam Conference

By July 1945, when the Potsdam conference opened, the British military government was already struggling to cope with the difficulties in Britain's northwestern zone of occupation, which included some of the most devastated cities, along with the highest concentrations of urban population, displaced persons, and the most serious food shortages. In order to restore

[6] Cavendish-Bentinck served in the British legation at Warsaw from September 1919 to January 1922, with the rank of third, and then second, secretary. Born in 1897, he had worked in the Foreign Service from the age of 18, with postings in Paris, the Hague, Athens, and Santiago. He had spent the war years in the Foreign Office, serving as chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee for most of the period.

[7] Hankey had served in the Warsaw embassy from November 1936 until the outbreak of war in September 1939. He was posted to Warsaw again as chargé d'affaires in the summer of 1945.

[8] Patrick Howarth, who served as press attaché in the Warsaw embassy after the war described its staff as being 'of outstanding quality'. *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary*, 206. John Colville noted that Hankey 'spoke Polish well' and described John Russell, second secretary in the embassy, as an 'able and vigorous diplomat'. John Colville, *Strange Inheritance* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1983), 176–177.

the region to self-sufficiency, German industry had to return to production and trade had to resume with the areas under Soviet occupation which had always been a vital source of foodstuffs and raw materials for western Germany. Otherwise, the British occupation authorities would be faced with famine and epidemics of disease in their zone.[9]

The difficulties in the British occupation zone were exacerbated by the Soviet transfer of the territory east of the Oder and western Neisse rivers—an area amounting to 21 per cent of German territory including the entire province of Silesia—to a semi-official Polish administration. Apart from the Soviet violation of the Yalta agreement—which stipulated that the final delimitation of the Polish–German frontier would await the peace conference—the permanent transfer of this territory to Poland would create two immediate problems in the British zone. First, the entire ethnic German population from the areas to be ceded to Poland (approximately eight and a quarter million people) would have to be resettled, many of them in the British zone. Second, the area would be withdrawn from the authority of the Allied Control Commission (ACC) in Germany, thereby excluding it from the area from which reparations could be drawn, reducing the total area from which the British and Americans could obtain food supplies for western Germany, as well as the raw materials needed to restart production.[10] For these reasons it was in Britain's interest for the border to be set as far to the east as possible. This was the objective Churchill initially pursued when discussion of the Polish–German frontier opened at Potsdam. Churchill argued strenuously against the cession of this territory, objecting to having 'a mass of people dumped' into the British zone.[11]

[9] Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K.G.* (London: Fontana, 1958), 365; Michael Balfour and John Mair, *Four-Power Control in Germany and Austria, 1945–1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 7; Christopher Knowles, 'The British Occupation of Germany, 1945–1949', *The RUSI Journal*, 158, no. 6: 85.

[10] TNA: FO 371/47592/N6328/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 5–15 June 1945; FO 371/47593/N6767/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 9 June 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 14 June 1945.

[11] *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers. The Conference of Berlin (Potsdam), 1945*, vol. 2 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1960), 209–221; Rohan Butler et al., eds., *Documents on British Policy Overseas* (hereafter: *DBPO*), *Series I, vol. 1: The Conference at Potsdam, July—August 1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1984), no. 219, p. 511.

In addition to alleviating the pressure on the British occupation authorities, the Polish–German border issue also presented an opportunity to extract concessions from the Soviet and Polish governments by linking British acceptance of the territorial desiderata to guarantees of political freedom inside Poland. The westward extension of the Polish–German frontier was of the very highest importance to the PPR. The acquisition of this territory would do much to enhance the new government's prestige among the population, as well as serving to boost the country's economy.[12] By this time, Foreign Office officials were growing alarmed by reports of PPR attempts to exclude the opposition parties from the elections, as well as an attempt to force the PSL to merge with the communist-sponsored Peasant Alliance (SL).[13] Churchill's initial strategy at the conference was to use the border issue as a means of leverage in order to secure political concessions from the PPR, specifically the promise to hold early elections with the full participation of the opposition parties. Churchill and Eden held a series of meetings with representatives of the provisional Polish government at the conference. The British remained unconvinced by the new administration's promise that Poland would 'develop on the principles of Western democracy'.[14] The Foreign Office recommended that Churchill and Eden should link British acceptance of Poland's territorial desiderata to the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the NKVD, and the establishment of 'proper internal political conditions in Poland … if as is possible M. Bierut's airy words amount to nothing'.[15]

Churchill and Eden left the conference on 25 July and returned to London for the next day's announcement of the results of the general election. The Conservative party was defeated and Attlee and Bevin took

[12] TNA: FO 371/47601/N9024/6/G55, Sargent to Cadogan, 24 July 1945.

[13] TNA: FO 371/47603/N9609/6/G55, Allen to Warner, 25 July 1945; N9720/6/G55, Foreign Office Meeting at the Foreign Secretary's Residence, 25 July 1945; FO 371/47602/N9107/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 23 July 1945; N9170/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 24 July 1945; FO 371/47601/N8963/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 July 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 21 July 1945.

[14] TNA: FO 371/47602/N9389/6/G55, Potsdam, 24 July 1945; N9536/6/G55, 24 July 1945; Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), LEGT 1/1, Leggett diary, 22 June, 25 and 29 July 1945; Richard Leggett, Obituary of George Leggett, (n.d.) http://www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/alumni/keeping-in-touch/obituaries/detail.asp?ItemID=2328 [accessed 27 March 2014]; TNA: FO 371/47603/N9536/6/G55, 25 July 1945.

[15] TNA: FO 371/47603/N9536/6/G55, Allen to Warner, 25 July 1945; Warner to Sargent, 27 July 1945; FO 371/47603/N9539/6/G55, Sargent to Cadogan, 30 July 1945.

over at Potsdam. Initially, Bevin adopted an uncompromising approach to the Polish question. He managed, for instance, to pin Bierut down to holding elections no later than early 1946.[16] Ultimately, Bevin made his decision on the Polish–German border based on discussions with Mikołajczyk. The frontier issue was politically important not only for the PPR but also for the PSL. There was widespread support for a border further to the west among the Polish population; it would therefore have been politically disadvantageous to the PSL, the party with strong links to the West, if the British and Americans disputed the frontier demarcation. Mikołajczyk told Bevin that Anglo-American agreement to the proposed frontier would help to discredit the PPR's argument that the West was hostile to Poland. Mikołajczyk also stressed the advantage for the PSL of early elections, which could only be conducted freely once the Red Army and the NKVD had withdrawn from Polish territory, but the Soviets would not budge from the disputed area until a firm decision had been reached on the exact demarcation of the frontier. In Mikołajczyk's view, elections had to be held swiftly in order to secure Poland's political independence. 'Poland will be independent if we have speedy elections; the elections in turn are dependent upon the fixing of the frontiers and the removal of Soviet troops from Polish territory'.[17] On 31 July, Bevin agreed to accept the border, with the proviso that final agreement on the demarcation line must await the peace conference.[18]

Bevin's decision to accept the border serves as an important indication of his thinking about Poland's political future when he first came to office. That he shifted from a determination to withhold recognition which matched Churchill's to a policy of acceptance following discussions with Mikołajczyk shows that he was not prepared to consign Poland to a Soviet

[16] CAC, LEGT 1/1, Leggett diary, 29 and 30 July 1945; *FRUS Potsdam*, vol. 2, 382–390, 471–476, 484–492, 500–501, 518–520; TNA: FO 371/47603/N9922/6/G55, Record of a Meeting at the Foreign Secretary's House, Potsdam, 31 July 1945.

[17] TNA: FO 371/47603/N9720/6/G55, 25 July 1945; N9659/6/G55, Clark Kerr to Bevin, 30 July 1945; Record of Conversation between Bevin and Mikołajczyk, 31 July 1945. Mikołajczyk had also repeated the same points in a private meeting with Eden. CAC, LEGT 1/1, Leggett diary, 25 and 26 July 1945; TNA: FO 371/47603/N9720/6/G55, Record of a meeting between Eden and Mikołajczyk, 25 July 1945; Clark Kerr to Eden, 26 July 1945; N9659/6/G55, Clark Kerr to Bevin, 30 July 1945.

[18] TNA: FO 371/47603/N9922/6/G55, Record of a meeting between the British and Polish delegations, 31 July 1945.

sphere. If that had been the case, Bevin would have prioritised the aim of limiting the area under *de facto* Soviet control, particularly given the not inconsequential ramifications for the British occupation zone of Germany. Bevin's willingness to assist Mikołajczyk indicates that he regarded the PSL as a significant political force which would be an essential part of any viable Polish administration. He was prepared to follow through on Churchill's commitment and throw Britain's weight behind the PSL in its power struggle against the PPR in order to see the establishment of a freely elected government in Poland.[19]

Bevin's instructions to Cavendish-Bentinck before the ambassador's departure for Warsaw reinforce this interpretation of the new foreign secretary's initial conception of British postwar policy towards Poland. Bevin cautioned that he was 'by no means convinced' that the PPR intended to 'establish a truly representative régime' in Poland. On the contrary, Bevin's impression was that the communists aimed to establish 'a regime much nearer to the Soviet model'. He instructed the new ambassador to do all he could to support the opposition factions led by Mikołajczyk in their efforts to establish a democratic, representative government in Poland with freedom for all parties to participate in the elections. 'It is my intention to use every lever that may be available to this end', Bevin asserted. Bevin also called up Churchill's promise to support Mikołajczyk, emphasising that it had not expired when Churchill left office; it was a promise which transcended party politics. Accordingly, Cavendish-Bentinck 'should not hesitate' to insist on Britain's right to be kept fully informed of the situation in Poland, especially 'regarding everything relating to the creation of conditions for the holding of elections' on the basis laid down in the Yalta agreement. Further, Cavendish-Bentinck could be open about Mikołajczyk and Stańczyk's 'special position' in the regard of the British government.[20] Thus, when Bevin first took office, it is clear that he envisioned an active, interventionist approach to policy in Poland—an approach very much in line with that of his officials.

[19] Andrea Mason, 'The UK, Poland, and the future of Germany', in *Reconciliation, Partnership, Security: Cooperation between Poland and Germany, 1991–2016*, ed. Karina Paulina Marczuk (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2016), 24.

[20] TNA: FO 371/47706/10656/211/55, Bevin to Cavendish-Bentinck, 23 August 1945.

British Policy After the Transfer of Recognition

British attempts to intervene in Poland's domestic political situation were complicated by the ongoing presence of the former Polish government-in-exile, which remained in London after the war. Following the transfer of recognition, the Foreign Office had to contend with a cascade of administrative and logistical matters arising from the liquidation of a government which had operated in London for five years. At the beginning of July 1945, Britain effectively took on the role of caretaker for all the functions previously carried out by the government-in-exile. As a result, British officials were immediately drawn into conflict with the Polish provisional government, which sought to muscle in on all the affairs of the former exile administration. British insistence on staving off interference by the new Polish government raised the ire of Warsaw and embroiled the British in lengthy and often acrimonious disputes. The new Polish government accused Britain of dishonourably persisting in propping up the exile administration, taking advantage of geographical circumstances to deny the Warsaw regime access to the property, funds, accounts, records, and citizens to which it considered itself rightfully entitled. In some instances—particularly in cases concerning government assets—this irritation was genuinely felt. Often, however, the Polish government used these disputes as a pretext to deflect criticism, terminating any discussion of the internal situation in Poland with accusations that Britain had reneged on existing agreements by continuing to support the exile government. Frequent complaints appear in the Foreign Office files about the Polish tactic of derailing any attempts by British officials to discuss internal abuses with a litany of often hyperbolic or invented grievances against Britain. Britain's position as unofficial arbiter in the transfer of power between the exile and provisional governments thus complicated British interventions in the Polish domestic political situation.

The Foreign Office sent definitive instructions to its foreign legations about a month after the transfer of recognition. The guidelines issued were clearly aimed at removing authority from officials of the former London government while simultaneously trying to stave off interference by the new government. In order to counter accusations from Warsaw that the British government was supplying the former government-in-exile with funds to carry on propaganda campaigns against Warsaw and Moscow, the Foreign Office was anxious to show that funding provided by Britain was limited to essential welfare services. An Interim Treasury

Committee (ITC) for Polish Questions was established in July to administer the affairs and liquidate the machinery of the former Polish government. The committee, chaired by Wilfrid Eady, second secretary of the Treasury, was also charged with ensuring that Polish civilians in Britain and abroad who had been dependent administratively and financially upon the London government should not suffer as a result of the disappearance of the former exile government.[21] Polish foreign missions were to limit their staff to the absolute minimum necessary to administer the camps, schools, and hospitals under their control. All these facilities were to be regarded as under the jurisdiction of the ITC. Similarly, Polish officials of the former London government had their diplomatic status withdrawn. On the other hand, representatives of the Warsaw government were not to be authorised to take part in the administration of Polish welfare organisations without the approval of the ITC.[22]

The most contentious issue in the triangular relationship between Britain, Warsaw, and the former exile government was that of the future of the Polish armed forces. When Britain transferred recognition from the exile to the provisional government, the British government inherited responsibility for almost a quarter of a million Polish servicemen who had served under British operational command.[23] Churchill's spontaneous post-Yalta promise that no Polish servicemen would be forced to return to Poland had not been accompanied by any detailed planning.[24] The Foreign Office was left to devise a strategy to facilitate repatriation, or settlement in Britain or its empire, for these servicemen, whose numbers were augmented by their dependants who were living in refugee camps mainly in the Middle East and British East Africa at war's end.[25] The problem of this

[21] TNA: FO 371/47597/N7778/6/G55, Sargent to Churchill, 29 June 1945; FO 371/47598/N8230/6/55, Foreign Office to Istanbul, 10 July 1945.

[22] TNA: FO 371/47602/N9109/6/55, Secretary of State for Colonies to Kenya, Uganda, Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika Territory, Palestine, 28 July 1945.

[23] Anita Prażmowska, 'Polish Refugees as Military Potential: Policy Objectives of the Polish Government in Exile', in *Refugees in the Age of Total War*, ed. Anna C. Bramwell (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 219.

[24] TNA: WO 106/3973, VCIGS to Field Marshal Alexander, 13 February 1945; General Harding to Alexander, 14 February 1945; WO 214/54, General Paget to VCIGS, February 1945; Alexander to CIGS, February 1945; FO 371/47579/N1884/6/55, Record of a meeting between Churchill and Anders, 21 February 1945.

[25] Most of these refugees were the dependants of Polish servicemen who had ended the war as part of the Polish Second Corps, led by Anders. "Anders's army" had been formed in the Soviet Union in 1941. It was composed of former prisoners of war who had been deported

overwhelming number of displaced people—most of whom had assumed that their dislocation would be temporary, but who were now facing permanent exile—was an enormous challenge, which was exacerbated by the competing claims of the former exile government and the new provisional government in Warsaw for jurisdiction over these people. When representatives of the Polish provisional government began to demand control of refugee camps and contact with Polish forces, the British government was unprepared. Having assumed responsibility for the welfare of these displaced Poles, the Foreign Office had no desire for the added complication of involving the Warsaw government. British officials instinctively sought to stave off interference with Polish citizens under British jurisdiction and insisted on retaining the officials from the former exile government who made possible the administration of essential services for this large number of people. At the same time, the British government was at pains to show that it was not continuing to support the exile government as a rival authority to Warsaw.

The ongoing existence of a fully equipped and organised Polish fighting force led by a virulently anti-communist officer corps under British command and to which Britain persistently denied Warsaw access created tension in Britain's relationship with the provisional Polish government. Britain intended to brook no interference by the Warsaw government with Polish troops under its jurisdiction. At the same time, there was no desire to exacerbate the tension in Britain's relationship with the provisional government by giving free rein to the Polish high command. The British government was obliged to refute a volley of accusations from Warsaw that Britain was conspiring against the new government with its enemies by continuing to provide assistance to the Polish underground. There was

to the Soviet Union after the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland, as well as from the approximately 1.5 million Polish civilians who had been deported to work in Soviet labour camps and collective farms beginning in February 1940. In 1942, Anders's army was evacuated from the Soviet Union to Persia, where they came under British jurisdiction. The number amounted to over 115,000 Polish servicemen and their dependants. The troops were placed under the authority of the British Middle East command and moved to Palestine, where they were merged with General Kopański's Carpathian brigade and formed the Second Corps. The majority of the women and children were in camps in British East Africa by the end of the war. The overall number of Polish refugees under British jurisdiction was increased by Polish forced labourers in Germany who ended up in displaced persons camp, as well as Polish POWs captured by the Germans, and, finally approximately 2,000 inmates of German concentration camps. Keith Sword, *Identity in Flux: The Polish Community in Britain* (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1996), 23–25.

suspicion that Polish forces in Italy had provided supplies to the underground, thus provoking the protests from Warsaw. After this incident, which was followed closely by a proposal from the Polish high command to further build up their forces with a view to challenging the Soviet Union, the British government moved quickly to reduce the influence of the Polish high command. The War Office Allied Forces Committee had already withdrawn recognition of Bór-Komorowski as commander-in-chief of the Polish army and of General Kukiel as minister of national defence. The Ministry of National Defence was to be liquidated entirely. On 13 July, Anders's request for permission to transfer 12,000 men from camps in France to the Polish Second Corps in Italy was refused. On 17 July, a formal ban was instituted on any further expansion of the corps.[26] A British military liaison mission was to be placed in the General Staff Headquarters to ensure that the British government had proper supervisory control over all the activities of the Polish high command.[27] By 19 July, all units of the Polish armed forces in the UK and overseas had been brought under the direct control of the War Office in Britain and British theatre commanders abroad.[28]

The chaos which arose in the aftermath of the transfer of recognition absorbed a large amount of the attention of the Foreign Office. The issue of the Polish armed forces has, however, been used to explain British reluctance to intervene in internal Polish affairs after the war. According to this line of argument, the British government pursued a deliberate and consistent policy of minimising the seriousness of the internal situation in Poland in order to avoid discouraging servicemen and their families from returning.[29] Repatriation for as many as possible was certainly the preferred British option, and officials were at times frustrated and overwhelmed by the scale of the task before them, giving rise to despairing or annoyed comments in the internal correspondence. But these occasional expressions of irritation should not be read as a guide to British policy. Rather than serving as a disincentive to intervene in Polish domestic affairs, the desire of the British to divest themselves of the burden of responsibility for the Polish troops added to the importance of ensuring an improvement in conditions in Poland.

[26] Hope, *Abandoned Legion*, 81, 95.

[27] TNA: FO 371/47598/N8209/6/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 10 July 1945.

[28] TNA: FO 371/47600/N8854/6/G55, Foreign Office to Terminal, 19 July 1945; N8686/6/55, Foreign Office to Tehran, 20 July 1945.

[29] Ostrowski, 'Return to Poland', 16, 190–192; Hope, *Abandoned Legion*, 13.

By early August, the Foreign Office had settled on a policy which conformed to Churchill's pledge while still aiming to repatriate the greatest possible number of Poles. The Foreign Office concluded that it would be justified in actively encouraging Polish citizens to opt for repatriation if the Polish government could be prevailed upon to promise favourable conditions for returnees.[30] In a memorandum of 9 August, Warner argued that Britain must obtain from the Warsaw government assurances as to the situation which repatriated Poles could expect to find upon their return. According to Warner, 'these Poles [must] have an opportunity of making a proper decision, in full knowledge of the facts and do not through the fault of His Majesty's Government suffer unnecessarily owing to any mishandling of the very complicated business of arranging for a proper choice'. To this end, the Foreign Office requested that the Warsaw government furnish the fullest possible statement of the conditions to be offered for all those who returned. It should contain definite pledges covering the Potsdam assurances. The Warsaw government should be encouraged to proceed with its plans to issue an amnesty, which should be as far-reaching as possible in order to reassure potential returnees who had supported the London Polish government. If Warsaw could be persuaded to provide these guarantees, Britain would have honoured its commitment to the ex-servicemen, as well as divesting itself of the responsibility for providing for a large proportion of them.[31]

It soon became clear to the Foreign Office, however, that the Warsaw government was using the issue of the unrepatriated troops as a stalling tactic to avoid discussion of serious internal issues. The Warsaw government had no desire to see the return of large numbers of servicemen who would bolster support for the PSL. Three weeks of talks in London with a Polish military mission under General Izydor Modelski on the repatriation issue brought no progress because the Polish military leaders would not agree to accept all those who wished to return. Warner noted that the Polish government sought the return only of those troops who would support the PPR. He dismissed as a 'propaganda line' the claim that Warsaw sought to repatriate Polish troops 'en masse' and were only prevented from doing so by British sluggishness coupled with interference by the former government-in-exile. Warner concluded that the repatriation

[30] Ostrowski, 'Return to Poland', 16.

[31] TNA: FO 371/47603/N10002/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 8 August 1945; FO 371/47604/N10153/6/G55, Warner Memorandum, 9 August 1945.

issue had become an excuse for the Polish government to delay elections. When Cavendish-Bentinck had pressed Bierut on the timing of the elections, reminding him that he had committed at Potsdam that they would be held not later than February, Bierut had replied that they could not take place until the Poles who were abroad had returned home. As a result of the slow progress of repatriation, at the present rate it would not be possible to hold elections until the middle of 1946. Warner noted that the War Office could actually repatriate Polish troops much faster if the Polish government were prepared to accelerate their reception. Mikołajczyk confirmed Warner's interpretation and added that the Polish government was anxious not to have the troops sent back armed and organised in their units. He advised Bevin and Warner to press ahead with the repatriation preparations in spite of the obstacles thrown up by Modelski's mission.[32]

Internal Situation in Poland

After the Potsdam conference, the British government sought to extend its support to Mikołajczyk as the struggle between the PSL and the PPR escalated. The Foreign Office had been alarmed by the news that the PPR had forced Popiel out as leader of the Labour party, instituting instead Felczak, the leader of the pro-communist dissident faction of the party. 'This is pretty shocking', minuted Warner. '[I]f Bierut & co. bring off this manoeuvre … and the similar manoeuvre which we understand from M. Mikołajczyk they are trying to put over in regard to the Peasant Party, there will be no real representation of three out of the four recognised democratic parties in Poland.'[33] Mikołajczyk had made clear at Potsdam that the strength of the PSL lay in 'the belief on the part of his Communist colleagues, that His Majesty's Government were wholly behind him'. Clark Kerr had impressed this point upon Bevin, stressing that 'Mikołajczyk gather[ed] prestige from every moment he spen[t] in [Bevin's] presence'. The Foreign Office suggested making use of the Polish government's expressed desire to see the rapid repatriation of the armed forces and the return of the merchant marine as a way of applying pressure on the provi-

[32] TNA: FO 371/47612/N15517/6/55, Warner memo, 7 November 1945; FO 371/47612/N15847/6/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 17 November 1945; Warner memo, 15 November 1945.

[33] TNA: FO 371/47604/N10216/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 8 August 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 12 and 14 August 1945.

sional government to fulfil the assurances given at Potsdam concerning political freedom in Poland.[34]

At this point, however, Mikołajczyk believed his position to be strong enough that he could withstand the pressure from the PPR without the application of sanctions by Britain. On 15 August, Roberts was able to catch a few minutes alone with Mikołajczyk at a reception at the Polish embassy in Moscow. Mikołajczyk explained that the PSL's position had been bolstered by Anglo-American acceptance of Poland's western frontier, while at the same time the PPR 'was getting very little from their Russian friends'. The Soviets were insisting on further modifications of the Curzon line in their own favour; an apparently generous offer of a 15 per cent share in Soviet reparations from Germany had been negated by Soviet insistence on large deliveries of goods from Poland in exchange; and the Red Army was continuing to strip the country as it withdrew. 'As a result of the above developments Bierut and his friends were seriously embarrassed'. Mikołajczyk said that a statement by Attlee or Bevin at the earliest opportunity in Parliament recapitulating assurances given by Bierut in Moscow and Berlin would be very helpful. If the situation had not improved in a month or two, then the application of sanctions would be useful. Mikołajczyk urged the British government not to use the repatriation issue as a weapon against the PPR. Western influence in Poland would be enhanced and Mikołajczyk's own position improved with the swift return of the greatest number possible. He was afraid that if time were lost on this issue, Bierut might fill the vacant lands with 'so-called Poles' from the Soviet Union.[35] In fact, Mikołajczyk urged the British government not to be waylaid by the Polish government's stalling tactics over the repatriation of Polish servicemen. He predicted that the Polish government 'would not dare to obstruct further' if Britain announced that all the arrangements, including transport, had been finalised for the return of the troops.[36]

In spite of Mikołajczyk's confidence, conditions deteriorated in Poland throughout the summer and fall of 1945. In early September, Cavendish-Bentinck summarised the political situation in Poland. The assurances given by the Polish government at Moscow and Potsdam had not been

[34] TNA: FO 371/47604/N10153/6/G55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 8 August 1945 (Cabinet distribution); FO 371/47603/N9659/6/G55, Clark Kerr to Bevin, 31 July 1945.
[35] TNA: FO 371/47604/N10503/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 16 August 1945.
[36] TNA: FO 371/47612/N15847/6/55, Warner memo, 15 November 1945.

carried out despite a series of warnings from Cavendish-Bentinck.[37] Arrests of opponents of the PPR were continuing. Soviet forces remained scattered across Poland, providing support for the activities of the Polish security police, which was in turn directed by the NKVD. These NKVD advisors constituted 'the backbone of police terror', directing the arrests that were occurring daily.[38] Hankey described the country as a '*polizeistaat*'.[39] British efforts to secure an amnesty for former members of the Polish underground army had amounted to little. The upshot would be the release of some 4,000 persons incarcerated on political charges. Given that the number of persons being held for political reasons was approximately 40,000, and given that the term 'political crimes' was itself 'elastic', the Foreign Office concluded that the amnesty would only 'touch the fringes of the problem' and was 'worthless from the political standpoint'.[40]

A few days later, Cavendish-Bentinck reported on a disturbing speech by the vice-minister of justice in which he declared that the 'courts of justice must state decisively on whose side they will be in their everyday work. They must understand that there is no room for courts of justice which have regard for formal truth.' The vice-minister had threatened that if the courts refused to 'take up a firm attitude in the interests of the vital matters of the state', the government would be compelled to establish others in their place. Cavendish-Bentinck maintained that the PPR leaders were 'totalitarian in mind' and would 'not abandon power without a struggle'. They would do their utmost to ensure that the election results were in their favour, and if they did not obtain the desired outcome, they would 'stage some *coup de main*' in order to hang on to power. The PPR had already proposed that all political parties should agree upon a list of candidates to be submitted to the electorate—the 'electoral bloc'—which would inevitably be arranged so as to ensure that the PPR and the parties affiliated to it would hold a majority. If the PSL leadership acquiesced to pressure from the PPR and joined the bloc, warned Cavendish-Bentinck, the

[37] TNA: FO 371/47606/N11434/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 1 September 1945; N11773/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 5 September 1945.

[38] TNA: FO 371/47606/N11832/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 7 September 1945.

[39] TNA: FO 371/56446/N10739/96/55, Hankey to Warner, 17 August 1945.

[40] The amnesty came into force on 21 August. TNA: FO 371/47606/N11549/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 3 September 1945; FO 371/47607/N12044/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 8 September 1945; N12045/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 13 September 1945.

Polish government would be able to claim that free elections had taken place and Britain would 'have no further *locus standi* for intervention in Polish internal politics and would have to watch the Communists gradually strangle their political opponents'.[41]

Council of Foreign Ministers, London

The London Council of Foreign Ministers[42] marked the beginning of the split between Bevin and his officials on the Polish issue. In view of the deterioration of conditions inside Poland, Cavendish-Bentinck and the Foreign Office proposed the tabling of a resolution at the meeting committing the four powers 'to assure complete equality of treatment to all democratic parties in Poland', which Bevin accepted.[43] This initial determination to take a strong line on the internal situation in Poland dissipated as the atmosphere at the Council quickly soured due to disagreement over the peace treaties for the Balkan states. The prevailing tension—as well as lack of American support for the initiative—prompted Bevin to shelve the resolution on Poland. Alarmed by this retreat, Cavendish-Bentinck strongly urged the British delegation to push ahead and table the resolution. Mikołajczyk had recently requested that the Council issue a public statement reaffirming the Yalta agreement and expressing a resolve that the forthcoming elections in Poland would take place freely with full liberty for all democratic parties with supervision by representatives of the three Yalta signatories. Cavendish-Bentinck warned that if the resolution were not tabled, Bierut and his followers would conclude that Britain had 'lost interest in Poland'.[44]

[41] TNA: FO 371/47607/N12148/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 12 September 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 19 September 1945.

[42] The Council of Foreign Ministers was set up at the Potsdam conference. Its purpose was to carry out the preliminary negotiations for a formal peace settlement.

[43] TNA: FO 371/47606/N11832/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 7 September 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 9 September 1945; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 9 September 1945; N11856/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 11 September 1945; FO 371/47608/N12801/6/55, Osóbka-Morawski to Bevin, 8 September 1945; FO 371/47606/N11921/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 10 September 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 11 September 1945; Sargent to Bevin, 11 September 1945; FO 371/47608/N12851/6/55, 'Brief for discussion on Poland in Council of Foreign Ministers', 15 September 1945.

[44] TNA: FO 371/47608/N12609/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 17 September 1945; Warsaw to Foreign Office, 18 September 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 22 September 1945; N12827/6/55, Warner to Cavendish-Bentinck, 22 September 1945; N12851/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 15–20 September 1945.

The Foreign Office agreed that the opportunity to raise the Polish issue in the formal context of the Council should not be missed. Three times officials returned to the idea of the resolution, but on each occasion, Bevin rejected their suggestions. On 22 September, he responded: 'I am against this', when Sargent suggested that the resolution could be tabled if the atmosphere at the conference were to improve. Then, at the end of September, as the meeting drew to a tense and unsatisfactory close, Sargent again proposed raising the question of Poland, noting that it was doubtful whether this could make the atmosphere any worse than it already was. Sargent suggested that Bevin and US Secretary of State, James Byrnes, inform Molotov that they intended to instruct their respective ambassadors to protest to the Polish government about the conditions in which the elections were being prepared. Bevin, however, objected. He minuted: 'I believe that if I do anything like this I shall make it worse for our friends in Poland. I am convinced that I shall do better by dealing direct with Poland and pursue steadily the policy I am now doing'. Sargent made a final attempt two days later: '[I]f Mikołajczyk, Stańczyk, & Co. are in any danger, this danger may be increased if we allow the Polish Government wrongly to think that we are no longer interested in the fight that these men are putting up in Poland'. Bevin did not budge, noting that Sargent's suggestion was the 'wrong tactic'.[45]

Thus, the line of policy advocated by the Foreign Office and the Warsaw embassy collapsed as the first Council meeting broke apart acrimoniously. There is no satisfactorily complete explanation for Bevin's refusal to raise the issue of Poland with the Soviets, but it is possible to piece together the main components of the reasoning underpinning his policy. The conference had become mired in discord over Soviet animosity at what it perceived as Western intrusion into its sphere of interest in Eastern Europe by the Anglo-American refusal to recognise the Romanian and Bulgarian governments.[46] Bevin feared that any British objection to the situation in Poland would be regarded by the Soviets in the same light as the dispute over Romania and Bulgaria, and ultimately serve to undermine Mikołajczyk's cause. He was adamant that the time was wrong for Britain to intervene.

[45] TNA: FO 371/47608/N12827/6/55, Warner to Cavendish-Bentinck, 22 September 1945; FO 371/47610/N13705/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 26–28 September 1945.

[46] Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 37.

Beyond fear of compromising the position of the PSL, Bevin was also considering the wider impact of Anglo-American policy in Eastern Europe on future Big Three cooperation. At this stage, Bevin seems to have been genuinely ambivalent about the best course of policy. In an aide-mémoire to the Americans ahead of the London meeting, referring to the 'Balkan and Danubian area',[47] Bevin raised the possibility that 'the time has come to decide whether or not to acquiesce in this block of countries remaining indefinitely in the Soviet sphere of influence'. At the same time, Bevin also floated the idea of Western support for the creation of a 'single economic unit' in Eastern Europe, suggesting that it would be worth making 'every effort … to overcome the Soviet objections' if it were 'in the interest of Europe as a whole to do so'. Bevin was clearly hoping that he and Byrnes could adopt a coherent joint policy approach in the region. The message concluded with an expression of hope that Byrnes and Bevin would have a chance to discuss the direction of policy as soon as the Secretary of State arrived in London.[48]

A number of conclusions can be drawn about Bevin's views based on his decisions at the conference. First, he was adamant that applying pressure on the Soviets over the Polish issue would be counter-productive for the Polish opposition at a time when tensions with the Western powers were running high. Second, he considered a joint Anglo-American approach to policy to be the most effective means of restoring Big Three cooperation and achieving particular aims in Eastern Europe. The American tendency to depart from a previously agreed line of policy—as in the case of Romania—annoyed him, but he was nevertheless disinclined to insist on a particular initiative in the face of American resistance. Third, the restoration of good relations with the Soviet Union was important to Bevin, but the outcome of the London conference was an unmistakable indication that these would not be easy to maintain. Bevin's experience of the Soviets at the conference seems to have led him to conclude that the best approach would be to eliminate as many sources of conflict in the bilateral relationship as possible, including the Polish issue. Bevin's approach did not signal his intention to withdraw from Polish affairs, but rather a decision to bide his time, to wait for a more auspicious moment

[47] Austria, Czechoslovakia, the ex-German "satellite" states in the Balkans, and Yugoslavia.

[48] *FRUS Diplomatic Papers, 1945. General: Political and Economic Matters*, vol. 2. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 102–104.

to intervene. The problem with this strategy for the Polish opposition, however, was the speed with which the PPR was moving to secure its control over the state.

Turning Point

After the conference, Bevin met with Cavendish-Bentinck when the latter was in London. Cavendish-Bentinck summarised the situation in Poland prior to his arrival. The PPR was consolidating its grip on the administrative structure of the state, with all but a few of the key posts occupied by their nominees. The press was restricted, particularly the papers belonging to the democratic parties, which struggled to publish. The Soviet and PPR-controlled security forces had created 'an atmosphere of terror'. Soviet troops remained scattered across the country, including in areas where their presence was unnecessary to protect the lines of communication with the Soviet zone of occupied Germany. 'It is clear to me', concluded Cavendish-Bentinck, 'that the Polish Communist clique who have the Government of this country in their hands have no intention of abandoning power if the elections should go against them'. The PPR leaders regarded the election as 'an obstacle which will be quietly surmounted'. There was little hope that the election would be free. 'Nobody, not even M. Mikołajczyk, believes that.'[49]

Cavendish-Bentinck recommended a two-pronged British initiative aimed at both the Soviet and Polish governments. Cavendish-Bentinck would inform Bierut that the British government expected elections to be held in Poland no later than February, in accordance with the undertakings which he had given at Potsdam. He would also insist that Popiel's Labour party should not be forced to merge with Felczak's 'stooge' Labour party. At the same time, Britain should press the Soviet government on the timetable for the withdrawal of their troops from Poland, and of the Soviet officers attached to the Polish security police. Bevin authorised Cavendish-Bentinck to proceed on the lines that he proposed. Clark Kerr was instructed to make the approach to the Soviets.[50] Bevin's response to Cavendish Bentinck's proposals serves as an indication of his thinking

[49] TNA: FO 371/47610/N13757/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 11 October 1945.

[50] TNA: FO 371/47610/N13757/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 11 October 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 14–30 October 1945.

on Poland towards the end of 1945: he sought to continue British support for Mikołajczyk and the PSL with the aim of seeing a democratic government established in Poland. He was anxious, however, to extricate the Polish issue from the increasingly fraught context of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. Bevin's decision to delegate to Clark Kerr the task of pressing for the withdrawal of Soviet troops is telling in this regard. While perfectly appropriate diplomatic protocol, it also suggests a desire to prevent the Polish issue from further embittering his own increasingly poor relations with the Soviet leaders.

At a meeting several days later, Cavendish-Bentinck found Bierut unwilling to commit to the British requests. Bierut insisted that elections could not take place until the Polish nationals abroad had not only returned but been given a chance to resettle in the country. In addition, there was the need to resettle the large number of Poles from the eastern regions which now belonged to the Soviet Union. Bierut predicted that this repatriation and resettlement process would only be complete in time to hold the elections by the middle of 1946. Cavendish-Bentinck attempted to impress upon Bierut that the British government could speed up the repatriation process with the cooperation of the Polish authorities. Bierut demurred, claiming that Poland lacked the rolling stock required to transport the returnees within the country. On the issue of the forced merger of Popiel's party with Felczak's group, Bierut insisted that the number of political parties needed to be reduced. The 'excessive' number of parties in prewar Poland had led to the collapse of the parliamentary system. He refused to provide a definite assurance that the two parties would not be forced to merge.[51]

The PPR also stepped up its attacks on the PSL in the autumn of 1945. The PPR leader and deputy prime minister, Władysław Gomułka, delivered a speech to PPR delegates in Warsaw in which he vilified Mikołajczyk. Gomułka claimed that the PSL received support from extremist elements and denounced Mikołajczyk as the 'trojan-horse by which reactionaries were trying to enter or divide the Government', claiming that these forces would use any method necessary, however criminal or violent, to attain political power. He urged the PSL to purge from its ranks all conservative and fascist elements and to unite with the SL.[52] Offering his analysis of

[51] TNA: FO 371/47611/N14438/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 16 October 1945; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 20 October 1945; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 21 October 1945; N14737/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 28 October 1945.

[52] TNA: FO 371/47611/N14731//6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 25 October 1945.

both his meeting with Bierut and of Gomułka's speech, Cavendish-Bentinck warned that the internal situation in Poland had reached a turning point and the PPR appeared determined to crush the PSL as an independent political force.[53]

In early December, the Polish government launched an anti-British propaganda campaign with a twofold purpose. It both served as a useful means for the Polish government to avoid questions regarding the internal political situation and was designed to discredit Mikołajczyk as a stooge of the British government, which was depicted as hostile to Polish interests. Cavendish-Bentinck noted that 'a real set-back to British popularity in Poland [would] have a marked effect on Mikołajczyk's popularity'.[54] In a press interview published on 3 December following his return from London, Rzymowski launched a concerted attack against the British government. The attack consisted of a concoction of genuine grievances, misrepresentation of unresolved issues, and outright fabrication. He condemned Britain for resisting the allocation of the western territories to Poland and accused it of seeking to undermine all of Poland's most vital national interests. Rzymowski raised the recurring issues of repatriation and the final liquidation of the government-in-exile. Rzymowski also claimed that the British Treasury had submitted a substantial bill to Poland for repayment of the cost of maintaining, paying, and equipping the Polish armed forces. In contrast, Stalin had not requested any payment for the cost of maintaining and equipping the Polish army in the Soviet Union because the 'Poles had paid with their blood for arms supplied to them for the common struggle'.[55]

Similarly, when the first train-load of Polish troops arrived from Italy, the minister of defence, Marshal Michał Rola-Żymierski, condemned the

[53] TNA: FO 371/47611/N14732/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 28 October 1945; FO 371/47611/N14735/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 28 October 1945; FO 371/47611/N14815/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 29 October 1945.

[54] Franciszek Litwin, a leader of the SL and minister of health in the provisional government, with whom Cavendish-Bentinck maintained regular contact, reported that the 'virulent press campaign directed against [Britain]' was part of a 'communist campaign against Mikołajczyk'. This view was confirmed by Mikołajczyk himself, who told Cavendish-Bentinck that Berman and Gomułka had begun to accuse him of being an agent for the Western governments. TNA: FO 371/47613/N16679/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 4 December 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 8 December 1945; FO 371/47613/N16705/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 28 November 1945; FO 371/47614/N17048/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 6 December 1945.

[55] TNA: FO 371/47613/N16634/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 4 December 1945.

return of the soldiers as individuals without arms or equipment, although this was not in fact the case. In contrast, Rola-Żymierski pointed out that Polish troops had returned from Russia fully armed and still grouped in fighting formations. 'Every effort is being made to represent the return of these men as an example of British meanness unworthy of their sacrifices at Tobruk and Monte Cassino', concluded Cavendish-Bentinck. Finally, on 7 December at the PPR congress in Warsaw, Gomułka delivered a speech which was a 'savage but veiled attack on M. Mikołajczyk and was also … strongly anti-British'. Like Rola-Żymierski, Gomułka contrasted the British approach unfavourably with that of the Soviet Union.[56]

The Polish provisional government used the attacks on the West to deflect attention away from developments inside the country. Rzymowski's interview coincided with reports from Warsaw of an escalation in abuses perpetrated by the security forces, including arbitrary arrests and indefinite detention with no recourse to legal advice or trial. The prisons were overcrowded due to the increasing number of arrests by the security police; prisoners were held in unsanitary conditions and were not allowed contact with their families. This period also marked an intensification of the attacks against the PSL, including the murder of the secretary-general of the party. At the end of November, Mikołajczyk told Cavendish-Bentinck that he had to conduct a 'ceaseless fight' to prevent PSL clubs or organisations from being closed by the security police. Two weeks later, Cavendish-Bentinck reported that Mikołajczyk was 'permanently engaged in getting his supporters out of prison'.[57]

By the end of 1945, it was clear that the PSL was not strong enough to withstand PPR pressure tactics without firm support from the Western powers. Already divisions were evident between the different centres of British policymaking as to how Britain should respond. The diplomats in the Warsaw embassy, observing the direction of events in Poland first-hand, were anxious to see the implementation of an interventionist strategy to discourage the PPR's abuse of power. The Northern Department supported this direction of policy and officials did their utmost to persuade Bevin to follow this line. Within his first half year in office, how-

[56] TNA: FO 371/47614/N17048/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 6 December 1945; N16998/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 10 December 1945.

[57] TNA: FO 371/47613/N16673/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 4 December, 1945; N16705/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 28 November 1945; FO 371/47614/N17087/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 13 December 1945.

ever, particularly after the difficult London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, Bevin had concluded that better Anglo-Soviet relations could only be achieved by removing as many points of friction as possible. His approach was therefore to deal with Polish issues outside the framework of Anglo-Soviet relations as far as possible, a tactic which was to render British support for the PSL less valuable as the PPR's pressure campaign intensified the following year.

CHAPTER 4

The Electoral Bloc to the Polish Referendum, January to June 1946

Introduction

The political situation in Poland began to change more quickly in early 1946. The PPR's pressure campaign against the PSL, begun in late 1945, intensified; the PSL's refusal to join the PPR-led electoral bloc at the end of February deepened the division between the two sides, and the last pretence of cooperation was dropped. The PSL's decision precipitated increased levels of repression against the party and its supporters. PSL officials and local leaders were harassed, beaten, and arrested; several high-ranking party members were murdered. PSL offices were closed. PSL members of the provisional government were pushed out of office in contravention of the Moscow agreement, which stipulated that a prescribed balance of cross-party representation be maintained. There began to be serious concern for Mikołajczyk's safety.[1]

The first half of 1946 saw a widening of the gap between Bevin and his officials in their approach to the Polish issue. The PPR's move to consolidate power in Poland coincided with a far-reaching re-evaluation of Soviet policy and intentions across the British policymaking establishment. At the end of February, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) produced a report on Soviet strategic interests and ambitions, in response to which the chargé d'affaires in Moscow, Frank Roberts, sent his well-known series

[1] TNA: FO 371/56439/N6471/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 24 May 1946.

A. Mason, *British Policy Towards Poland, 1944–1956*, Security, Conflict and Cooperation in the Contemporary World,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94241-4_4

of telegrams arguing that the lines between Soviet security concerns and Soviet imperialism were becoming increasingly blurred. At the same time, the Foreign Office carried out its own reassessment of British policy towards the Soviet Union, a process which culminated in the establishment of the Russia Committee in March 1946 to collate information on Soviet actions in different areas in order to coordinate a British counterstrategy.[2]

For the Northern Department and the Warsaw embassy, the reassessment of Soviet ambitions, coupled with the PPR's bid to consolidate control demonstrated the importance of mounting a robust response to abuses by the Soviet-supported Polish government. Officials advocated the pursuit of a strongly interventionist approach in order to prevent the Polish opposition from being decimated and a one-party state established. They believed that British protests—ideally coordinated with the US—could still have a restraining influence on Soviet behaviour, particularly given Soviet anxiety about the high risk of civil disorder in Poland if the PSL were excluded from government altogether. Western pressure would serve both to reinforce the position of the PSL and discourage the Soviets from actions which would cause instability in a country as crucial to Soviet security as Poland.[3]

Bevin, on the other hand, began to reconsider the policy of exclusive support for the PSL if it meant an end to the deadlock in Polish politics and the resolution of a persistent point of friction in Anglo-Soviet relations. The question of Bevin's view of the Soviet Union is a source of contention in the historiography. Some historians have pinpointed early 1946 as a turning point for Bevin, the moment at which his conversion to a Cold War mentality began.[4] A shift in the foreign secretary's approach to the Soviet Union was certainly evident in areas where he perceived Britain's crucial interests to be threatened by Soviet actions, specifically in the

[2] Raymond Smith, 'A Climate of Opinion: British Officials and the Development of British Soviet Policy, 1945–7', *International Affairs* 64, 4 (Autumn 1988): 635–636; Raymond Smith, 'Ernest Bevin, British Officials and British Soviet Policy, 1945–47', in *Britain and the First Cold War*, ed. Anne Deighton (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 37; Ray Merrick, 'The Russia Committee of the British Foreign Office and the Cold War, 1946–47', *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, 3 (July 1985): 454; Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 278.

[3] TNA: FO 371/56423/N8399/27/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 5 June 1946.

[4] Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 78; Smith, 'Bevin, British Officials and British Soviet Policy', 37–38; Alexander Nicholas Shaw, 'Sir Reader Bullard, Frank Roberts and the Azerbaijan Crisis of 1945–46: Bevin's Officials, Perceptions and the Adoption of a Cold War Mentality in British Soviet Policy', *Cold War History* 17, no. 3 (January 2017): 291.

Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean.[5] Bevin's willingness to adopt a harsher policy in these specific instances has been interpreted as an indication of his wholesale adoption of an anti-Soviet stance across all areas of foreign policy. In fact, however, Bevin's response to the Soviet Union varied considerably across different regions. In the Middle East and the Mediterranean, Soviet expansionism threatened an area of vital strategic and economic importance to Britain: the 'lifeline' to empire and a key source of oil.[6] The maintenance of a strong empire was essential to Bevin's plans to shore up British prosperity and prestige; any encroachment on strategically sensitive areas by a rival power therefore had to be met with forceful resistance. Bevin's anger at the Soviet intrusion in the Middle East was above all the reaction of an 'old-fashioned imperialist', rather than that of a newly converted cold warrior.[7] An examination of Bevin's response to the Polish question indicates that his approach to the Soviet Union was actually characterised by deep ambivalence, inconsistency, and lack of uniformity across different geographical areas. In Poland—and across Eastern Europe—Bevin's conciliatory attitude to the Soviet Union suggests that he had not yet given up hope that Anglo-Soviet cooperation could be re-established.[8]

[5] After the war, Stalin forcefully renewed his pursuit of the long-held Russian ambition for control of the Turkish Straits (the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, which connect the Black Sea and the Mediterranean). The Soviets demanded the right to build military bases on the Straits, "jointly" with the Turks, as well as the return of territory in the southern Caucasus ceded to Turkey under the terms of the Soviet–Turkish treaty of 1921. At the London Foreign Ministers Conference, the Soviets made a claim for the former Italian colony of Tripolitania. Finally, in a move to gain access to Iranian oil reserves, the Soviets established two secessionist regimes in Iranian Azerbaijan and in the Republic of Kurdistan. Stalin also delayed the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran in contravention of the agreement that all foreign powers would leave Iran within six months of the end of the war, provoking a full-scale crisis in early 1946. On 24 March 1946, one day before the issue was to be brought before the United Nations, Stalin suddenly ordered the withdrawal of troops. Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 36–38; 40–45. In May 1946, in an effort to counter Soviet expansionism in the region, Bevin authorised a more aggressive anti-Soviet propaganda campaign in Iran. Shaw, 'Bullard, Roberts and the Azerbaijan Crisis', 291.

[6] Bevin quoted in Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 414.

[7] Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 414, 424; William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 5–6.

[8] Keith Hamilton and Ann Lane, 'Power, Status and the Pursuit of Liberty: The Foreign Office and Eastern Europe, 1945–1946', in *Europe within the Global System, 1938–1960. Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany: from Great Powers to Regional Powers*, ed. Michael Dockrill (Bochum: Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1995), 38.

Bevin's wider European foreign policy also inclined him to adopt a cautious approach towards the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. Revisionist historians have shown that for the first two to three years after the war Bevin was more seriously committed to the pursuit of Western European cooperation than previously acknowledged in the historiography.[9] Although still imprecisely defined, Bevin envisioned some form of Western European customs union built on the foundation of a strong Anglo-French relationship, which would have at its disposal the colonial possessions of the Western European imperial powers.[10] Sean Greenwood has shown that Bevin's objective of building up a Western European grouping tended to make him more cautious in his approach to the Soviet Union in Europe. He did not intend the Western European bloc as an anti-Soviet instrument, but he was acutely aware that the Soviets were bound to perceive it this way, and he therefore took great care to avoid fuelling their suspicions.[11] Bevin's reconsideration of exclusive British support for the PSL—a party that was implacably opposed to the Soviet Union and which would therefore stoke Soviet suspicions about British intentions—was consistent with his cautious approach in Western Europe.

Bevin's concern about Soviet perceptions of his plans in Western Europe should not be understood to mean that he was prepared to allow Eastern Europe to fall irretrievably into the Soviet orbit. Some of the recent work which reassesses Bevin's views on European cooperation argues that he accepted early on that the international system would be based on three spheres of interest.[12] Bevin's approach to the Polish issue, however, shows that at this stage he was still envisioning cooperation with the Soviets and the Americans. Although he began to doubt the policy of exclusive support for the PSL, he did not want Britain to withdraw from its role in determining Poland's political future altogether. Rather, his suggestion

[9] Kent and Young, 'British Policy Overseas', 48–49; Greenwood, 'Third Force Policy', 428–432; Deighton, 'Entente Neo-Coloniale', 841; John Callaghan, 'The Foreign Policy of the Attlee Government', in *The British Labour Party and the Wider World: Domestic Politics, Internationalism and Foreign Policy*, eds. Paul Corthorn and Jonathan Davis (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), 120–121. For a useful summary of the evolution of the revisionist historiography on Bevin's "Third Force" policy, see Daddow, *Britain and Europe Since 1945*, 122–134.

[10] To that end, Bevin held talks early in the year with French Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, regarding imperial cooperation. Deighton, 'Entente Neo-Coloniale', 841.

[11] Greenwood, 'Third Force Policy', 427.

[12] Deighton, 'Entente Neo-Coloniale', 843. See also Deighton's earlier work, *Impossible Peace*, 50–51.

was that Britain support a broader-based Polish opposition movement as a means of hastening the resolution of the country's political crisis, as well as removing a source of conflict in the Anglo-Soviet relationship. This episode suggests that at this point Bevin was not thinking in terms of fixed, exclusive spheres of interest, but rather of an arrangement that would still involve some degree of ongoing cooperation among the Big Three.

There were three other, interconnected constraints that were beginning to be felt more acutely in 1946, which limited Bevin's policy options and influenced his decisions in 1946. The first was the emergence of criticism from sections of the PLP and—crucially—from Attlee of Bevin's failure to improve Anglo-Soviet relations, which reinforced the importance of limiting the points of conflict in the relationship only to those which touched vital British interests. The second was Britain's weak economic situation, which meant that Bevin was under pressure to curtail expenditure on overseas commitments. Finally, there was the position of the US. Negotiations for an American loan to Britain had finally been concluded in December 1945, but the agreement faced an uphill battle in Congress against a conservative coalition of southern Democrats and Republicans, who objected to the extension of further assistance—even in the form of a loan—to European states.[13] Bevin hoped to persuade the Americans to relieve Britain of some of the financial burden of maintaining shared Western interests, but the US commitment to active participation in international affairs remained unclear. In this climate of economic weakness, insecurity, and uncertainty about American intentions, Bevin sought to keep British policy broadly consistent with that of the US, including in Eastern Europe. The State Department's response to the consolidation of communist control in Poland tended to be more muted than that of the Northern Department and Bevin insisted on aligning British policy with that of the US, on several occasions choosing not to proceed when the US proved unwilling to act jointly with Britain in a demarche in Warsaw. Again, officials took a different view to that of the foreign secretary, evincing deep frustration with the State Department and chafing against Bevin's reluctance to pursue an independent policy vis-à-vis Warsaw. What emerges from the dialogue between Bevin and his officials is a picture of a foreign secretary pushed by the convergence of a declining economy and multiplying global responsibilities into a position

[13] Randall Bennett Woods, *A Changing of the Guard: Anglo-American Relations, 1941–1946* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 368–371.

of increasing dependence on American goodwill, circumscribing his policy options in the process. These constraints, together with domestic political pressure for better Anglo-Soviet relations and the hope that some form of Western European bloc could be established, both of which reinforced the importance of maintaining cordial Anglo-Soviet relations, were the key determinants in Bevin's approach to the Polish question in the first half of 1946. For the PSL, the consequence was that British policy lacked resolute initiative at a moment when the party badly needed robust international support.

Electoral Bloc

In early 1946, the PPR pressed forward with the idea of a single electoral list. The PPR general secretary, Władysław Gomułka, had first raised the idea of an electoral bloc at the end of September 1945 at a joint meeting of the PPR Central Committee and the PPS Executive Committee.[14] The PPS did not immediately agree to the bloc because there was serious disagreement within the party regarding the extent to which it should cooperate with the PPR. The postwar PPS was a weak and fragmented party, a conglomeration of rivalrous splinter groups which had formed after the prewar PPS was dissolved in September 1939. The PPS was rent by internal divisions as different factions, each with competing visions of the party's postwar future, vied for control over the leadership. Ultimately, Józef Cyrankiewicz, who became secretary general in November 1945 and who favoured close cooperation with the PPR, prevailed in this power struggle to secure control of the leadership.[15]

On 4 November, the PPS Supreme Council resolved to join the electoral bloc,[16] and at a meeting of the Executive Committee at the beginning of April 1946, Cyrankiewicz managed to outmanoeuvre his opponents and a general resolution was passed in favour of joining the bloc.[17] Although dissenting elements remained in some branches of the party, from this point onward the leadership of the PPS was committed to coop-

[14] Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948*, trans. John Micgiel and Michael H. Bernhard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 237.

[15] A.J. Prażmowska, 'The Polish Socialist Party, 1945–1948', *East European Quarterly*, 34, no. 3 (September 2000): 339–341, 343.

[16] Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 237.

[17] TNA: FO 371/56437/N4601/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 3 April 1946.

eration with the PPR.[18] Having secured the cooperation of the PPS, in the first months of 1946, the PPR began to apply increasingly intense pressure on Mikołajczyk to agree to include the PSL in the bloc. Mikołajczyk's response was to stall for as long as possible in order to avoid the repression which would inevitably follow an outright refusal to cooperate.[19] He made vague, general statements stressing the importance of democratic elections, but stopped short of giving a definitive response.

At the PSL party congress, no definite decision was reached as to whether to accept the single electoral list. It was agreed that the final decision would depend on the attitude of the other parties towards the PSL, and would be conditional upon the fulfilment of four minimum conditions: an end to attacks by the security police on the PSL; a cessation of attacks on the composition of the PSL; an equal allocation of posts in the administration and in official organisations; and equality of rights with regard to the purchase of newsprint and the free expression of opinion. Cavendish-Bentinck reported that Mikołajczyk had skilfully extricated himself from a difficult position by postponing the decision. To have declared that he intended to fight the election as the leader of the opposition would have made it virtually impossible for him to remain in government and would have resulted in the unrestrained persecution of the PSL throughout the country. On the other hand, to give in to the single electoral list would have amounted to surrender in the eyes of his supporters and considerably weakened his position.[20]

Negotiations regarding the single electoral list began between the PPR, the PPS, and the PSL on 7 February.[21] As the negotiations progressed, Cavendish-Bentinck became increasingly concerned for Mikołajczyk's safety. He pointed out that the strength of the PSL depended entirely on Mikołajczyk and there was no other leader who could easily replace him. A worried letter from Cavendish-Bentinck to Allen reveals the extent to which the PPR's violent repression had weakened the PSL. According to

[18] The recalcitrant sections were eventually purged in two waves in April and October 1948 and the two parties formally merged to form the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – PZPR) in December 1948. Prażmowska, 'The Polish Socialist Party', 355.

[19] Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 477.

[20] TNA: FO 371/56432/N1338/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 22 January 1946; FO 371/56433/N1893/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign office, 11 February 1946; N1930/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 11 February 1946.

[21] Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 243.

Cavendish-Bentinck, a couple of possible replacements for Mikołajczyk had either been incarcerated or killed. Further, Mikołajczyk's life was 'what the insurance companies describe as a "poor risk"'. The ambassador declared that he would be 'pleasantly surprised' if Mikołajczyk were 'not bumped off before the elections'.[22] Mikołajczyk himself was 'more worried' than the ambassador had ever seen him. He anticipated that his refusal to join the electoral bloc would result in his forcible removal from the government, along with the other PSL ministers, Władysław Kiernik, Czesław Wycech, and Tadeusz Kapeliński, followed by 'more violent attacks on [the PSL] and increased persecution of its members'. As the tension heightened over the PSL's refusal to join the single list, Cavendish-Bentinck asked Mikołajczyk what step would be of greatest help to him. Mikołajczyk responded that a statement in the House of Commons expressing the British government's opposition to a single electoral list would be of most value.[23]

British Policy Review

It was at just this point, however, that Bevin began to question the strategy of supporting the PSL exclusively and instructed the Foreign Office to undertake a review of British policy towards Poland. Bevin expressed anxiety that the British government was over-committed to the PSL, and was encouraging Mikołajczyk to take an 'unduly intransigent' position on various issues, including that of the single electoral list.[24] Bevin requested the policy review following a meeting in early February with the Polish vice-minister of foreign affairs, Zygmunt Modzelewski. The timing of Bevin's request just after Modzelewski's visit suggests a link between the two events, but it is difficult to identify any particular aspect of Bevin's discussion with Modzelewski that might have prompted him to request the review. The main issues covered were the Warsaw government's objection to the continued presence of the Arciszewski government in London, the

[22] TNA: FO 371/56433/N1655/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Allen, 23 January 1946.

[23] TNA: FO 371/56433/N1893/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 11 February 1946; FO 371/56433/N1931/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 22 February 1946.

[24] TNA: FO 371/56434/N2093/34/55, Private letter from Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 12 February 1946.

slow pace of troop repatriation, and the negotiations for an Anglo-Polish financial agreement which were then in progress.[25]

It is possible that Bevin's doubts about Britain's exclusive support for the PSL derived in part from the report he received from the members of a British parliamentary delegation, comprised mostly of Labour MPs, which visited Poland in January.[26] In the report which it issued upon returning to Britain, the delegation commented favourably on the progress achieved by the Polish provisional government in rebuilding industry, agriculture, housing, commerce, and social welfare institutions out of the destruction and chaos which had prevailed in the country at the end of the war. The delegation came out in support of the presentation of a single list of candidates to the electorate, emphasising the need for national unity in Poland in order to facilitate much needed ongoing economic reconstruction. 'It appears at the moment that the main need of the Polish people is to learn the art of co-operation in politics', the report concluded.[27] Cavendish-Bentinck reported that the Labour delegates, having spent most of their time with members of the PPS in the constant presence of minders from the security police who kept Mikołajczyk's supporters away from the members of the delegation, had come away with an artificially positive view of the government, coupled with the impression that Mikołajczyk's followers lacked the dynamism of the PPR and PPS supporters.[28]

It is difficult to determine the exact effect of the delegation's report on the direction of Bevin's policy. He initialled the document, so it is clear that he read it. Bevin raised the possibility of withdrawing support for the

[25] M.E. Pelly et al., eds., *DBPO, Series I, vol. 6: Eastern Europe, August 1945– April 1946* (London: HMSO, 1991), no. 70, pp. 269–74; TNA: FO 371/56434/N2093/34/55, Private letter from Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 12 February 1946.

[26] The Labour members of the delegation were Harry Hynd, John Rankin, Bernard Taylor, Stephen Taylor, and Harry Thorneycroft. The other members were Philip Piratin (Communist) and Tufton Beamish (Conservative). TNA: FO 371/47826/N16424/16424/55, 14 December 1945; N17806/16424/55, 15 and 21 December 1945.

[27] TNA: FO 371/56459/N2810/47/55, 'Report of Parliamentary Delegation to Poland', January 1946. Beamish did not endorse the final report.

[28] TNA: FO 371/56433/N1655/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Allen, 23 January 1946; FO 371/56432/N696/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 14 January 1946; FO 371/56459/N903/47/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Warner, 12 January 1946; N1456/47/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Warner, 19 January 1946; FO 371/47826/N16424/16424/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Warner, 30 November 1945.

PSL shortly after the delivery of the report—the timing of which suggests that it might have had some influence on his thinking. Also of potential significance was the delegation's conclusion that claims of Soviet interference in Polish affairs had been overstated.[29] This was in line with a widely held view in the Labour party that although the Soviet Union was exerting tighter control over Eastern Europe than the British had hoped, Soviet actions were explicable in view of their legitimately held security concerns. The British response should be to assuage Soviet fears by making a concerted effort to improve relations. This was the position of Bevin's critics on the left of the party. By this point, rumblings of discontent were beginning to roll through the Labour party over the perceived anti-Soviet direction of Bevin's foreign policy. The first session of the UN General Assembly had become mired in conflict, with Bevin and Andrei Vychinsky, the Soviet deputy foreign minister, trading shots over Greece and Iran.[30] The disappointing outcome at the UN had deepened discontent within the party, as evidenced by the criticism directed at Bevin during a difficult House of Commons debate on Anglo-Soviet relations at the end of February.[31] Bevin was not immune to this criticism—his officials noted that he was stung by it on different occasions.[32] Although at this stage opposition to Bevin within the PLP had yet to coalesce, it is possible that it exerted some influence on the direction of his policy.

This rising dissatisfaction within the PLP converged with the renewal of the conflict between Attlee and Bevin over the most appropriate response to the Soviet challenge to the British position in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Attlee regarded Soviet geostrategic objectives as legitimate and was prepared to make concessions to satisfy them. Bevin, on the other hand, was determined to respond forcefully to what he saw as a Soviet threat to Britain's imperial security. In September 1945, Attlee had supported an American proposal at the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting to establish international control over the former Italian colonies in North Africa against Bevin's wishes. In February 1946, Attlee questioned the necessity of maintaining such a large British military presence

[29] TNA: FO 371/56459/N2810/47/55, 'Report of Parliamentary Delegation to Poland', January 1946.

[30] Callaghan, 'Foreign Policy of the Attlee Government', 120; Jones, *Russia Complex*, 121–122.

[31] Jones, *Russia Complex*, 122–123.

[32] Pierson Dixon, *Double Diploma: the Life of Sir Pierson Dixon, Don and Diplomat* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), 241.

in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Bevin—supported by the chiefs of staff—determinedly resisted Attlee's challenge to the most fundamental strategic assumptions underpinning British diplomatic and defence policy. Attlee's suggestion was anathema to Bevin: any concessions to another power in such a vital region would imperil British security, erode its power, and diminish its prestige. Further, whereas Attlee saw a scaling back of the British military presence as a way of reducing an unaffordable commitment, in Bevin's eyes, a strong empire was essential for Britain's postwar economic recovery.[33] Although Attlee carefully kept this disagreement private—not even bringing it before Cabinet—the underlying tension was a constant reminder to Bevin of Attlee's preference for a broadly conciliatory, cooperative approach to the Soviet Union. This renewed bout of conflict with the prime minister can only have served to reinforce to Bevin the importance of reducing tension in other areas of the Anglo-Soviet relationship.

Bevin believed that British policy in Poland was exacerbating already tense Anglo-Soviet relations, and he therefore cast about for an alternative approach. Bevin's doubts about Poland hinted at his desire for a wider policy shift across Eastern Europe. When requesting the review, Bevin expressed concern about exclusive British support for the anti-Soviet opposition parties in all the Eastern European countries, which he feared would exacerbate the already adversarial dynamic in Anglo-Soviet relations. Bevin was 'anxious' that Britain should not be committed 'too exclusively to the support of certain political parties or groups which would tend to be regarded as pro-British elements and as definitely opposed to the Soviet orientation'.[34] Bevin had already adopted a tendency towards caution in his approach to other states in Eastern Europe. For instance, in Bulgaria in 1945, Bevin had refused to put pressure on the Soviet government to postpone elections in order to allow time to change an unfair electoral law, which prevented the full participation of opposition parties. Similarly, in Romania, he was not prepared to back King Michael and opposition leaders in their attempt to overthrow the Soviet-backed government of Petru Groza.[35]

[33] Raymond Smith and John Zametica, 'The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee Reconsidered, 1945–7', *International Affairs* 61, no. 2 (1985): 243–245; Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 417–418, 422–424; Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 4–5.

[34] *DBPO, Series I, vol. 6,* no. 70, pp. 269–274; TNA: FO 371/56434/N2093/34/55, Private letter from Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 12 February 1946.

[35] Hamilton and Lane, 'The Foreign Office and Eastern Europe', 38.

Bevin's caution in Poland was also consistent with his approach to the Soviets in conjunction with his plans for Western Europe. Greenwood has noted that Bevin pursued his plans for a Western European customs union with an acute awareness of Soviet sensitivities. His concern about raising Soviet suspicions acted as a 'strong brake on any moves in the direction of European cooperation'.[36] An overly adversarial British policy in Poland—a country crucial to Soviet security—would be perceived as many times more threatening than a Western European grouping and carry a much higher risk of alienating the Soviets. Some historians have presented Bevin's acceptance of an international system divided into three spheres of interest as an inevitable concomitant of his plans for Western Europe, with his 'three Monroes' comment at the end of 1945 frequently cited as evidence.[37] I would argue, however, that Bevin's comment about the drift towards spheres of influence, 'or what can better be described as three great Monroes' was mainly an expression of frustration with the 'power politics naked and unashamed' of both the US and the Soviet Union, rather than an indication of his vision of the future of the international system. Bevin made this comment in the context of a much longer memo, which is mostly devoted to criticism of the uncooperativeness of the Americans and the Soviets, and their violations of internationalist principles. It concludes with a statement of Bevin's commitment to conduct his foreign policy in accordance with the 'procedure, constitution and obligations' of the United Nations Organisation.[38] Further, Bevin was not proposing the complete withdrawal of British influence from Poland. Instead, he hoped it might be possible to establish political plurality in Poland by means other than exclusive British support for the PSL. Bevin's thinking suggests that at this point he was not planning on the basis of an international system defined by fixed spheres of interest.

The Foreign Office immediately mobilised to thwart Bevin's attempt to change the course of British policy in Poland. Officials did not want the Polish opposition to splinter into too many different factions and sought to ensure that all opposition groups rallied around Mikołajczyk, whose

[36] Greenwood, 'Third Force Policy', 425.

[37] Hamilton and Lane, 'The Foreign Office and Eastern Europe', 47; Weiler, *Ernest Bevin*, 153.

[38] *DBPO, Series I, vol. 3*, no. 99, pp. 310–313.

victory it considered 'the only hope of ejecting the present administration'.[39] From the Foreign Office point of view, Bevin's doubts could not have occurred at a worse time. Near the end of February 1946, the Foreign Office concluded that 'the critical moment' was 'rapidly approaching' which would decide whether free elections would be held in Poland.[40] It was now vitally important to shore up Mikołajczyk's position and reaffirm British support for the Polish opposition.[41]

Sargent sought to steer the foreign secretary back to the existing policy line. Sargent warned that 'if we do not give a certain amount of support and encouragement to the non-totalitarians [in Eastern Europe] they will lose heart and abandon the dangerous game of opposing the Communist pressure to which they are being continually subjected'. He added that British and American support might be all that prevented the opposition parties 'from being liquidated out of hand by the local Communists'. Further, Sargent emphasised the Foreign Office's ongoing sense of commitment to Mikołajczyk personally: 'These considerations apply in particular to Poland, where we are under an obligation to Mikołajczyk, since when we urged him against his will to go to Poland and enter the Government we promised to do our best to see that he came to no harm'.[42]

By mid-March, Sargent and Allen had managed to persuade Bevin that a revision of policy towards Poland was unnecessary. Sargent reaffirmed that Britain still aimed 'to work for the weakening of Communist predominance in Poland and for something approaching a representative regime'.[43] The episode of the policy review highlights the difference between Bevin and his Northern Department officials in their view of Soviet intentions in Eastern Europe, as well as the most appropriate British response. The Foreign Office position was based on a far more pessimistic reading of Soviet intentions in Eastern Europe, whose objective they believed was a complete takeover of the region. Their concerns about this

[39] TNA: FO 371/56433/N1551/34/12, Cavendish-Bentinck to Allen, 23 January 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 6 February 1946; FO 371/56434/N2397/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20 February 1946.

[40] TNA: FO 371/56433/N1931/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 22 February 1946.

[41] TNA: FO 371/56434/N2093/34/55, Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 12 February 1946.

[42] TNA: FO 371/56434/N2624/34/55, Sargent Memo, 14 February 1946.

[43] TNA: FO 371/56435/N2912/34/55, Warner Minutes, 6 March 1946; Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 13 March 1946.

scenario were both strategic and reputational. The extension of Soviet control across Eastern Europe would result in the creation of anti-Western, communist-dominated regimes across the region, which was not in Britain's interest. Further, British prestige was at stake: Britain had committed publicly to support Mikołajczyk and the PSL. Forfeiting Poland's political future to the Soviet Union would damage Britain's reputation—both in Poland and more widely. If it proved impossible to thwart Soviet intentions, Britain could at least preserve its reputation and retain the loyalty of the Polish political opposition by extending to it the strongest possible support until the end.

Bevin, on the other hand, was becoming increasingly anxious to avoid the Polish issue leading to a further deterioration in Anglo-Soviet relations. He sought to remove sources of conflict from the relationship in order to restore it. Although the Foreign Office had avoided a change of course for the moment, they could not stave it off indefinitely. Bevin's policy review request was an indication of the beginning of a shift in his thinking as to how best to resolve the Polish issue, and by late 1946, this was the approach that he would adopt.

The foreign secretary's period of indecision coincided with a pivotal moment in Poland as Mikołajczyk fought for his party's survival. Mikołajczyk had been hoping for a forceful display of international support for the PSL's right to contest the elections independently. As the tension rose over the PSL's refusal to join the electoral bloc, Mikołajczyk had asked for a statement in the House of Commons expressing the British government's opposition to a single electoral list.[44] Bevin did make a statement in the House, but instead of formally objecting to the single electoral list in Poland as Mikołajczyk—and the Foreign Office—had hoped, he confined himself to recalling the Polish government's pledges at Yalta and Potsdam to hold free and unfettered elections. This statement, which made no reference to the single list was of significantly less use in helping Mikołajczyk to withstand PPR pressure to agree to join the electoral bloc, suggesting instead that Britain did not intend to interfere beyond perfunctory reminders and pro forma protests in internal Polish affairs.[45] The lack of robust support for the PSL at this juncture weakened Mikołajczyk's position and helped to embolden the PPR, with

[44] TNA: FO 371/56433/N1893/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 11 February 1946; FO 371/56433/N1931/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 22 February 1946.

[45] 419 HC Deb 5s, cols. 1125–1126.

a significant increase in the frequency and severity of attacks on the PSL between February and May 1946.[46]

Breakdown of Electoral Bloc Negotiations

Although Mikołajczyk strung out the tripartite negotiations for as long as possible, by the end of February the talks had broken down completely. The PSL rejected the terms offered by the PPR and the PPS, which stipulated that the PSL would have only 20 per cent of the seats in a single list.[47] Instead, Mikołajczyk proposed that the PSL should have a 75 per cent majority and be entitled to elect the president, the prime minister, and the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. Mikołajczyk deliberately proposed terms which he knew would be unacceptable to the PPR because he was determined that there should not be a single list of candidates.[48]

Following the collapse of the negotiations with the PSL, the PPR formed a four-party bloc with the PPS, the Democratic Alliance (*Stronnictwo Demokratyczne*—SD), and the communist-sponsored SL, which had been created in September 1944 as a rival to Mikołajczyk's party. The formation of the bloc marked the formalisation of the division between the PPR-led group and the PSL, and brought about an intensification of the struggle for political control between the two. The spring of 1946 saw an increase in PPR attacks on the PSL. Between February and April, 21 PSL activists were murdered; in May alone, 25 were murdered. The killings were almost certainly carried out by the security apparatus.[49] On 10 March at the National Convention in Warsaw of the Peasants' Self-Help Association, "delegates" planted by the PPR staged a violent demonstration against Mikołajczyk. Two days later, security police raided the party's headquarters, confiscated equipment, seized documents, and arrested several people. Also in mid-March, the PSL newspaper, *Gazeta Ludowa* was ordered to restrict its circulation to 62,500, down from its previous circulation of 85,000. The PPR were increasingly using the people's courts, which had originally been set up to deal with misdemeanours and petty crimes, to justify the imprisonment of PSL members. Finally, in

[46] Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 478.

[47] The PPR and its satellites would have 70 per cent of the seats, and Popiel's SP would have the remaining 10 per cent.

[48] TNA: FO 371/56434/N2476/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 24 February 1946; FO 371/56435/N3312/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 5 March 1946.

[49] Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 478.

the face of Mikołajczyk's objections, the PPR had begun recruiting from among communist supporters in order to establish a people's militia, intended to act as a reserve police force.[50] Concurrent with its other repressive tactics, the PPR began to edge the PSL ministers out of government. Mikołajczyk expected that he and the other PSL representatives would be ejected at any time.[51]

At the end of March, the British government learned that the Polish government was planning to hold a referendum at the end of June in which the electorate would be asked to vote on three issues: the abolition of the Senate, nationalisation of industry and the implementation of land reform, and the extension of Poland's western frontier to the Oder-Neisse line. The Foreign Office regarded the whole exercise as nothing more than a stalling tactic to further delay the elections. Cavendish-Bentinck insisted that the announcement of the referendum necessitated some form of response from Britain, since the resulting postponement of elections was, as the Foreign Office noted, a 'clear breach' of Bierut's promise, given at Potsdam, that elections would be held by February 1946.[52]

In view of the referendum announcement and the PPR's increasingly repressive tactics, Cavendish-Bentinck urged a review of British policy towards Poland. He summed up the political situation in stark terms. Power was concentrated in the hands of a small number of communist leaders who relied on the security police to maintain their control over the population. The PPR themselves had admitted to Cavendish-Bentinck that they would receive only approximately 20 per cent of the vote in free elections, but they had no intention of relinquishing power. The majority of the population supported Mikołajczyk but were 'in terror of the security police and of other means by which the administration can make life intolerable for them'. The PPR was systematically reneging on the Yalta, Moscow, and Potsdam agreements: they had postponed elections and

[50] TNA: FO 371/56435/N3312/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 5 March 1946; N3520/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 13 March 1946; FO 371/56436/N4081/34/55, Allen to Bevin, 21 March 1946; FO 371/56437/N4396/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 1 April 1946.

[51] TNA: FO 371/56436/N3582/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 16 March 1946; FO 371/56436/N3611/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 17 March 1946; FO 371/56436/N4081/34/55, Allen to Bevin, 21 March 1946; FO 371/56437/N4396/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 1 April 1946.

[52] TNA: FO 371/56437/N4396/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 1 April 1946; FO 371/56437/N4475/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 4 April 1946.

changed the balance of power within the government by gradually edging out the PSL members. The intention of the PPR was to continue putting off elections using various ruses such as the referendum, while strengthening its hold on the country via the security police and control over the administrative machinery. In these circumstances, Cavendish-Bentinck envisaged two possible courses of action. Britain could either make pro forma protests but essentially accept that the present Polish administration would remain indefinitely in power or it could attempt to solicit Soviet support in applying pressure to see the fulfilment of the undertakings made at Yalta, Moscow, and Potsdam. Protests which came from the Western powers only, without any pressure from Moscow, would be 'ineffectual'.[53]

The response to Cavendish-Bentinck's appeal shows that the Foreign Office was beginning to reshape British policy towards Poland in line with Bevin's desire to minimise the points of conflict in Anglo-Soviet relations. Northern Department officials dismissed the idea of trying to enlist Soviet cooperation in applying pressure on the Polish administration. If Britain were to force the issue, the most likely outcome would be a standoff with the Soviet government. It was important to avoid the Polish question becoming 'once again …. a direct issue between the Soviet Union and the Western democracies'. There is a particularly telling comment in the minutes which indicates a marked shift in policy towards Poland: 'In fact, though not in form, the Polish situation is already an Anglo-Soviet issue, but the existence of the Polish Provisional Government as a pawn serves at least to prevent a deadlock developing directly between the Russians and ourselves (and the Americans) of the kind which overshadows the whole field of Big power relations'.[54] Although the Northern Department agreed that the Polish internal situation could only—or at least with the best chance of success—be brought about via British pressure on the Soviets, this was subordinate to the importance of keeping conflict with the Soviet Union to a minimum.

Bevin's desire to limit conflict with the Soviet Union is further evidenced by his insistence that no action be taken on the Polish situation until the elections had taken place in Greece.[55] A British occupation force, originally sent in by Churchill at the end of 1944, continued to support an

[53] TNA: FO 371/56436/N4094/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 March 1946.
[54] TNA: FO 371/56436/N4094/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 29 March 1946.
[55] TNA: FO 371/56436/N4094/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 29 March 1946.

unpopular right-wing government against a coalition of former anti-fascist resistance groups in order to prevent the communist-led National Liberation Front (EAM) from seizing power in Athens. In January 1946, the Soviet Union had brought a formal complaint about the ongoing presence of British troops in Greece before the UN Security Council. Although the Security Council dropped the issue from the agenda on 6 February without taking a vote, Greece remained a highly sensitive issue in Anglo-Soviet affairs.[56] In keeping with Bevin's strategy of limiting Anglo-Soviet conflict to areas which affected Britain's vital interests, the need to orchestrate the election of a (non-communist) government that could command sufficient authority to restore political and economic stability in a country deemed vital to Britain's strategic interests took precedence over an intervention in Poland.

A United Front? Anglo-American Policy Towards Poland

With an approach to the Soviet Union ruled out, in early April 1946, the Foreign Office attempted to initiate a joint Anglo-American protest to the Polish provisional government in the hope that a united front would have more clout.[57] The Foreign Office proposed to raise with the Polish government the suppression of the democratic opposition, the activities of the security police, and the changes in the balance of government. Britain also pressed the State Department to consider demanding the abolition of the Ministry of Public Security. Finally, the memorandum noted that representations were unlikely to be effective unless accompanied by the threat of sanctions. To this end, the British and American governments should make clear that any form of financial assistance to Poland would be withheld until these conditions were met.[58]

Consultations with the State Department, however, did not yield the desired effect. Instead of 'a full onslaught in one comprehensive joint formal approach', the Americans elected for 'rather half-hearted informal

[56] G.M. Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British Policy in Greece, 1944–1947* (Oxford, 1982), 171–173; David H. Close, *The Origins of the Greek Civil War* (London, 1995), 161.

[57] TNA: FO 371/56437/N4987/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 11 April 1946; FO 371/56437/N5068/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 17 April 1946.

[58] *FRUS, 1946. Eastern Europe; the Soviet Union*, vol. 6 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 420–422, 423–424.

representations as a first step'.[59] The State Department instructed the American ambassador in Warsaw, Arthur Bliss Lane, only to urge the Polish government to fulfil the commitments agreed at Yalta, Moscow, and Potsdam, and to issue a public statement confirming that early elections would be held. No mention was made in the American protest note about the imbalance in the Polish provisional government or the tactics of the security police.[60]

The Foreign Office had planned to 'make the strongest representations' possible to the Polish government.[61] Instead, however, Bevin insisted that Britain must remain 'in step' with the Americans. Cavendish-Bentinck was instructed to make parallel representations in concert with Lane. The Foreign Office cautioned Cavendish-Bentinck 'to keep the form, tone and content of your representations in general conformity with [Lane's] and to avoid giving the impression that you are being more vigorous, acrimonious or comprehensive in your approach than your United States colleague'.[62] Cavendish-Bentinck delivered the British aide-mémoire to Modzelewski on 24 April. In order not to diverge from the American line, he avoided any mention about the changes in the balance of the Polish provisional government or the activities of the security police.[63]

The Anglo-American protests were further undermined by the US decision to extend credit to the Polish government in return for a public assurance that the referendum was not intended as a replacement for the elections, and that elections would be held in accordance with the Yalta agreement before the end of 1946.[64] The Foreign Office was caught completely off guard by the news. Cavendish-Bentinck had first alerted the Foreign Office at the end of January that a mission from the Polish government had gone to Washington in the hope of securing a credit agreement.[65] Over the course of the discussions about the joint protest, Foreign Office officials had stressed to the Americans the importance of withholding all economic assistance to Poland; the State Department had responded with an assurance that the US would not extend any credits or

[59] TNA: FO 371/56437/N5184/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20 April 1946.
[60] TNA: FO 371/56437/N5184/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 18 April 1946; *FR US 1946* vol. 6, 428–429.
[61] TNA: FO 371/56437/N4987/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 11 April 1946.
[62] TNA: FO 371/56437/N5068/34/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 19 April 1946.
[63] TNA: FO 371/56438/N5384/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 24 April 1946.
[64] TNA: FO 371/56437/N5350/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 April 1946.
[65] TNA: FO 371/56505/N1000/287/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 January 1946.

financial aid.[66] The Foreign Office reacted with dismay to the news that the State Department planned to go ahead after all, calling the decision 'extraordinary' and 'disastrous'. The issue was deemed potentially damaging enough that Halifax was instructed to intervene in a last-minute attempt to reverse the State Department's decision before the agreement was formally announced.[67]

It appears from the Foreign Office files that Halifax judged it too late to intervene and the State Department formally announced the credit agreement with Poland on 24 April.[68] The American government extended credit in the amount of $50 million to the Polish government for the purchase of US surplus property held abroad. In addition, the Export-Import Bank of Washington would extend an additional credit of $40 million to the Polish government. This credit was limited to use for the purchase in the US of coal wagons and locomotives. Poland was the principal European coal-producing country and the US regarded its supplies as essential to rebuilding Western European industry and reducing European reliance on American coal. In exchange for the credit, the Polish government promised that the wagons would be used to transport coal to Western Europe and the Balkans.[69] Crucially, the Polish government promised to provide compensation for requisitioned or nationalised American property.[70] Finally, the Polish government also agreed to participate in an international trade and employment conference, which was part of the State Department's broader campaign to establish freer world trade.[71]

The general Foreign Office view was that the State Department had secured real concessions relating to American economic interests in Poland,

[66] TNA: FO 371/56437/N4987/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 11 April 1946; FO 371/56437/N5190/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 19 April 1946; *FRUS 1946*, vol. 6, 420–422.

[67] TNA: FO 371/56437/N5194/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 22 April 1946; FO 371/56437/N5273/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 24 April 1946.

[68] Warner asked Balfour whether anyone from the British embassy in Washington had made a final attempt to persuade the State Department not to go ahead with the credit agreement. TNA: FO 371/56438/N5398/34/55, Warner to Balfour, 1 May 1946. I did not find any response to this question from the Washington embassy in the Foreign Office files nor is there any record of an intervention by Halifax or Balfour in *FRUS 1946*, vol. 6.

[69] TNA: FO 371/56438/N5445/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 25 April 1946.

[70] The Polish government also undertook to abide by the principles of trade set out in the Mutual Aid Agreement of 1942 and to carry out the US–Polish Commercial Treaty of 1931.

[71] TNA: FO 371/56438/N5385/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 24 April 1946; FO 371/56439/N6076/34/55, Halifax to Bevin, 2 May 1946.

but had settled for political assurances which were entirely without value. There was also anger at the way in which the State Department had 'thoroughly let down' their British counterparts. In a confidential letter to Balfour in Washington, Warner wrote that the Foreign Office was 'very much taken aback and distressed by the Americans' behaviour' and could not understand 'their lack of frankness'. In the view of the Foreign Office, the American decision had totally undermined the British and American protest notes. The Americans, wrote Warner, had '[led] us to think that they would make parallel representations of the strongest kind to the Polish Provisional Government' but instead had 'disclos[ed] at the very last moment that they were giving them credits in return for quite insufficient—and indeed I am afraid worthless—assurances'. Warner's frustration was unmistakable. 'How on earth did the Americans come to be so completely unrealistic—especially after the detailed discussions with us and between the two Ambassadors in Warsaw—as to the points which required covering?' He sought an explanation for the sudden change of tactics in language which departs from the usual crisp, formal Foreign Office style:

> Were the State Department deliberately concealing from us the fact that they had a Credit Agreement on the stocks and were they therefore leading us down the lane in the conversation with [undersecretary of state, Dean] Acheson and [assistant chief of the Division of Eastern European Affairs, C. Burke] Elbrick? … Or was there sudden high level intervention? … Or was there a lack of liaison inside the State Department? Or what?

Warner's letter contains a note of desperation. He recognised that the American move had the potential to irrevocably damage the Polish opposition movement. He pointed out that the opposition in Poland was stronger and better organised than in the other countries of Eastern Europe. The opposition was 'well led and not cowed'. But without Anglo-American support, that opposition would not be able to withstand communist pressure indefinitely. 'Are we, in spite of this, in spite of the Yalta Agreement and in spite of the encouragement given to Mikołajczyk at Moscow to think he and his colleagues would receive the support of the United States Government and ourselves, to allow the tiny Communist minority to increase their hold on Poland?' If, however, 'we and the Americans do not play our part and the opposition is driven completely underground we may well have a bloody civil war in Poland'.[72]

[72] TNA: FO 371/56438/N5398/34/55, Warner to Balfour, 1 May 1946.

Warner's frustration arose from more than just the American about-face. In effect, Foreign Office policy towards Poland was beginning to fall apart. The Foreign Office assessment in May 1946 was that the Soviet Union would probably allow Mikołajczyk to remain in office because without him the Polish government would lack legitimacy, and Poland would slide into serious disorder. The Foreign Office judged, however, that continuing British support would be essential to Mikołajczyk's survival, both politically and personally: 'If we were to cease giving our support [Mikołajczyk] would probably lose much of his position in Poland and would possibly be murdered or arrested'.[73] Instead of adopting a strongly interventionist approach with the new administration and lending substantial support to Mikołajczyk at this critical juncture, however, British policy faltered uncertainly. Just at the moment when Mikołajczyk needed an unequivocal show of international support during the negotiations for an electoral bloc, Foreign Office officials instead had to focus their attention on persuading Bevin not to abandon the PSL altogether. Then, having secured approval to make a protest to Warsaw over its campaign of repression against the PSL, this initiative also foundered on what the Foreign Office clearly perceived to be American cowardice and bad judgement, compounded by Bevin's increasing unwillingness to part ways with his US counterparts on any major policy initiative.

In spite of its frustration with the State Department's decision to proceed with the credit deal, the Foreign Office made another attempt to secure American agreement to make a joint protest to the Polish government over the persecution of the PSL.[74] The need to intervene became increasingly urgent as the PPR stepped up its attacks on the PSL in the run-up to the referendum. The PSL had chosen to use the referendum as an opportunity to demonstrate its support among the population by urging the electorate to vote 'no' to the question regarding the retention of the Senate. Official government propaganda, on the other hand, urged the voters to answer 'yes' to all three referendum questions. Thus, the referendum had developed into a showdown between the PPR-led electoral bloc and the PSL. Cavendish-Bentinck reported that security police had shut down six more PSL district offices, for a total of nine forced to close. In other places, instead of closing offices, the security police were

[73] TNA: FO 371/56423/N8399/27/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 5 June 1946.
[74] TNA: FO 371/56439/N6206/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 15 May 1946.

arresting local party leaders.[75] In mid-June, Mikołajczyk reported an increasing number of clashes between the PSL and the security police. He also detailed the steps undertaken by the government to ensure that the desired results were returned in the referendum, including the complete control by the PPR of the local committees responsible for supervising the voting.[76] Hankey concluded that the referendum was 'obviously a political weapon aimed at [Mikołajczyk]'; the PSL was 'being increasingly discriminated against and liquidated piecemeal'.[77] On 29 June, the day before the referendum, Mikołajczyk held a press conference in which he detailed the mass arrests of PSL party members and supporters across Poland. In the last three weeks, over 1,200 had been arrested, 700 in the Poznań region alone.[78]

Even in these circumstances the Americans again proved unwilling to take a hard line. In early June, Clark Kerr,[79] who had been transferred from Moscow to Washington, reported that the State Department intended to wait for the report they had requested from Lane on the recent spate of political arrests in Poland and the attempts to disrupt the PSL before deciding whether to make representations in Warsaw. This news prompted Hankey to comment that it was 'clearly useless waiting further for the Americans'. He proposed that Britain go ahead and make the representations it had been contemplating since the spring without the Americans.[80] Later in June, Llewellyn Thompson, the new State Department chief of the Division of Eastern European Affairs, informed Clark Kerr that it might be impolitic for the US and Britain to make further representations in Warsaw, since 'continued special interest' in the PSL might backfire on Mikołajczyk, who was already subject to accusations of acting as a stooge of the Western powers. Allen noted that the 'State Department's knees [were] again weakening' and Hankey concluded that 'Mr Thompson had obviously been got at'.[81]

[75] TNA: FO 371/56440/N7400/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 5 June 1946; FO 371/56441/N7860/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 15 June 1946.

[76] TNA: FO 371/56441/N7641/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 12 June 1946.

[77] TNA: FO 371/56441/N7860/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20 June 1946.

[78] TNA: FO 371/56442/N8431/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 29 June 1946.

[79] Clark Kerr's title was now Lord Inverchapel. For consistency, I have continued to refer to him as Clark Kerr.

[80] TNA: FO 371/56440/N7397/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 6 June 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 14 June 1946.

[81] TNA: FO 371/56442/N8141/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 22 June 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 25 June 1946.

The State Department did briefly suspend its credit agreement and the transfer of surplus supplies after the Polish government censored the telegrams of American press correspondents and failed to uphold its promise to publish the exchange of notes between the Polish ambassador in Warsaw and the State Department regarding the credit agreement. The arrangement was, however, restored at the end of June after a brief interval.[82] Reporting the decision, Clark Kerr noted that the State Department did not intend to withhold the extension of credits until fair elections had taken place. The restoration of the credit agreement again caused consternation in the Foreign Office. The British were disappointed by the American decision, particularly given the timing immediately prior to the referendum. '[T]he very worst moment the Americans could have chosen', commented Hancock.[83]

The British government, which had been engaged in its own negotiations for an Anglo-Polish financial settlement since the end of 1945, announced that it would refuse to ratify the agreement until the Polish government had fulfilled the terms of the Yalta agreement and the undertakings given by Bierut at Potsdam. Specifically, Bevin sought satisfactory assurances that free elections would be held in 1946. Bevin specified that the agreement would not be ratified if 'there were indications that measures had been taken to suppress any of the existing political parties'.[84] The decision to refuse ratification of the financial agreement sent a clear signal that Britain intended to insist on the fulfilment of the Yalta and Potsdam commitments, but Bevin was unwilling to go so far as to adopt the Foreign Office's recommendation that ratification be delayed until elections had actually been held, effectively nullifying the impact of the ratification condition.[85] The conclusion of the long-delayed Anglo-Polish financial agreement just before the referendum served to strengthen the position of the provisional government, to confer legitimacy upon it, and, as Mikołaczyk had commented to Lane, to give the impression that it was 'not viewed with disfavour' by Western governments.

[82] *FRUS, 1946,* vol. 6, 467.

[83] TNA: FO 371/56442/N8260/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 25 June 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 28 June 1946; FO 371/56423/N8363/27/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 27 June 1946.

[84] TNA: FO 371/56422/N8192/27/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 24 June 1946; FO 371/56423/N8363/27/55, Bevin to Strasburger, 28 June 1946.

[85] Hankey made this recommendation and Sargent agreed that it would be the most effective course of action. TNA: FO 371/56423/N8399/27/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 18 June 1946; N8367/27/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 28 June 1946.

Referendum

In the final weeks before the referendum, the Foreign Office and the Warsaw embassy were increasingly at odds with the foreign secretary over the best approach to policy in Poland. A private letter from Hankey to Cavendish-Bentinck reveals the ongoing anxiety amongst officials that Bevin would decide to withdraw British support for the PSL. Hankey questioned whether 'it had been "unwise"' for the PSL 'to make the referendum an occasion for an apparent trial of strength'. He explained his concern: 'What I am afraid will happen is that the results will be favourable to the Communists and our masters may then say to you and me "What is all this about the strength of the non-Communist Parties in Poland? Surely our Embassy and the Northern Department are, after all, mistaken"'. Hankey worried that the results of the referendum would be misinterpreted by ministers and MPs who did not properly understand the methods of intimidation and repression employed against the PSL.[86] Cavendish-Bentinck's reply suggests accumulated frustration at the government's unwillingness to pursue any of the initiatives he proposed and its great reluctance to intervene on behalf of the opposition. 'If, whenever an election takes place, conducted with totalitarian methods, our masters are going to accept the result as representing the feeling of the people of the country … then they may as well reconcile themselves to permanent totalitarian Communist regimes in all the countries in which the Communist Party at present hold the key posts.'[87]

The referendum was held on 30 June 1946 with a turnout of 85.3 per cent of the electorate in spite of the intimidation tactics employed by the PPR and the security police, including the arrest of thousands of PSL supporters, the disbanding of local PSL committees and the closure of local branch offices prior to the referendum. The official results of the referendum released by the government were falsified. These claimed that 68 per cent of the electorate had voted for the abolition of the Senate, 77 per cent for land reform and nationalisation of industry, and 91 per cent for the western frontier with Germany.[88] The British embassy in Warsaw, on the other hand, estimated that a majority of approximately 80 per cent voted against the abolition of the Senate in order to demonstrate their opposition to the present government. The embassy noted that a 'surprisingly

[86] TNA: FO 371/56441/N7963/34/55, Hankey to Cavendish-Bentinck, 19 June 1946.
[87] TNA: FO 371/56442/N8518/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 25 June 1946.
[88] TNA: FO 371/56443/N9147/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 12 July 1946.

large proportion' of the electorate also voted against agricultural reform and nationalisation.[89] These results, which were collected by embassy observers at polling stations around the country, have since been roughly corroborated by documents released after 1989. Only 26.9 per cent had voted 'yes' to all three questions as they had been urged to do by official government propaganda. In response to the question about the retention of the Senate, to which the PSL had urged voters to answer in the negative, 73.1 per cent had voted 'no'.[90] The British embassy reported back to the Foreign Office with 'voluminous evidence' on various instances of fraud in the collection and tabulation of the referendum votes. For instance, Mikołajczyk showed Cavendish-Bentinck a large wad of voting papers given to him by a printer who had been ordered to destroy them. Plumbers had been called to unblock a drain in a school building which had been used as a polling booth to find that it had been clogged by ballot papers.

Conclusion

Overall, in the run-up to the referendum, British policy was characterised by a lack of consistency and an increasingly sharp division between Bevin and the Northern Department over the best approach to Moscow and Warsaw, as well as to Washington. Officials advocated a robust, oppositional stance in the face of Soviet and PPR attempts to destroy the Polish opposition. They sought to pursue this harder line independently of the US when the State Department backtracked. Bevin, however, was increasingly reluctant to act unilaterally, insisting that British policy be aligned with that of the US. At this point, several pressures were converging on Bevin, which help to explain his unwillingness to pursue a policy towards Poland independently of the US. He was under increasing pressure from the Treasury to limit expenditure as Britain's economic situation deteriorated. In order to ease the financial pressure, Bevin sought to persuade the US to assume a greater proportion of the responsibility for certain key strategic responsibilities which he regarded as essential Western—not only

[89] TNA: FO 371/56443/N8598/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 2 July 1946; FO 371/56443/N8888/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, including ten enclosed reports on the conduct of the referendum from embassy staff in electoral districts across Poland, 10 July 1946.

[90] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland,* 196.

British—interests, including the Middle East and the Mediterranean. In the spring of 1946 specifically, Bevin was trying to secure greater American involvement in Palestine. At the same time, Britain was struggling with the burden of financial aid to Greece and officials were preparing an approach to the US for assistance.[91] American reluctance to accept a larger share of these responsibilities was a source of growing frustration to Bevin, but as long as uncertainty prevailed about the US commitment to an international role, he could not risk departing dramatically from the US, particularly in an area such as Poland which was not vital to British interests.

Although the Foreign Office accepted that the results had been fabricated, the referendum did not bring about a change in British policy. In fact, as the Foreign Office feared, from this point on, Bevin's support for the PSL began to weaken. This was evident immediately after the referendum, when, for instance, Mikołajczyk requested that the British government state publicly that it did not accept the published results of the referendum. Although Britain accepted that the referendum results had been 'cooked', the reply to Mikołajczyk's request was that 'for the present we feel we have no locus standi for an official pronouncement of the kind suggested by M. Mikołajczyk'.[92]

Bevin also continued to tailor his policy to American requirements. He asked the Foreign Office to get the views of the State Department before he delivered a response in the House of Commons to a parliamentary question concerning the timing of the Polish elections. The Foreign Office proposed that Bevin respond that the British and American governments shared 'a common anxiety to see the Yalta and Potsdam Agreements in respect of Poland implemented and … both expect[ed] the Polish Provisional Government to carry out its obligations under these Agreements'. The State Department responded that it would prefer a rephrasing of the statement to avoid the implication that Britain and the US were '"ganging up"' against the Soviet Union.[93] This pattern of

[91] Robert Frazier, *Anglo-American Relations with Greece: The Coming of the Cold War, 1942–47* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 108–110; Robert M. Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America, 1944–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 276–280; Folly, 'Ernest Bevin and Anglo-American Relations', 157.

[92] TNA: FO 371/56443/N8804/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 5 July 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 9–11 July 1946; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 12 July 1946.

[93] TNA: FO 371/56444/N9295/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 12 July 1946; Washington to Foreign Office, 12 July 1946.

moderating the tone of British interventions in Poland, or abandoning initiatives entirely at the behest of the Americans, remained in evidence during the critical period between the referendum and the elections, when Mikołajczyk most needed international support in order to prevent the PSL from being completely sidelined.

CHAPTER 5

From the Referendum to the Elections, June 1946 to January 1947

Introduction

The months between the referendum and the general elections in January 1947 saw Britain effectively relinquish its remaining influence over the postwar political settlement in Poland. First, in the summer of 1946, Britain rejected Mikołajczyk's request for international supervision of the elections. Second, the British failed to exploit a serious split within the PPS over the issue of long-term cooperation with the PPR. Third, minimal support was extended to the PSL in the pre-election period and the party's eventual elimination was accepted as inevitable. Fourth, once the elections had been held, it was agreed that no further significant attempts to alter the political situation in Poland would be made. This process of disengagement did not occur systematically or seamlessly; it was not the result of a single decision, nor was it the product of consensus between Bevin and his officials in the Northern Department and the Warsaw embassy. Instead, it was the result of a convergence of a series of other pressures and priorities which together discouraged an interventionist policy in Poland: deteriorating Anglo-Soviet relations, which threatened to break down altogether as a result of the deadlock over Germany; Britain's declining economy, which forced Bevin reluctantly into a position of greater dependence on American assistance and goodwill, thus limiting the scope of his policy options; the pursuit of Bevin's plans for

A. Mason, *British Policy Towards Poland, 1944–1956*, Security, Conflict and Cooperation in the Contemporary World,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94241-4_5

Western European cooperation, which heightened his caution vis-à-vis Poland and throughout Eastern Europe; rising Labour party opposition to Bevin's foreign policy, which culminated in an open revolt in the autumn of 1946; and finally, renewed tension with Attlee over Bevin's refusal to accommodate Soviet ambitions in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean.

Mikołajczyk Requests International Supervision of Elections

In the summer of 1946, Mikołajczyk announced his intention to seek international supervision of the upcoming general elections. On 16 July 1946, speaking with foreign press correspondents, Mikołajczyk accused the provisional Polish government of two violations of the Moscow agreement: the arrest of more than 5,000 members of the PSL before, during, and after the referendum, and the failure to appoint a member of the PSL to the Presidium of the National Council (no PSL member had been appointed to replace Witos after his death in October 1945). Mikołajczyk also drew attention to the electoral fraud committed by the PPR during the referendum. In light of these violations, he put forward a number of demands in connection with the upcoming general elections: every party should be represented on the electoral committees at every level and there should be complete freedom of pre-election campaigning. He also announced that in the coming session of parliament, the PSL would put forward proposals to ensure that the elections would take place freely, including the possibility of international supervision.[1]

The British response to Mikołajczyk's request for international supervision was inconsistent: the Foreign Office oscillated between intervention and disengagement. This inconsistency hints at the widening gap between Bevin and his officials: Bevin sought to distance Britain from involvement in Poland; the Northern Department officials were obliged to conduct policy accordingly but were reluctant to abandon their previous interventionist approach; at the other extreme the Warsaw embassy wanted to extend stronger support to the Polish opposition. Initially, the Northern Department rejected Mikołajczyk's request for international supervision on the grounds that it would be impracticable: neither the Soviet nor the Polish provisional government would agree to international supervision; it

[1] TNA: FO 371/56444/N9328/34/55, Russell to Bevin, 18 July 1946.

would be too difficult to secure enough suitable Polish-speaking observers; and above all, it would commit Britain to 'an undesirable degree of responsibility for internal developments in Poland'.[2]

Mikołajczyk persisted despite the British refusal; the Warsaw embassy supported him; and the Northern Department reconsidered his request. Mikołajczyk insisted that if Poland did not receive the support of the Western democracies, the PSL would continue to be suppressed, the elections would be rigged, and a totalitarian communist regime would be installed. Mikołajczyk predicted that if this were to happen, there would be an increase in violence across the country; large numbers of people would join the underground movement; the security situation would deteriorate to the point of chaos; the government would find its own resources inadequate to control the country and would have to request more Soviet police and troops. Ultimately, 'a state of smouldering civil war would ensue'.[3] The Warsaw embassy counselled strong support for Mikołajczyk. John Russell, first secretary, urged that Britain 'go all out' to secure international supervision. He insisted that Britain could not 'afford to follow a new Munich policy at this stage in Eastern Europe'. He concluded: 'In the immediate future we seem more likely to lose than to win: we must, however, stake all or we shall most certainly lose all. A new Munich in Poland to-day would be irretrievable for many years to come, and I am sure that only the boldest of policies now can save our position in the long-term future'.[4]

The Northern Department agreed to reconsider the possibility of international supervision. Hankey supported the proposal, arguing that it would be possible to persuade the Polish government to grant admission to a small corps of observers, which would be enough to allow the British government to determine whether the elections had been faked. The presence of a British—and ideally an American—contingent of observers would, in Hankey's view, 'put the Polish Government in a remarkably awkward position and to that degree would make them more chary of faking the elections'. Also, crucially, a corps of observers would improve Mikołajczyk's position and 'give the Polish people confidence'.[5]

[2] TNA: FO 371/56444/N9328/34/55, Foreign Office minutes, 20 July 1946; N9711/34/55, Cabinet Offices to J.S.M. Washington, 22 July 1946.

[3] TNA: FO 371/56444/N10042/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 2 August 1946.

[4] TNA: FO 371/56444/N10034/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 2 August 1946; FO 371/56445/N10332/34/55, Russell to Hankey, 31 July 1946.

[5] TNA: FO 371/56445/N10369/34/55, draft telegram by Hankey, 7 August 1946.

Ultimately, however, Bevin rejected the proposal. Hankey summarised the reasons for Bevin's opposition: any internationally constituted supervision mission would have to include a Soviet contingent, but the Soviets would inevitably 'connive at falsification of local results wherever possible and refuse to endorse any joint report on the elections which was not to their liking'. In short, Britain would 'have responsibility without effective control' over the electoral process.[6] Cavendish-Bentinck met with Bevin in Paris and attempted to persuade him to reconsider his decision on international supervision. Bevin instructed the ambassador to tell Mikołajczyk that Britain 'would back his efforts to secure free elections to the best of our ability', but insisted that he 'could not promise what was impossible'.[7]

Bevin did not offer further explanation for his refusal to reconsider international supervision of the Polish elections, but it is possible to assemble a picture of the other pressures and priorities that narrowed his range of options. In the summer of 1946, the largest and most pressing problem occupying Bevin's attention was the future of Germany. It was here that Bevin's greatest policy problems converged: doubts about American support; the future of Anglo-Soviet cooperation; and the pressure of maintaining Britain's foreign obligations with diminished economic strength. The cost of maintaining the British zone had become unsustainable; Bevin was under increasing pressure from the Chancellor to limit expenditure; and the problem was exacerbated by Soviet unwillingness to provide much needed food shipments for Britain to sustain its densely populated zone. Very reluctantly, Bevin was edging towards the conclusion that the only solution might be a division of Germany, a step which was liable to lead to a rupture in relations with the Soviet Union and which he therefore saw as an absolute last resort.[8] At the same time, he desperately needed the US to take on a greater share of the cost of the British zone, but American intentions remained unclear. He sought both to limit the damage to Anglo-Soviet relations and to avoid giving the Americans the impression that he was taking an unnecessarily confrontational approach towards the Soviet Union.

[6] TNA: FO 371/56445/N10369/34/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 10 August 1946; N10480/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 16 August 1946.

[7] TNA: FO 371/56445/N10377/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 14 August 1946; N10429/34/55, Hankey to Warner, 16 August 1946; N10480/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 16 August 1946.

[8] TNA: CAB 128/5/56, CM 56 (46), 6 June 1946; CAB 195/4/44, CM 56 (46), 6 June 1946.

Bevin's comments during a Cabinet discussion in June on the cost of the occupation zone are useful in elucidating his reasoning: he was 'reluctant to break' with the Soviet Union, but if the division of Germany did prove to be the only solution to the crisis in the British zone, Britain could not be the one responsible for provoking this step. He would sooner the US 'had a row with R[ussia] than th[a]t we opened it'.[9] Bevin's restraint vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in his approach to the German problem—the resolution of which was vital to Britain's economic and security interests—serves as a strong indication that he applied even greater caution in other areas of policy likely to antagonise the Soviets.

At the Paris Council of Foreign Ministers meeting Bevin warned that Britain could no longer sustain the burden of maintaining its occupation zone in Germany; the Soviets had created an impossible situation by taking reparations from their zone while refusing to share resources or to cooperate in establishing a common import–export system. Bevin threatened to organise the British zone separately unless the country was reorganised as a single economic unit. In response, Byrnes extended an offer to join the American zone with one or more of the other occupation zones. As expected, the Soviets reacted angrily; Molotov made a speech rejecting the dismemberment of Germany, and the meeting ended inconclusively.[10] While the future of Germany hung in the balance, Bevin was reluctant to take up the issue of election supervision in Poland. To put two such unwelcome prospects before the Soviet Union at the same time would have seemed too much like a provocation, with potentially explosive consequences. In spite of his frustration over the impasse in Germany, Bevin's comment in Cabinet that he remained 'reluctant to break' with the Soviet Union, suggests that at this stage, he had not altogether abandoned the hope that relations could still be improved.[11]

Further, even after Byrnes's Paris offer of a bizonal arrangement, Bevin continued to worry that the Americans would '"leave him in the lurch" in Europe'.[12] Studies of American policy in the immediate postwar period suggest that Bevin had good reason to worry. In his work on Anglo-American relations, Robert M. Hathaway notes that 'the prevalent sentiment in the American capital' was 'a chary reluctance to acknowledge the

[9] TNA: CAB 195/4/44, CM 56 (46), 6 June 1946.
[10] Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 94–95; Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership*, 258.
[11] TNA: CAB 195/4/44, CM 56 (46), 6 June 1946.
[12] Bevin, quoted in Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 105.

many similar interests binding them to the British'. Even in mid-1946, when US policy towards the Soviet Union began to harden, this shift did not necessarily translate automatically into a friendlier or more sympathetic approach to Britain. For instance, Byrnes's merger offer was timed to offset the propaganda value of a speech by Molotov in which he championed German political unity, rather than out of a desire to relieve Britain's financial distress.[13] The tenuous, conditional nature of American assistance meant that Bevin had little choice but to err on the side of caution. Increasingly suspicious of the Soviet Union and as yet uncertain of the US position, challenging the Soviets over Germany and Poland simultaneously was too risky, too likely to provoke an aggressive Soviet reaction, recrimination from the Americans, and the collapse of the nascent arrangements for a solution to the German problem.

Turning to the UN

The Foreign Office sought to submit representations to the provisional Polish government before the passage of a new electoral law on 20 August, in a joint approach with the US.[14] Both the British and American notes were submitted to the Polish government on 19 August.[15] The British note expressed concern over the irregularities which had occurred during the referendum, drawing particular attention to the arrest of leading PSL supporters shortly before the referendum, as well as to the restrictions imposed upon the opposition parties during the campaign. Attention was drawn to reports that in some places, members of the army had been obliged to vote collectively and without conditions of secrecy, as well as to allegations of electoral fraud during the count. The British government also protested about the suspension of Popiel's Labour party. Reminding the provisional government of its undertaking at Potsdam to hold free elections, the note emphasised that all democratic parties should have equal freedom and facilities during the upcoming general election—a condition which was 'clearly being disregarded'. Finally, the note specified that all parties should be represented on all electoral commissions at all levels; votes should be counted in the presence of representatives of all

[13] Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership*, 250, 258–259. On Bevin's frustration with American 'stinginess', see Folly, 'Ernest Bevin and Anglo-American relations', especially 153–157.

[14] TNA: FO 371/56444/N10056/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 7 August 1946; Foreign Office to Washington, 9 August 1946.

[15] TNA: FO 371/56445/N10646/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 August 1946.

parties; results should be published immediately in each voting district; and there should be a system for appeals in the event of electoral disputes.[16]

Mikołajczyk was pleased with the British and American representations but continued to try to secure formal foreign supervision of the elections. He told Cavendish-Bentinck that he would consider bringing the Polish situation before the UN Security Council if the new electoral law was designed to ensure victory for the PPR and its affiliates.[17] Towards the end of August, the Foreign Office considered the possibility of taking the cases of Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania to the UN General Assembly (the Security Council idea was discarded on the grounds that the Polish situation did not constitute a dispute which would be likely to threaten international peace). In all three countries, attacks against opposition parties had intensified over the preceding five weeks, and the Foreign Office sought to take a step which would reinforce the representations. 'We have for some time been casting about for "sanctions" with which to back up our representations to the Polish Provisional Government', explained Warner, 'and we have been considering the possibility of threatening a resort to the United Nations'.[18]

By late October, the Foreign Office was prepared to proceed with the plan to bring the matter of 'the suppression of the liberty of the individual' in Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania before the assembly. Warner suggested that the 'shocking state of dictatorship and repression of pre-electoral activities' in the Eastern European states could be raised. It would be 'particularly desirable' to draw attention to the case of Poland, given the proximity of the elections, which seemed 'likely [to be] faked'. Bringing the issue before the assembly could potentially be very effective because 'one of the things the Polish Government most fear and dislike is publicity at U.N.O. for their shortcomings'. Before proceeding, however, the Foreign Office sought first to confirm that the US did not have any objection to this course of action. Byrnes viewed the plan as unwise, arguing that it would end in 'a wrangle with Molotov over the terms of the Yalta agreement'. He maintained that the assembly was not the right forum for such an argument.[19] In spite of growing American apprehension about the

[16] TNA: FO 371/56445/N10367/34/55, Foreign Office to Paris, 13 August 1946.

[17] TNA: FO 371/56446/N10739/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 21 August 1946.

[18] TNA: FO 371/56446/N10814/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 14 August 1946; Warner to Jebb, 24 August 1946.

[19] TNA: FO 371/56450/N15174/34/55, Warner to Jebb, 27 November 1946.

Soviet Union, US policy in Europe remained inconsistent throughout 1946, 'vacillat[ing] violently and unpredictably between absolute non-intervention and intervention beyond a point which we think desirable' as one frustrated Foreign Office official commented.[20]

The idea of bringing the issue of political repression in Eastern Europe before the UN General Assembly does not come up again in the Foreign Office files after its rejection by Byrnes. The scuppering of the UN plan highlights Bevin's increasing reluctance to deviate from the US in his foreign policy, particularly in any matter which involved the possibility of conflict with the Soviet Union. American agreement or cooperation had come to be regarded virtually as a prerequisite for the adoption of a particular policy. Bevin would not take a policy step towards Poland, or indeed towards Eastern Europe more generally, without first clearing it with the Americans. By the autumn of 1946, negotiations were underway for the fusion of the British and American occupation zones of Germany. These were tricky talks to navigate as the British attempted to persuade the reluctant Americans to take on a greater share of the cost.[21] Britain's economic situation continued to decline, with, for example, the introduction of bread rationing, which had been avoided even during the war. Britain's financial distress nevertheless remained a 'low priority' for the US, with the Americans refusing to take on any more than half of the trade deficit of the merged zones.[22] Further, uncertainty remained about the longevity of the US commitment, with the Americans 'still taking a short-term and hesitant view of the bizonal discussions'.[23] Thus, while the bizone negotiations were in progress, it was particularly important not to undertake any foreign policy initiative which might annoy the Americans and delay or jeopardise the process.

PPS Split

In the summer of 1946, the PPS unexpectedly began to exert greater independence from the PPR. The PPS leadership was unhappy about the way in which it had been sidelined by the PPR during the referendum. Instead of treating the PPS on an equal basis, the communists had relegated the

[20] Unnamed Foreign Office official, quoted in Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership*, 252.
[21] Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 110–115.
[22] Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership*, 260.
[23] Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 111.

socialists to the position of 'junior partner' in the preparation and running of the referendum.[24] Further, the true results of the referendum had shown how little support there was for the communist party among the Polish population. At the same time, however, the PSL had proved powerless to prevent the provisional government from falsifying the referendum results. Thus, although the referendum confirmed the PSL's broad support base, the final outcome represented a setback for the party. A number of key PPS leaders therefore saw a chance for their own party to take a more prominent role in the future government.[25] The socialists reasoned that, in the wake of the referendum debacle, Stalin would have to reconsider his support for the PPR. The PPS, which was friendly towards the Soviet Union, but which also enjoyed genuine support among the population, was well-placed to assume the leadership position within a government which would be a true coalition, rather than only a nominal one, entirely dominated by the PPR.[26]

Tension rose between the PPS and PPR throughout the summer, with leaders from both parties criticising each other publicly in speeches and in print. Osóbka-Morawski asserted in a speech in Łódź that the PPS was the party best-suited to 'hold aloft the banner of national unity'. He maintained: 'If one can speak of a leading party, it is the PPS'.[27] In August, three prominent PPS members, Henryk Wachowicz, Bolesław Drobner, and Ryszard Obrączka all declared that the party should wrest political leadership away from the PPR, or at least should only enter into cooperation with the PPR if it was 'on a fully equal basis'.[28] The deterioration of the PPR–PPS relationship also led to internal conflict within the socialist party. In particular, there was a significant faction which objected to the PPS leadership's move towards greater independence from the communists. This dissatisfaction culminated in a leadership challenge by a group of 28 PPS members, led by the minister of information and propaganda, Stefan Matuszewski, who from the early postwar period had favoured very close cooperation with the PPR.[29] The pro-PPR group planned to take control of the party headquarters, arrest Osóbka-Morawski

[24] Prażmowska, 'Polish Socialist Party', 349.

[25] The group of leaders who favoured greater independence from the PPR were Cyrankiewicz, Drobner, Hochfeld, Obrączka, Osóbka-Morawski, Szwalbe, and Henryk Wachowicz. Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 295.

[26] Ibid., 295.

[27] Quoted in Ibid., 295–298.

[28] Ibid., 298.

[29] Prażmowska, 'Polish Socialist Party', 341.

and Cyrankiewicz, and initiate a merger of the communist and socialist parties. The plotters had also apparently enlisted the support of a prewar PPS military unit, which was brought in from Kielce to assist in the coup attempt. The plot was discovered; the coup attempt was thwarted; the PPS leadership expelled one of the leaders, Stanisław Skowroński, from the party, and ejected Matuszewski from the Executive Committee, which was promptly reinforced by several of Cyrankiewicz's allies. By the beginning of September, this centrist group was firmly in control of the party leadership.[30]

There is some evidence that at the same time as the PPS was pressing for greater autonomy from the PPR, Stalin was becoming reconciled to the idea of allowing the non-communist Polish political parties to occupy a larger role in government. First, in mid-July, Romer reported that the PPR had been warned by the Soviet government that they would have to reach some sort of accommodation with the Polish opposition. This was also the view of the British embassy in Warsaw. Russell reported that the referendum results had come as a shock in Moscow, where the depth of the PPR's unpopularity had hitherto not been well understood. Russell explained that neither the Soviet embassy in Warsaw nor the Politburo in Moscow were particularly well-informed about the views of the Polish population, largely because the NKVD reported only what they thought Moscow wanted to hear. 'I am therefore quite prepared to believe that the Politburo … has issued instructions to its agents in the present Polish Government to keep things quiet and make an arrangement with the P.S.L. if possible', commented Russell.[31] In mid-September, Julian Hochfeld, a prominent centrist member of the PPS,[32] reported to Denis

[30] Ibid., 349–350.

[31] The occurrence of a shift in Soviet policy is given greater weight by a meeting which had taken place between Lebedev and Mikołajczyk. Until this point, Lebedev had refused even to receive Mikołajczyk. TNA: FO 371/56444/N9822/34/55, Savery to Allen, 15 July 1946; FO Minutes, 17 July 1946; Hankey to Russell, 31 July 1946; FO 371/56445/N10451/34/55, Russell to Hankey, 10 August 1946.

[32] Hochfeld was one of the PPS leaders who continued to favour ongoing cooperation with the PSL. Although he regarded true political pluralism as impossible, given the circumstances in postwar Poland, neither was he a supporter of the electoral bloc. According to Kersten: 'In Hochfeld's view if the PPS were to endorse the bloc, it would do so solely because it considered it the only path that would allow them to avoid a dictatorship of the proletariat, hence, the mass terror and the drastic limitations of all civil rights'. Hochfeld was concerned about the increasingly repressive measures employed by the security forces, fearing that 'the mechanism of repression, once started, would act blindly and increase the terror to dimensions that were difficult to foresee'. Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 253–255.

Healey,[33] secretary of the Labour party's International Department, that Stalin had promised Cyrankiewicz and Osóbka-Morawski, who had flown to Moscow to see Stalin after the coup attempt, that the PPS could have larger representation in the government and even that a 'genuine offer of collaboration' could be extended to the PSL.[34] Two weeks later, Witold Kulerski, secretary of the Council of the PPS, acting as Mikołajcyzk's envoy in London,[35] confirmed that Stalin had 'agreed to less rigid control in Poland', had consented to Matuszewski's expulsion from the PPS, and had agreed that the party should 'be allowed more freedom'. According to Kulerski: 'In general Stalin had conveyed the impression that he must have peace in Poland and that the present regime was not conducting its affairs in a manner which ensured this'.[36]

This contemporary analysis of the Soviet position is supported by the interpretations of several historians. Prażmowska argues that there are 'strong indications' that Stalin spoke directly to the PPR leadership, admonishing them not to completely undermine the independence of the PPS.[37] Likewise, John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds argue that the

[33] As Secretary of the Labour Party's International Department, Healey was responsible for reestablishing links with European socialist parties and helping to form a new Socialist International. As part of this work, Healey attended socialist party conferences in Western and Eastern Europe. Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), 74–75.

[34] TNA: FO 371/56446/N12218/34/55, Healey to Hankey, 12 September 1946.

[35] Kulerski met with Sargent and Hankey in London at the end of September 1946. Bevin declined his request for a meeting. Kulerski emphasised Mikołajczyk's concern about the situation in Poland. He would need further help from the British government 'in order that he should succeed in securing a real democratic regime in Poland'. Kulerski reported that the PSL was subject to 'constant persecution', was unable to publish its newspaper, and could not hold public meetings or conduct normal electoral activity. Mikołajczyk believed that foreign observers would help to make it more difficult for the communists to fake the elections. Kulerski reported that Mikołajczyk had 'the gravest forebodings' about the way in which the new electoral law would be applied. Kulerski reiterated Mikołajczyk's request that Britain take the question of Poland to the UN Security Council. Mikołajczyk was also 'most anxious' that Britain should maintain its policy of withholding economic help to the present Polish government. He had expressed 'dismay' at the American decision to implement the export–import bank credit in mid-August, approximately a week prior to the submission of the joint British and American notes regarding the elections. TNA: FO 371/56447/N12741/34/55, Hankey memo, 28 September 1946; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 11 October 1946.

[36] TNA: FO 371/56446/N12336/34/55, Hankey to Cavendish-Bentinck, 25 September 1946.

[37] Prażmowska, 'Polish Socialist Party', 350–351.

evidence suggests that Stalin reined in the PPR after Cyrankiewicz and Osóbka-Morawski's trip to Moscow. According to Coutouvidis and Reynolds, Jakub Berman, head of the UB, the Polish security police, and responsible for liaison with the Kremlin, ordered the leftist PPS group to put an end to their attempts to take control of the leadership of the party. The authors imply that Berman did so on instructions from Moscow.[38] Finally, I.I. Orlik cites a conversation in May 1946 during which Stalin told Berman and Osóbka-Morawski that Poland could 'move closer to socialism' without having to establish 'a dictatorship of the proletariat or a Soviet structure', implying that at least in the spring and summer of 1946, Stalin was prepared to allow a degree of political freedom in Poland.[39]

This shift in Soviet policy was significant, affording a potential opportunity for Britain to step in and loosen the PPR's grip on power by offering strong support to a more independent PPS. An autonomous PPS could shore up the position of the PSL and help to create a viable alternative to a Soviet-dominated, single-party Polish government. From the point at which the other democratic political parties were either eliminated or chose to enter into cooperation with the PPR, the objective of Foreign Office policy had been to see the PSL form a government following free elections. The PPS split from the PPR offered a means of consolidating the increasingly fragile position of the PSL if the two parties could be brought into some form of coalition. The importance of this chance was underlined by Mikołajcyzk, who for months had emphasised that the political situation in Poland could be 'saved' if the PPS broke with the PPR.[40] The Foreign Office recognised the potential significance of this Soviet policy move, seeing it as a chance to push for greater transparency and fairness in the Polish political process. Warner minuted that the Soviet instructions 'justifie[d]' Britain's policy of 'pressing for the fulfilment of the Yalta pledges'. Bevin, however, noted that although it was 'right to keep up pressure', they must not 'carry this policy on a moment longer

[38] John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986), 263.

[39] Quoted in Norman M. Naimark, 'Post-Soviet Russian Historiography on the Emergence of the Soviet Bloc', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, 3 (Summer 2004): 572.

[40] TNA: FO 371/56451/N15295/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 November 1946.

than absolutely necessary, it must not develop into a kind of amusing sport'.[41]

In early November, Cavendish-Bentinck, in London for consultations, stressed the importance of the shift within the PPS. Cavendish-Bentinck reported that the negotiations concerning the allocation of seats in the electoral bloc continued to drag on, with the PPS refusing to give in to the PPR's demands. Cyrankiewicz was key in resisting PPR domination. Eugenio Reale, the Italian ambassador to Warsaw, who was also a member of the executive of the Italian Communist Party, told Cavendish-Bentinck that the PPR was furious with Cyrankiewicz and regarded him as 'a virtual enemy'.[42] Given the low level of support for the PPR in Poland, if 'the rank and file of the Socialist party [were] becoming increasingly restless under communist tutelage', a split between the parties had the potential to alter the configuration of the government quite dramatically.[43] Warner summarised the implications of these changes: '[A] break away on the part of the Polish Socialists would be a matter of quite first-class importance for future developments in Poland'. The PPR were 'in a tiny minority', and the PPS was the second strongest party after the PSL. He also predicted that the reemergence of an independent, non-communist socialist party in Poland could have important implications for other Eastern European countries.[44]

Cavendish-Bentinck advised strong British support for the breakaway faction of the PPS. He hoped that a meeting could be arranged between Bevin and Cyrankiewicz, who was due to travel to Bournemouth in early November for an International Socialist conference. Cyrankiewicz, however, did not attend the conference after all and the meeting never came to pass.[45] Then, on 20 November, Cavendish-Bentinck reported that the PPS and the PPR had reached agreement on the formation of an electoral bloc. Each of the two parties would have 28 per cent of the seats in the new legislature; the other parties allied to the PPR would have 28 per cent; and the remainder of the seats would be allocated to the

[41] TNA: FO 371/56444/N9822/34/55, FO Minutes, 17 July 1946; Hankey to Russell, 31 July 1946; FO 371/56445/N10451/34/55, Russell to Hankey, 10 August 1946.

[42] TNA: FO 371/56449/N14241/34/G55, Warner memo, 1 November 1946; Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 28 October 1946.

[43] TNA: FO/371/56449/N14042/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 28 October 1946; Foreign Office minutes, 5 November 1946.

[44] TNA: FO 371/56449/N14227/34/55, Warner memo, 1 November 1946.

[45] TNA: FO 371/56449/N14227/34/55, Warner memo, 1 November 1946.

PSL. Cavendish-Bentinck reported that there had been considerable resistance to the deal within the PPS. Eventually, however, Stanisław Szwalbe persuaded the majority of PPS members to accept it. Hankey commented that if the PPS continued to cooperate with the PPR, the two parties, together with their smaller allies, would control approximately 85 per cent of the seats, although it was commonly agreed that the PPS and the PPR together could command a maximum of only 25 to 30 per cent of genuine popular support.[46]

In spite of the PPS–PPR agreement, discord lingered between the leaders of the two parties. The main sources of disagreement were the desire of the PPR to put PPS candidates in an unfavourable position on the electoral lists in certain districts, and conflict over the allocation of ministries after the elections. In order to break the deadlock between the two parties, Stalin asked Gomułka and Cyrankiewicz to visit him in Sochi, on the Black Sea, where he was on holiday. Stalin gave Cyrankiewicz reason to believe that the Soviet Union supported the ongoing existence of an independent socialist party in Poland. Stalin even went so far as to condemn the PPR leaders who sought to establish communist dominance. Armed with these assurances from Stalin, Cyrankiewicz was able to return to Poland and reassure his own party that the PPS would not be subsumed by the PPR.[47] Cavendish-Bentinck saw the summons of Polish leaders to Moscow as an indication that the Soviet government understood that unless the PPR continued to collaborate with the PPS—or at least gave the appearance of ongoing collaboration—the communists would be unable to retain control in Poland.[48] The Soviet summons indicates that Moscow had real concern about the split, highlighting more starkly the opportunity missed by Britain. Cavendish-Bentinck's assessment of this episode was highly accurate: he immediately recognised the moment when the tension which underlay the PPS–PPR relationship created an opening wide enough that some carefully applied leverage might have split the parties apart. Likewise, his reading of the purpose and implications of Stalin's summons was accurate.

[46] TNA: FO 371/56450/N14980/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 22 November 1946; FO 371/56450/N14974/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 November 1946; Foreign Office minutes, 22 November 1946.

[47] Prażmowska, 'Polish Socialist Party', 350–351; Eleonora Syzdek i Bronisław Syzdek, *Cyrankiewicz. Zanim zostanie zapomniany* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Projeckt, 1996), 122–123.

[48] TNA: FO 371/56451/N15295/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 November 1946.

When this crucial chance presented itself for Britain to support the PPS in asserting its autonomy from the PPR, to encourage the party to pursue an independent line of policy, and to maintain a separate organisational existence, nothing was done. At this point, PPS leaders were not quite prepared to break entirely with the PPR,[49] and for its part, the PSL remained reluctant to enter into an alliance with the PPS as long as the socialists continued any form of cooperation with the PPR.[50] Even if the PPS and the PSL were not without mutual reservations, the British did nothing to attempt to facilitate talks between the two parties, or to mediate between them. Had some form of agreement proved to be achievable, the balance of power between the Polish political parties would have shifted dramatically.

Part of the problem was a series of delays in dealing with the issue. In September, when the first reports of a PPS–PPR split began to filter through, the Foreign Office could not immediately confirm the information.[51] Further, the embassy in Warsaw initially cautioned that the seriousness of the rift should not be exaggerated.[52] By the time the accuracy of the reports had been established, Bevin was in New York for the third Council of Foreign Ministers. Judging from the correspondence, there was a delay of several weeks before the Foreign Office received his comments. By the time Hankey responded to Cavendish-Bentinck on 23 November, the PPS and the PPR had already reconciled and reached agreement. Further, when Bevin did respond, instead of seizing the chance to offer firm support to an independent PPS, he questioned the source of the information about the split. Having read Cavendish-Bentinck's account of his conversation with Reale, Bevin's only comment was: 'What interests me is why Reale if a faithful Communist Party member should confide in our Ambassador; and much more why he should retell a story to the disadvantage of … his Polish comrades. It is at the least, unusual

[49] TNA: FO 731/56446/N10853/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 25 August 1946.

[50] The PPS opened talks with the PSL on 23 August; they offered 25 per cent of seats in an electoral bloc to the PSL. The PPR would also have 25 per cent, with 20 per cent for the PPS, and 30 per cent for the remaining three parties, a 'formula which came very close to breaking Communist hegemony'. Mikołajczyk, however, refused to consider entering into an electoral bloc with the PPR, although he was prepared to consider 'limited local pacts' or an agreement which would give a 'decisive majority' to the PSL, the PPS, and the SP. Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947*, 263–264.

[51] TNA: FO 371/56446/N12218/34/55, Healey to Hankey, 12 September 1946.

[52] TNA: FO 371/56446/N11146/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 3 September 1946.

behaviour for a communist'. Bevin wondered if there had been a split in the Italian Communist Party.[53] It is a response which suggests indifference to the course of events in Poland. While reasonable for Bevin to be sceptical about Reale's motive for repeating this story, the foreign secretary's complete lack of interest in this change in Polish politics suggests a strong disinclination to reverse his policy of disengagement.[54] Bevin's main concern seems to have been to dispense with the whole issue as quickly as possible, as evidenced in July by his impatient response to Warner's exhortation to continue to press for fulfilment of the Yalta pledges. Bevin's response to the PPS split suggests that by the end of the year, his resolve that Britain should retain some influence in Poland had ebbed away. His failure to support the PPS is significant: at the beginning of the year, Bevin sought to throw British support behind a broader based Polish opposition. Half a year later, however, Bevin evinced virtually no interest in exactly such an opposition movement as would have been created by an accord between the breakaway faction of the PPS and the PSL.

PLP Opposition

Bevin's non-interventionist approach in Poland seems to have been reinforced by rising opposition to his foreign policy within the parliamentary Labour party, which peaked at the end of 1946 while Bevin was attending the Council of Foreign Ministers in New York. Bevin's critics accused him of adhering too closely to the policy of his Conservative predecessor. They were particularly disappointed by his failure to establish an amicable, cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union. Instead of a dramatic improvement in relations with the Soviet Union, as many in the party had hoped, there had been a steady deterioration since the end of the war.[55] Bevin's critics were composed of two main factions: the far-left of the PLP

[53] TNA: FO 371/56449/N14042/34/55, Hankey to Cavendish-Bentinck, 23 November 1946.

[54] Reale kept up good relations and met regularly—both officially and socially—with Cavendish-Bentinck and Lane during his time as Italian ambassador in Poland. Reale described his first meeting with his British and American counterparts on 8 October 1945: 'Both of them are happy to cooperate with me in spite of the fact that Italy appointed a communist as ambassador, and their governments are also not negative about that fact'. Eugenio Reale, *Raporty: Polska, 1945–1946* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1991), 12.

[55] Jones, *Russia Complex*, 127–129; Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 276; Michael R. Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy, 1914–1965* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 105–106; Deighton, *Impossible* Peace, 13; Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 416.

and those closer to the centre who wanted Britain to lead in forging a middle way in international relations, rather than aligning itself so closely with the US. In arguing for the necessity of better Anglo-Soviet relations, both factions tended to minimise the gravity of Soviet actions in Eastern Europe. The far-left regarded the sacrifice of political liberties in the region as regrettable but justifiable given the attendant economic and social advantages of communisation. According to this interpretation, the curtailment of political liberties was only temporary; it was a phase which would not last beyond the inevitable transition period and would pass once a new economic structure was safely and firmly in place.[56]

A larger faction of Bevin's critics comprised those who believed in the idea that Britain should forge a third way in international affairs.[57] This faction acknowledged that Soviet actions in Eastern Europe had been excessively brutal, but insisted that some allowance had to be made for legitimate Soviet security concerns. Britain and the US had done nothing to try to dispel these fears and break the cycle of mounting hostility. Instead of slavishly following the American lead, Britain should carve out a new direction in its foreign policy and take the lead in establishing liberal socialism in Europe. This would represent a viable and positive alternative to bipolar hostility and lay the foundation for genuine and enduring cooperation with the Soviet Union.[58]

Both factions subjected Bevin to a barrage of criticism at the party conference in Bournemouth in June 1946. Harold Laski, the party chairman, made a 'radically critical' speech in which he accused Bevin of undermining the natural kinship between the Soviet Union and the British Labour party. He argued that Soviet actions in Eastern Europe were justifiable given that fascist forces remained active in Europe, and blamed Soviet suspicion of the West primarily on the atomic monopoly.[59] Then in August and September 1946, the *New Statesman* published a series of four articles by Richard Crossman, one of Bevin's most vociferous opponents, which were highly critical of his conduct of foreign affairs.[60] The unrest came to

[56] Jones, *Russia Complex*, 132–133; Jonathan Schneer, *Labour's Conscience: The Labour Left, 1945–51* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 30–31. See also the first-hand account by one of Bevin's opponents: Ian Mikardo, *Back-Bencher* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 95–97.

[57] The 'Third Force' idea was first conceived by G.D.H. Cole. Jones, *Russia Complex*, 136.

[58] Ibid., 136–137.

[59] Ibid., 128.

[60] Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 61, 78, 90, 93.

a head in October when 21 MPs sent a letter to Attlee calling on the government to change the direction of its foreign policy, to follow socialist principles in international relations, and above all not to ally Britain so closely with the US. When Attlee did not immediately agree to meet the group, they gave a copy of the letter to the press, and it was published in the *Manchester Guardian*.[61] This was followed by the introduction of a censure motion against the foreign secretary. Fifty-eight Labour MPs, led by Crossman, signed an amendment to the King's Speech which criticised the government's foreign policy.[62] Although the amendment was defeated 353–0, there were 130 abstentions. This was a 'damaging figure', which meant that the amendment amounted to 'a demonstration of disapproval' from a significant swathe of the centre of the party, and not just from the consistently critical left-wing faction.[63]

This opposition to Bevin from within the PLP was not negligible. At the time, the *Manchester Guardian* described the amendment to the King's speech as 'the most serious public act of dissent from the policy of the Government which has so far been committed by Labour members'.[64] Bullock describes how between 1945 and 1950 'a minority on the Left of the Party kept up a persistent criticism of the Government's foreign policy both inside and outside the House' with Bevin as its 'principal target'. The degree to which this opposition influenced the course of Bevin's policy is difficult to determine. Although Bullock argues that 'Bevin was never deterred from doing what he wanted to do by this opposition', it is unlikely that he was able to entirely ignore this vocal corps of critics.[65] He must have been conscious of the need to carry his party with him on foreign policy matters. When the amendment to the King's Speech was tabled, Bevin's private secretary, Pierson Dixon, noted that the 'case of the "Rebels" at home has been poisoning everything', observing that: 'This is upsetting

[61] Hugh Dalton, *High Tide and After. Memoirs, 1945–1960* (London: Frederick Muller, 1962), 168; Robert J. Jackson, *Rebels and Whips: An Analysis of Dissension, Discipline and Cohesion in British Political Parties* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 54–55; Hugh B. Berrington, *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons, 1945–55* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1973), 56–58.

[62] Quoted in Berrington, *Backbench Opinion*, 58.

[63] Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 329.

[64] Quoted in Jones, *Russia Complex*, 139.

[65] Ibid., 61–62.

[Bevin], though he maintains a brave face'.[66] Indeed, Bullock himself acknowledges the view of the PLP as an important consideration in Bevin's deliberations over whether to abandon the idea of a unified Germany.[67]

Late 1946 also marked a renewal of the long-running conflict between Bevin and Attlee over Britain's position in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, with the prime minister leaning increasingly towards disengagement. Attlee argued that Britain and the Soviet Union should agree to a policy of disinterest in Greece, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. The establishment of a 'neutral zone' in the region would serve two purposes: first, it would allow an increasingly overstretched Britain to scale back its commitment in the region and second, it would pave the way for better Anglo-Soviet relations. Attlee suggested that Soviet policy was dictated as much by 'fear of attack by the U.S. and [Britain]' as it was by expansionist ambitions.[68] Bevin continued to push for the maintenance of the British presence in the region, arguing that it was vital to protect the security of the empire. The stand-off was only finally resolved in January 1947 when the chiefs of staff threatened to resign if Attlee continued to insist on British withdrawal. Confronted with this threat, Attlee backed down.[69] It seems safe to conclude that the PLP opposition, coupled with the pressure by Attlee, reinforced Bevin's own instinct to tread with care where the Soviet Union was concerned. If Bevin had pushed the issue of election supervision in Poland, he would have risked bringing the simmering conflict over Eastern Europe to a head, antagonising the Soviet Union, incensing the critics of his foreign policy within the party, and further alienating Attlee.

PSL Countermeasures

By the end of 1946, the local organisation of the PSL had been badly weakened in many areas. PSL representatives were to be substantially kept off the local electoral commissions (covering individual voting districts). The PSL head office was visited by the security police almost every day. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the PSL to maintain contact with the British embassy: two members of staff of the party newspaper had been

[66] Bevin and Dixon were attending a Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in New York City when the amendment was tabled. Dixon, *Double Diploma*, 241.

[67] Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 105–109.

[68] Attlee, quoted in Smith and Zametica, 'Clement Attlee Reconsidered', 248.

[69] Ibid., 249–251.

arrested, both of whom had had contact with British embassy officials.[70] The PSL had been liquidated altogether in the region[71] of Radomsko on the grounds that members of the party continued to belong to the underground.[72] In the first week of December, Cavendish-Bentinck travelled to Radom, Kielce, Kraków, Katowice, and Częstochowa. He reported that repressive measures were being taken against prominent supporters of the PSL, particularly in the countryside.

Mikołajcyzk predicted that if the elections proceeded according to PPR plans, the PSL would be suppressed, he and the other party leaders would be arrested, the underground movement would gain in strength, and acts of violence would start to occur by the following spring and summer, possibly culminating in a revolution against the regime. At the end of November, Mikołajcyzk informed Cavendish-Bentinck of the PSL's plans for countermeasures against government repression. First, he intended to inform the Yalta powers of the abuses occurring inside Poland.[73] Second, the PSL was planning an economic boycott: the party's supporters would be instructed not to sell their agricultural produce or to buy other goods. If the majority of PSL candidates were arrested, the party might be forced to boycott the election altogether.

The Foreign Office asked Cavendish-Bentinck to quietly discourage Mikołajcyzk from resorting to these measures. It sought to avoid any action that carried the possibility of eliciting Russian intervention. The reaction to Mikołajcyzk's plans shows that British policy towards Poland was moving inexorably towards disengagement: '[W]e must not lay ourselves open to the charge of having in any way hampered Mikolajczyk in his efforts to secure free elections. But equally we must not allow him to think that we can give him more effective help than is in practice possible'.[74] The Foreign Office response gave a foretaste of the policy which was

[70] Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947*, 275–276, 297–299; TNA: FO 371/56451/N15240/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 November 1946.

[71] *Gmina* of Radomsko. Literal translation is 'commune of Radomsko'.

[72] TNA: FO 371/56451/N15238/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 November 1946; FO 371/56451/N15835/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 12 December 1946.

[73] The State Department did not even want Mikołajcyzk to inform the Yalta powers directly about the repression of the PSL, suggesting instead that he request Bierut to transmit the information. TNA: FO 371/56450/N15057/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 22 November 1946.

[74] TNA: FO 371/56449/N14640/34/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 16 November 1946; FO 371/56449/N14852/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 20 November 1946; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 22 November 1946.

explicitly adopted in early January: Britain could not extend further assistance to the Polish opposition. However, British prestige must be maintained by avoiding the impression that Britain had in any way impeded free elections in Poland. This concern about prestige was so deep that the Foreign Office was prepared to actively discourage Mikołajcyzk from taking any measure which could actually be effective because it might elicit Soviet intervention and therefore demand substantive Western support for the Polish opposition. Failure to intervene in these circumstances would deliver precisely the blow to Britain's reputation that the Foreign Office sought to avoid.

Run-up to Elections

The month preceding the elections saw a sustained increase in attacks on the PSL. In light of the increasing severity of these measures of repression, Cavendish-Bentinck and Lane proposed to address another joint statement to the Polish government, emphasising that the conduct of the elections did not correspond to the Yalta and Moscow agreements.[75] Cavendish-Bentinck submitted a draft statement for review by the Foreign Office, as well as by the British embassies in Moscow and Washington. Instead of pursuing the idea of a joint statement, however, Bevin opted to make informal representations to the Soviet Union concerning the Polish elections. Specifically, the British ambassador to Moscow, Maurice Peterson, was to raise the 'improper measures taken by the Polish authorities to influence the results of the elections', in line with the view already expressed by the State Department.[76]

Bevin himself wrote the note instructing his officials to drop the approach to the Polish government and take the matter up with the Soviet authorities instead. In this instance, the US was prepared to go further than Britain: the State Department formally invited the Soviet

[75] On 22 November, Cavendish-Bentinck and the US chargé d'affaires had delivered the protest notes from their respective governments. The British note stressed the necessity for all political parties to 'enjoy equal facilities to conduct electoral campaigns freely without arrest or threat of arrest and without discriminatory restriction of election activities'. Further, all parties needed to be represented on all electoral commissions at all levels. TNA: FO 371/56450/N14980/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 November 1946; FO 371/56451/N15237/34/55, Foreign Office News Department, 29 November 1946.

[76] TNA: FO 371/66089/N6/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 31 December 1946; N29/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 31 December 1946; N451/6/55, Memorandum to Bevin, 8 January 1947; N231/6/55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 9 January 1947.

Union to join in tripartite representations to the Polish government about the conduct of the elections. By the end of 1946, the American position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union was hardening but remained frustratingly unpredictable for the Foreign Office. Bevin might therefore have rejected Cavendish-Bentinck's proposal based on American reluctance to act jointly with Britain in the past, only to find that he was out of step with his 'awkward … dancing partner'.[77] As Sargent noted, the American decision had put the British in an 'awkward position'.[78] Principally, however, Bevin's main preoccupation seems to have been to avoid a public confrontation with the Soviet Union. At the close of 1946, Bevin was drawing up his plan on the long-term future of Germany. The plan proposed revisions of the Potsdam protocol which would facilitate the handover of power back to the Germans themselves, and the implementation of measures which would make Soviet involvement in western Germany nearly impossible. These proposals were bound to be deeply unpopular with the Soviet Union. It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that Bevin continued to try to limit the points of serious contention between Britain and the Soviet Union, with Germany taking priority over Poland.[79]

Peterson met Molotov on 11 January. Peterson began by detailing the Polish government's repression of the PSL. Molotov agreed that the elections should be free but added that the Soviet Union had no reason to suppose that this would not occur. Britain's information must have come from opposition sources, observed Molotov. At this point Peterson discarded his brief and declared his intention to speak frankly and personally. 'The Soviet Government in Poland', he said 'seemed … to be over playing their hand'. He assured Molotov that 'there was no conceivable risk' that any 'great power in the world today … would support in any [Eastern European country] a Government hostile to the Soviet Union'. Peterson urged the Soviet government 'to trust more completely in democratic processes and to give up the practice of trying to maintain minority Governments in power against the opposition of the majority'.[80]

[77] Unnamed Foreign Office official, quoted in Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership*, 252.
[78] TNA: FO 371/66089/N451/6/55, Sargent minute, 8 January 1947.
[79] Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 120–121.
[80] TNA: FO 371/66089/N500/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 11 January 1947.

Peterson's meeting with Molotov was the final significant attempt on the part of the British government to influence the political settlement in Poland. The beginning of 1947 marked a turning point in British policy, with a significant step towards complete disengagement from Poland and across Eastern Europe. A Foreign Office policy document produced immediately prior to the Polish elections was predicated on the demise of the PSL and on an acceptance that Britain would not make any attempt to challenge the result of the elections. The first concern was to limit potential damage to British prestige. To that end, perfunctory protests would be made to the Soviet Union over the conduct of the Polish elections: '[W]e should be unlikely to achieve any practical result from any approach to the Soviet Government, but at least we should hope to establish … where the blame lies for this state of affairs if only "for the record" and to convince our friends in Poland and elsewhere that we have done our best'. In other words, Britain would be unable to influence the conduct of elections in a way that might actually affect the outcome, but the impression must be preserved that the British had fulfilled their obligations. The second priority was to retain the loyalty of the Polish opposition. Churchill's promise to Mikołajczyk in June 1945 was explicitly acknowledged, as well as the gravity of the consequences for the individuals who had chosen to return to Poland on the strength of that promise: 'Many Poles who are friendly towards us and especially among those who returned from the West would not forgive or forget our just shelving what we undertook on their behalf, especially as a good many consider that they have risked their lives and liberty by going back'. This section of the document highlights that the commitment to Mikołajczyk and his allies continued to weigh on the officials of the Northern department, even as they concluded that it would be impossible to fulfil. Finally, officials recommended that a 'scaled down' version of the existing British policy should be followed: 'friendly contacts' with the PSL should be maintained and the PPS 'very discreetly' encouraged 'to build up Polish resistance to out-and-out communisation and to preserve some measure of national independence'.[81] Thus, although not quite prepared to withdraw completely from Poland, the beginning of January marked a significant retreat, an acknowledgement that once elections had been held, Poland would belong to the Soviet sphere where British influence would be minimal.

[81] TNA: FO 371/66090/N658/6/55, 'British Policy towards Poland', 10 January 1947.

Election Campaign

Meanwhile, the PPR intensified its efforts to completely destroy the PSL. In October, the political-education department of the Polish army had established special protection-propaganda groups (*Grupy Ochronno Propagandowe*—GOP), which were charged with disseminating pro-government election propaganda in nine electoral districts around the Katowice and Wrocław areas in villages where a high proportion of inhabitants supported the PSL. Acting in concert with the UB, these groups collected the names of all PSL activists, as well as known supporters of the illegal underground bands, the National Armed Units (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*—NSZ) and Freedom and Independence (*Wolność i Niezawistosc*—WiN), which were remnants of the wartime underground resistance movement. Thus, as far as the state was concerned, supporters of the legal opposition were now equated with those who assisted illegal, armed underground organisations. In spite of the army's claim that PSL party cells were disbanding or transferring their allegiance to the parties of the democratic bloc under the influence solely of the GOPs' 'persuasion, [rather] than pressure', in fact the GOPs relied on 'physical force and intimidation', or threats thereof, to dissuade voters from supporting the PSL.[82]

The British embassy obtained very detailed information about the activities of the GOPs, which it called 'flying sections'. Cavendish-Bentinck obtained a copy of a directive issued to the GOPs, which specified that the speeches delivered by the groups were intended to incite the population against the PSL and to provoke the PSL 'to acts which would give cause for reprisal'.[83] Through Mikołajczyk, Cavendish-Bentinck also secured a copy of a propaganda booklet distributed by the GOPs to every household in the villages they visited. The booklet extolled the virtues of the government and denounced the PSL. He predicted that the groups would be an important tool in the PPR election campaign in the countryside. According to Cavendish-Bentinck, the use of the army to spread propaganda was 'a new departure in Poland'. In his view, '[t]he conception is clever for the Army as a whole is the one body in the Polish State which has always maintained its popularity'.[84]

[82] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 200–201.

[83] TNA: FO 371/56452/N16236/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 20 December 1946.

[84] TNA: FO 371/56452/N16323/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Attlee, 12 December 1946.

The PPR also sabotaged the PSL's electoral structure. This was achieved largely because the communists had managed to gain control of the local electoral commissions, either directly or indirectly through 'compliant members of other parties' or through individuals recruited by the UB.[85] The Warsaw embassy received detailed reports about the PPR's sabotage campaign. For instance, '[e]very effort' was made to prevent the PSL from submitting their lists of candidates before the deadline on 19 December. In one area, the president of the district electoral commission was 'indefinitely absent' when the PSL representatives applied to submit their lists. In some cases, those responsible for delivering the candidate lists or collecting supporting signatures were arrested.[86] By the end of December, 24 PSL offices had been closed.[87] According to the government, the closures occurred when connections were found between PSL members and the underground. There was no doubt in Cavendish-Bentinck's mind that this was a spurious excuse and was simply part of the regime's plan to ensure a desirable outcome in the elections. Likewise, the Foreign Office concluded that this news 'confirm[ed] our fears of the extent to which the present regime in Poland will go to cook the elections'.[88]

Michael Winch, first secretary in the Warsaw embassy, returned from Kraków just after the new year with reports of a number of incidents of repression and malpractice during his stay in the city. Names of PSL members, people likely to vote for the PSL, and some socialists had been deleted from the electoral roll on a large scale. The deputy governor of the province of Kraków reported that 40,000 voters had been struck off the roll in the city. In some of the villages in the province, as many as half the voters had been deleted. There was widespread fear that the deletion of a voter's name from the electoral roll indicated that a charge would subsequently be levelled against the person by the public prosecutor. Further, requests for a commitment to vote for the government bloc were being made on a large scale in Kraków, with an accompanying threat of expulsion from one's dwelling in cases of non-compliance.

[85] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 202; Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947*, 275.

[86] TNA: FO 371/56452/N16279/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 December 1946.

[87] TNA: FO 371/56452/N16236/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 20 December 1946.

[88] TNA: FO 371/56452/N16413/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 24 December 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 31 December 1946.

Likewise, in Katowice, the British consul reported that the Polish government had initiated a campaign to obtain at least one million signatures from amongst the 1.7 million voters in Upper Silesia in support of the government bloc. People who refused to sign were threatened with reprisals. Cavendish-Bentinck surmised that the authorities were attempting to collect a huge number of signatures in support of the government bloc 'in order to produce these after the elections as proof that they represent the will of the people'.[89]

On 7 January, Winch called in at the PSL headquarters. Stefan Korboński, of the Central Executive Committee, reported that in the absence of PSL members on the district and local electoral commissions, the presence of party representatives in the voting booths and at the counting of the votes was the only safeguard remaining to the party. The general commissioner for elections had just issued a circular to the effect that the district electoral commission must not sanction representatives unless the individuals concerned could present letters from the local *Starost* (head of county administration) attesting to their good character. The *Starosts*, who did not know personally all the people put forward as party representatives, were simply passing the lists of names on to the local security police who then summoned the prospective representatives and refused to release them unless they agreed to work as informers. 'In this way … persons who were the last hope of the Polish Peasant Party have, in many cases, been added to the list of their enemies. The Polish government rejected the PSL list of candidates in ten of the largest constituencies, thus preventing approximately 22 per cent of the population from having the chance to vote for the PSL.[90]

Mazur, also of the PSL Central Executive Committee, told Winch about the degree of pressure being applied to government employees. At the beginning of January, employees at the Ministry of Health were asked whether they wanted their salary and food cards for the month. The delivery of the cards depended on how they intended to vote. They were then asked to sign declarations attesting to their intention to vote for the government bloc. Those who signed the declarations were then told that they need not bother going to the polls because a ministry representative would

[89] TNA: FO 371/56452/N16523/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 28 December 1946; Foreign Office minutes, 31 December 1946; FO 371/66089/N557/6/55, Report by M.B. Winch, 4 January 1947.

[90] TNA: FO 371/66089/N460/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 10 January 1947.

go and vote for his colleagues. The harassment and abuse was beginning to have an effect as many PSL supporters believed that voting would be useless since the results were sure to be falsified.[91]

In Gdańsk, lists of signatures with pledges of votes for the government bloc were being collected systematically. Non-compliance would result in voters' expulsion from their homes, and possibly more severe reprisals. Cavendish-Bentinck predicted that by these means the government bloc was poised 'to build up [a] large and possibly actual majority vote' in Gdańsk, thus 'rendering any later falsification of the count a mere elaboration'. Reports from other districts showed that the practice of collecting signatures was widespread across the country.[92]

In a report of 10 January summarising the situation in Poland, the Foreign Office noted that the Polish government was disregarding all of the conditions stipulated by the British government in the run-up to the elections. 'It seems certain that the elections will be faked, as the Polish Government bloc are taking every possible measure to ensure their own complete success.' Mikołajczyk's supporters had been excluded altogether from the district electoral commissions (which collated the results and calculated the proportional representation). In over 20 per cent of constituencies, the PSL lists of candidates had been rejected for various reasons, with 132 candidates rejected individually and 110 under arrest. PSL members had been expelled from their farms, forced out of their jobs, and subjected to police searches of their homes. PSL meetings had been broken up, several branches had been suspended, the editor and key members of the editorial staff of the main party newspaper had been under arrest since the end of September 1946, at which point the editorial office had been closed. 'In short the Polish Provisional Government has so far completely disregarded its obligations under the Crimea and Potsdam agreements to hold free and unfettered elections, or the stipulations we have made in our notes of August 19th and November 22nd regarding the conditions obviously necessary to ensure freedom of elections.' Cavendish-Bentinck judged that overall the government bloc had 'succeeded in imposing their will far better than most observers would have thought possible some months ago'.[93]

[91] TNA: FO 371/66089/N558/6/55, Report by M.B. Winch, 7 January 1947.
[92] TNA: FO 371/66090/N573/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 14 January 1947.
[93] TNA: FO 371/66090/N658/6/55, 'British Policy towards Poland', 10 January 1947.

Elections

On election day, Cavendish-Bentinck made a tour of Warsaw and the surrounding districts. Other members of the embassy and consular staff provided a network of observers covering the main towns and cities, and several rural districts. Polling was reportedly heavy, at around 80 per cent, in all districts except ten in which the PSL was not represented. In these districts, many of the voters had to be forced to the polls, but even then the percentage of voters was not high. Hardly any of the polling booths allowed for secret voting. Employees of state organisations were 'invariably marched to the booths in groups, often with brass bands and banners. The majority of these, often under inescapable pressure, voted openly'.[94] In the districts observed by Cavendish-Bentinck, many of those who voted independently did manage to evade the polling booth officials and submit a secret vote. The chances of success depended upon 'the courage and skill of the voter and the standard of organisation in the polling booth… The usual dodge was to substitute at the last moment the Polish Peasant Party's number for that of the Government bloc'. Estimates by members of the British diplomatic corps and by visiting journalists put the true vote for the parties of the government bloc at between 20 and 50 per cent in "old Poland". In the western territories, where the government exercised much tighter control over the voting process, the pro-government vote was much higher.

The absence of opposition party representatives made it much easier to exert pressure on voters in the booths, and to falsify the final results. Most of the PSL representatives were either arrested the night before the election, or they were simply thrown out of the polling booths. At six polling stations in Warsaw where the PSL had representatives present, the count, which was reported by the representatives to Mikołajczyk, showed that the votes were divided roughly equally between the government bloc and the PSL. Afterwards, however, the results in four of the six booths were changed, and one was reversed. Similar manipulation of results occurred in Poznań.[95]

[94] Cavendish-Bentinck accurately described the methods by which the regime controlled voting by state employees. Padraic Kenney outlines the process by which the 'regime engineered its victory' in the factories: 'party leaders worked out down-to-the-minute voting schedules; workers met at assigned places and then marched together to the voting booth, sometimes with pieces of paper marked with a "3" (the number of the Democratic Bloc's list) pinned to their coats'. Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communism, 1945–1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 54.

[95] TNA: FO 371/66090/N1159/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 24 January 1947.

The results of the election announced on the morning of 21 January (two days after the voting) were overwhelmingly in favour of the government bloc, which obtained 327 seats. The PSL had 24 seats (approximately eight per cent of the total); the Labour party had 10; the New Freedom Polish Peasant Party had seven; and independent groups had four. Cavendish-Bentinck concluded that 'the elections have been neither free nor unfettered'. His final verdict was damning: 'The extent … to which force, chicanery, pressure and falsification were used, to bring about a result favourable to the Communists and their friends, surpassed most expectations'. He pointed to eight key pieces of evidence in support of this assessment. In the constituencies where the PSL had the strongest support, 22 per cent of the electorate had been deprived of the possibility of voting for the party. The government and the security services had made '[e]very effort' in the six weeks preceding the elections 'to terrorise the electorate'. The absence of PSL representatives at the polling booths had made it very easy to falsify the results. All state officials and employees, and all members of the armed forces had been compelled to vote openly, where a vote cast for the PSL 'would have entailed immediate dismissal' or other penalties for members of the armed forces. In the countryside, 'headmen' were ordered to bring groups of electors to the polling booths at particular times, and to hand to each voter a slip with the number of the government bloc candidate. Many PSL members were arrested the night before the elections and many more were struck off the electoral registers. At the end of his post-election report, Cavendish-Bentinck noted that he had been struck by people's determination not to vote for the government bloc, although they frequently had to resort to subterfuge in order to do so, and ignoring that the results were sure to be falsified. 'They appeared to desire to give themselves at least the satisfaction of voting against the present regime.'[96]

Conclusion

Mid-1946 was an important turning point in British policy towards Poland. It was the moment at which Bevin's resolve to retain some British influence in Poland ebbed away. The move towards disengagement was evident in a series of policy choices in the second half of the year, begin-

[96] TNA: FO 371/66090/N934/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 21 January 1947; N1159/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 24 January 1947.

ning with the refusal of Mikołajczyk's request for international supervision of the Polish elections. The key turning point was the decision not to support the breakaway faction of the PPS. At the beginning of the year, Bevin sought to throw British support behind a broader based Polish opposition movement. When just such a configuration was beginning to take shape later in the year, however, Bevin offered neither encouragement nor support. Equally, British disengagement was unmistakable in the effort to thwart Mikołajczyk's plans for countermeasures against the PPR's campaign of repression prior to the elections. This direction of policy was largely the result of the proliferation of additional pressures on Bevin: the acute shortage of resources necessary to maintain the British occupation zone of Germany and the consequent imperative both to seek an accommodation with the Soviet Union and to secure American financial assistance. As a result, Bevin's policy options vis-à-vis Poland were ever more limited as he was obliged to tailor his policy to suit American and Soviet interests and preferences. Thus, British policy towards Poland was first filtered through the lens of policy towards Germany, the US, and the Soviet Union.

The last of the British resolve to influence the postwar Polish political settlement evaporated just at the moment when external support became crucial to the survival of the PSL. Crippled by the PPR's concerted campaign of attack carried out through the autumn and winter of 1946–1947, the PSL's only chance of retaining legal recognition as a political party rested on support from its foreign allies. Mikołajczyk entered into the election campaign confident of this support; at each key juncture he found it was not forthcoming. The PPR succeeded in crushing the PSL as a political force and terrorising its supporters into quiescence. After the elections, the PPR moved quickly to consolidate its control over the Polish state apparatus.

CHAPTER 6

Mikołajczyk's Escape, January to November 1947

Introduction

After the Polish elections, a strong sense of resignation began to seep into British policy, a sense that any attempt to interfere with the process of consolidation of communist control would be futile. The Foreign Office concluded that little could be achieved by mounting further protests or formally disputing the results of the elections. Similarly, officials rejected the possibility of 'further wrangling' on the subject with the Soviet government.[1] The British response to the outcome of the Polish elections was partly conditioned by changes in the international system. The relationship between the Soviet Union and the Western powers was marked by rising tension, distrust, and division by 1947. The turn of the year marked the point at which the Soviets started to move aggressively to secure communist control across Eastern Europe. Increasingly, an acceptance of a European system based on spheres of interest was evident in British policymaking. A further stretch of protracted, unproductive discussions with the Soviets over Poland held no appeal, particularly given that the British and Americans were about to embark on a new round of intensely difficult negotiations with the Soviets over the more

[1] TNA: FO 371/66091/N1179/6/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 1 February 1947.

A. Mason, *British Policy Towards Poland, 1944–1956*, Security, Conflict and Cooperation in the Contemporary World,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94241-4_6

urgent question of the future of Germany early in the year.[2] Above all, British foreign policy decisions were determined by the economic situation, which reached crisis point in early 1947. Bevin's urgent priority was to persuade the Americans to consolidate the bizone arrangements in order to relieve Britain of the burden of maintaining the British zone of Germany.

The shift towards a policy of detachment was evident in changes in personnel at the Warsaw embassy. Shortly after the Polish elections, Cavendish-Bentinck was transferred out of Warsaw. A long delay followed before the arrival of his successor, Donald St. Clair Gainer. Thus, the crucial period of communist consolidation coincided with an absence of leadership in the embassy. Philip Broad, the chargé d'affaires who stepped in for the interim, pursued a much more detached policy throughout the spring of 1947, seeking to improve relations with the Warsaw government wherever possible while allowing contact with Mikołajczyk to lapse entirely until May. Broad's period in charge saw an almost total retreat from involvement in Poland's internal political affairs. Broad's approach was a source of irritation to the Foreign Office, which sought to continue to extend some support to the Polish opposition. The result was an unevenness in British policy, with Bevin's focus on Germany, Broad's on improving relations with the Warsaw government, and the Foreign Office not entirely willing to relinquish influence over the internal Polish political situation. Inevitably, however, the basis of Foreign Office policy began to erode due to political changes in Poland. The Polish opposition had been badly weakened over the course of the election campaign: the PSL had been all but eliminated as a political force in Poland, and the PPS was moving steadily towards union with the PPR, leaving the British without a viable political alternative to the communists to which it could lend its support. As a consequence, British attention turned instead to resolving a series of matters which soured Anglo-Polish relations: the unfinalised western frontier of Poland, the unratified Anglo-Polish financial agreement, the large number of German refugees from Poland's western territories

[2] Germany was discussed at the New York meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, which sat from 4 November to 12 December 1946. Dixon referred to these weeks as a 'nightmare'. A full session was to be devoted to Germany at the Moscow Council meeting in March 1947. Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 116.

flooding the British occupation zone, and the long-running dispute over the slow pace of repatriation of former members of the Polish armed forces.

In spite of Britain's withdrawal from Polish politics, however, the Foreign Office snapped into action in the summer when it received reports that Mikołajczyk was facing imminent arrest. As the threat to Mikołajczyk loomed ever closer, there was a corresponding reversal of the decline in British interest and involvement in Polish affairs, a sense that even if all else had failed at least something could be salvaged if Mikołajczyk could be saved. Churchill's 1945 promise was binding; the British government was still responsible for protecting the man it had sent back to Warsaw. The focus on Mikołajczyk's personal safety exclusively signified a great narrowing of Churchill's original commitment, certainly, but there was also a palpable sense of renewed interest. There was a consensus within the Foreign Office that Mikołajczyk could not simply be left to face his fate.

Polish Government Post-elections

The PPR emerged from the elections firmly in control of the state apparatus in Poland. Cavendish-Bentinck commented that the communist leaders now felt themselves 'more firmly than ever in the saddle'. They were confident that within three years they would 'have this country where they want it'.[3] After the elections, a new Polish government was formed in which the key ministries of foreign affairs, industry, public security, education, and administration of the former German territories were all held by the PPR. The PPS was allocated six ministries but these were of lesser importance than those controlled by the PPR.[4] Shortly after it opened on 4 February, the *Sejm* hurriedly passed a new constitution, which served to consolidate and formalise the PPR's position of control.[5] On 5 February, Bolesław Bierut—the only declared candidate—was elected president of the republic.[6] Thus, real control of the country remained in the hands of the original nucleus of the Committee of National Liberation formed in Lublin.[7]

[3] TNA: FO 371/66092/N2811/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 28 February 1947.
[4] Prażmowska, 'Polish Socialist Party', 350.
[5] Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 351–354.
[6] Ibid., 348.
[7] TNA: FO 371/66092/N2811/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 28 February 1947.

British Reaction to the Polish Elections

Bevin took a pointed step back from involvement in Poland immediately after the elections when he decided against making any official comment on their conduct or results.[8] The Foreign Office prepared a statement for Bevin to read in the House of Commons but he changed his mind and decided not to deliver it.[9] The statement nevertheless merits consideration because it provides a clear indication of the direction of British policy towards Poland after the elections. It began with criticism of the conduct of the elections: voting had not taken place freely; the evidence showed that there had been widespread intimidation of voters, removal of names from the register, and arrests of both candidates and voters. As a result of the suppression of the lists of opposition candidates in some areas, 22 per cent of the electorate had been given no choice but to vote for the government bloc. The Polish government had resorted in many regions to the removal of names from the candidate lists. Government officials, members of the armed forces, and many others had been made to vote openly under considerable pressure. The count had been conducted entirely in secret and had taken 12 days. In view of the circumstances in which the elections were held, the British government could not possibly consider them free or fair, and did not regard the new government as either democratic or representative.

At this point, the statement took a different turn. In spite of the dissatisfaction with the conduct of the elections, there was no intention to take the issue to the UN, withdraw the British ambassador from Warsaw, break off diplomatic relations, or impose economic sanctions on Poland. None of these measures would succeed in ushering in a democratic regime; the new Polish government intended to remain in power and the Soviet Union was determined that it should do so. 'We have to face the fact that this is not an area where in the circumstances we can effectively insist on our rights however well-founded… We must cut our coat according to our

[8] Bevin made this decision in spite of the fact that the US issued a statement condemning the conduct of the Polish elections. The Foreign Office statement was initially prepared to accompany the American initiative. Department of State *Bulletin*, vol. 16, no. 397 (9 February 1947): 251; TNA: FO 371/66091/N1179/6/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 28 January 1947.

[9] No reason is given for the decision in the Foreign Office files. A note attached to the statement by Warner reads: 'This draft statement, intended to be made in the House by the S/S, was not in fact used but should be entered for [the] record'. TNA: FO 371/66091/N1535/6/55, 4 February 1947.

cloth.' The statement concluded with the assertion that Britain had been right to try to bring the two sides of the Polish government—the exile and the Lublin factions—together. The only source of regret was 'that through no fault of ours that attempt has failed'.[10] Thus, for the first time, the British government clearly and unequivocally conceded defeat in its attempt to influence the political settlement in Poland. The possibility of cooperation or compromise with the Soviet Union in Poland had been closed off.

The concluding section of the statement suggests that a Cold War mentality was beginning to take hold in British foreign policy, a conviction that the postwar international order was to be defined by an adversarial relationship between the Soviet Union and the West. The corollary to this view was an acceptance that Eastern Europe now lay beyond the reach of British influence. Although there is nothing explicit in the Foreign Office files to indicate why Bevin did not read the statement on the Polish elections in parliament, it seems likely that the decision was linked to this larger policy which was beginning to take shape more clearly by early 1947. To deliver a public scolding to the Polish government over the handling of the elections in the House of Commons would have implied ongoing British interest in the country's political future and would have been inconsistent with a policy of detachment from the Soviet sphere of interest.

Position of the PSL

After the elections, the PSL, though much diminished by months of determined persecution, remained committed to its policy of opposition to the new regime. Mikołajczyk successfully quashed a leadership challenge in February 1947 at the party's Supreme Council meeting. Three prominent party figures, with the support of a quarter of the delegates, pressed for the party leadership to reach an accommodation with the new regime in order to prevent the peasant movement from losing all political relevance. The resolution was defeated by 60 votes to 20, thus confirming majority support for Mikołajczyk. In March, the leaders of the dissenting faction were expelled from the party.[11]

[10] TNA: FO 371/66091/N1535/6/55, Statement for Foreign Affairs Debate [n.d.].

[11] After its defeat, the rebel group formed the PSL-Lewica (PSL-Left) faction and began publishing its own newspaper, *Chłopi i Państwo*. Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947*, 301.

Underlying the PSL's policy of ongoing opposition to the new government was the hope that it would prove possible to keep the core of the party organisation intact until conditions improved or a crisis emerged which would oblige the PPR to realise that it could not govern the country without the PSL. Mikołajczyk believed that the complete suppression of the PSL would be met with a spike in political violence, which would force the PPR to turn to the PSL for help. Instead, however, the political situation in Poland slowly began to stabilise in early 1947.[12] Although dissatisfied with the new government, the majority of the Polish population were also deeply tired, and anxious to get on with rebuilding after the war. There was little energy remaining for the fight that would be required to oust the government, which could be achieved only at a high cost and might lead to nothing.[13]

Mikołajczyk was disappointed, and his position further weakened, by the absence of meaningful intervention on the part of the Western powers. Much of the existing literature on the subject claims that the West severed all links with Mikołajczyk and the PSL immediately after the election.[14] Although this is an oversimplification—contact continued until Cavendish-Bentinck left Warsaw and resumed again in May—it is true that Britain was no longer prepared to support the PSL's ongoing opposition to the new Polish government in the same way. The gap between Mikołajczyk's expectations and British intentions comes across unmistakably in Cavendish-Bentinck's account of their last lunch together before his departure for London:

> Mikolajczyk and other Poles rather pathetically ask whether Poland and the non-fulfilment of the Yalta and Moscow Agreements and the undertakings given at Potsdam could not [be] brought up in Moscow or at U.N.O. I have told Mikolajczyk that even if the Secretary of State and Mr. Marshall brought the Polish affair up in Moscow M. Molotov would merely maintain what he has done heretofore, that the elections were free and unfettered and that the opinions of H.M. Government and the United States Government are based on lies emanating from Fascist-reactionary sources. As regards U.N.O. I told Mikolajczyk that we had examined the possibility of bringing Polish

[12] Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947*, 300–301; Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 361–362.

[13] Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 337.

[14] Coutouvidis and Reynolds, for example, argue that 'the West abandoned Mikołajczyk without ceremony'. Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947*, 300.

> affairs up there but so far as I could gather this had not been found practicable. He maintained, however, that sooner or later Poland would come before U.N.O. Thank God I shall be cultivating banana trees and orchids in my gardens in Rio and Petropolis![15]

The ambassador's comments—admittedly reflecting a certain "last-day-of-term" insouciance as he was about to leave Warsaw to take up a new posting in Rio de Janeiro—highlight a serious discrepancy between the views of the PSL and the British government as to Poland's political future.[16] Even Cavendish-Bentinck, who had been Mikołajczyk's steadfast supporter, had accepted the shape of the new international order: Poland now fell into the Soviet orbit, and if Molotov stonewalled on the subject of the Polish elections in the Council of Foreign Ministers, there was little Britain could do to change the situation. The PSL had not survived the elections; the party no longer had a place in Polish political life; Britain was not interested in piecing together the remnants of the party to reconstitute a credible opposition force.

Position of the PPS

The independence of the PPS eroded further after the elections. The socialist leaders hoped that by continuing to cooperate with the communists they would gradually be able to increase their influence in the country. According to this strategy, public support would increase as people realised that the PPS was the only effective political party which was not totally dominated by the PPR. The PPS set out to win support for socialism with 'a moderate and pluralistic economic and political programme'. The PPS laid out their idea of a 'Polish road to socialism', which would

[15] TNA: FO 371/66092/N2923/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 27 February 1947.

[16] According to his biographer, Patrick Howarth, Cavendish-Bentinck was ultimately prevented from taking up his post in Rio as a result of the scandal which surrounded his divorce proceedings. He was dismissed from the diplomatic service, lost his pension, and spent the remainder of his career in the private sector. Howarth, *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary*, 221–223. John Colville concurs that the 'lurid publicity' surrounding Cavendish-Bentinck's divorce trial was an important reason for his dismissal. Colville adds, however, in addition to the divorce proceedings, Cavendish-Bentinck's implication in the Warsaw spy trial, which drew criticism from the Labour left, and the press support which he received from Bevin's enemy, Lord Beaverbrook, taken together, explain why he was dismissed. Colville, *Strange Inheritance*, 193.

accommodate, for instance, a three-sector economic model including the private and cooperative sectors alongside state enterprise. The wishes of the population would be taken into account during the transformation process; the PPS would not seek to replicate the course of events which had unfolded in Russia after the revolution.[17] Józef Cyrankiewicz, who had been appointed prime minister after the elections, explained to Cavendish-Bentinck that although the PPS would continue to collaborate with the PPR, they would 'at the same time assert their own views and oppose extreme measures'. Cyrankewicz would be 'as tough as he could with the Communists without openly breaking'.[18]

Cavendish-Bentinck believed that the PPR 'intended to weaken the PPS, to infiltrate it, and in due course to make it an absolute satellite'. In his last dispatch from Warsaw, the ambassador summed up the position of the PPS. He referred to his earlier suggestion that Britain should regard the PPS as the next line of defence after the PSL against the complete communisation of Poland. The events of the past two months, however, had led Cavendish-Bentinck 'to believe that this line of defence [was] being steadily weakened and that it [would be] likely to prove ineffective'. Although Cyrankiewicz was the prime minister, his deputy was still Jakub Berman, 'the Communist "eminence grise"'. Further, the PPR held the presidency of the republic and, according to the new constitution, the president could take the chair at Cabinet meetings whenever he so desired, meaning that Bierut could oust Cyrankiewicz at will.[19] Further, Cyrankiewicz exercised no real autonomy from the PPR. He had gone to Moscow after the elections[20] because he did not want the PPR ministers to serve as the only intermediaries between the Polish and Soviet governments, but in the end he was accompanied by PPR Politburo member and minister of industry and commerce, Hilary Minc.[21] Likewise, in the realm of foreign affairs, Cavendish-Bentinck predicted that the socialist vice-minister for foreign affairs, Stanisław Leszczycki, was unlikely to exercise any influence when faced with 'such determined communists' as Zygmunt

[17] Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947*, 303–304; Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 208; Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 364–365.

[18] TNA: FO 371/66092/N2653/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 February 1947.

[19] TNA: FO 371/66092/N2811/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 28 February 1947.

[20] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 203.

[21] Teresa Torańska refers to Minc as 'third in command in Poland, after Berman and Bierut'. Teresa Torańska, *Oni: Stalin's Polish Puppets* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987), 15.

Modzelewski, now the minister. Finally, the PPS had also failed to secure any measure of control over the all-powerful security police.[22]

The Foreign Office concurred with the ambassador's assessment of the PPS's poor prospects. In a briefing paper on Poland prepared in advance of Bevin's trip to Moscow, the Foreign Office observed that the PPS had not given 'a definite sign of independence'. Until the Foreign Office received an indication that the PPS was prepared to resist being subsumed by the PPR, British assistance should not be forthcoming: 'We should like to support the Polish Socialist Party in any stand which it may be able to make against the out-and-out communisation of Poland, but … we have to await some signs of independent action before we can support the Party'.[23] The risk, speculated Patrick Hancock, was that the PPS would wait too long: 'It may well be that before long the Communists will begin to put the squeeze on the Socialists just as they put pressure on Mr. Mikolajczyk and his followers when they were members of the Government. If this happens, the Socialists may well find that it is too late for them to assert themselves'.[24] The sense of detachment is again evident in the British reaction to PPS plans; the Foreign Office officials judged the strategy to be unlikely to succeed but did not attempt to push the leadership into more robust opposition against the PPR.

Exit Cavendish-Bentinck

The shift in Anglo-American policy away from active involvement in Polish politics was marked by the departure from Warsaw of the American ambassador, Arthur Bliss Lane, and Cavendish-Bentinck at the end of February. Lane resigned in protest over the conduct of the elections.[25] Cavendish-Bentinck's transfer had been agreed prior to the elections, although the reason for the decision remains unclear. According to Cavendish-Bentinck's

[22] TNA: FO 371/66092/N2811/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 28 February 1947.

[23] TNA: FO 371/66092/N2537/6/55, 'Brief [on Poland] for Secretary of State to take to Moscow', February 1947.

[24] TNA: FO 371/N2653/6/55, Hancock Minute, 4 March 1947.

[25] *FRUS, 1947. Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union* vol. 4 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1972), 413–414; Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed: An American Ambassador Reports to the American People* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1948), 289–290; TNA: FO 371/66091/N1282/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Warner, 24 January 1947.

biographer, Patrick Howarth, who was press attaché in the Warsaw embassy at the time, the Polish government began to agitate for Cavendish-Bentinck's removal after the referendum. The ambassador was held responsible for the negative coverage of the referendum in the British press, as well as for initiating the formal British protest note calling attention to the irregularities which had occurred during the campaign and voting. After the referendum, during a visit to London, a representative of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested that Cavendish-Bentinck be removed. Cavendish-Bentinck was later told by another Foreign Affairs employee that the Polish government 'hated [him] like poison'.[26] The Polish government never formally declared Cavendish-Bentinck *persona non grata* but it is possible—as Howarth suggests—that Cavendish-Bentinck's transfer was arranged as the result of pressure by the Polish government. [27] If this were the case, British acquiescence to the request for Cavendish-Bentinck's removal would have been a clear signal that Britain did not intend to interfere in internal Polish affairs. The selection of Gainer as Cavendish-Bentinck's successor reinforced the signal of disinterest. Unlike Cavendish-Bentinck, who had served in the Warsaw embassy before the war, Gainer had no experience in Eastern Europe.[28] The appointment of an ambassador with no previous experience of the country or region to which he had been posted was an indication that he would be very unlikely to initiate policy, or to make any demarche that would be unwelcome to the Polish government.

Cavendish-Bentinck's recall and the presentation of the credentials for Gainer also constituted 'the first formal act of de jure recognition by H.M.G. of the new regime', since the letters would have to be made out to the president of the republic, rather than to the president of the National Council of the Homeland—the term in use at the time that

[26] TNA: FO 371/56448/N13701/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 24 October 1946.

[27] According to Howarth, Cavendish-Bentinck also interpreted the arrest of his friend, Count Ksawery Grocholski as part of a campaign by the Polish government to 'get rid' of him. Howarth, *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary*, 218–221. Colville also recalls that the Polish government wanted both Cavendish-Bentinck and Lane out of the country. Colville, *Strange Inheritance*, 188.

[28] Gainer spent the early part of his career in Scandinavia and then Cuba. Before the war, Gainer served as consul-general in Munich and Vienna; he spent the wartime period in South America as minister/ambassador in Venezuela, 1939–1944, and ambassador in Brazil, 1944–1947. Warsaw was Gainer's last posting abroad before his retirement in 1951. *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Yearbook, 1952* (London, 1952), 286–287.

Cavendish-Bentinck had presented his credentials to Bierut.[29] Russell reported that the Polish government had made 'little attempt to conceal [its] jubilation at the departure of the two Ambassadors'. Lane and Cavendish-Bentinck had 'symbolised to the Poles the Anglo-American policy of intervention in Polish affairs, which ended with the elections'.[30] Similarly, Howarth recalled that '[t]he departure of Bentinck was a cause of satisfaction to the Polish Government'.[31] Thus, the recall of Cavendish-Bentinck, the appointment of Gainer, and the discarding of the 'provisional' qualifier were important symbolically as indications that the British government did not intend to challenge the election results or the composition of the new government, or indeed to attempt to alter the course of Poland's internal affairs.

Instead, Britain sought to tie up loose ends and settle points of contention. This approach to policy is evident in the brief that the Foreign Office prepared for Bevin ahead of the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Moscow and his return stop in Warsaw. The main outstanding issues included Poland's western frontier, which Britain had not yet recognised as final; the Anglo-Polish financial agreement, which had been signed in London in 1946 but never ratified; the negotiations for an Anglo-Polish trade agreement; compensation for British interests affected by the nationalisation of foreign enterprises in Poland; Warsaw's objections to the Polish Resettlement Corps; disputes over the repatriation of Polish citizens; and the recent arrests of Polish employees of the British embassy in Warsaw and of acquaintances of British diplomats there.[32] The briefing paper for Bevin's trip underscores the post-election shift in British policy. The issues covered amounted either to irritants in bilateral relations or involved direct attacks on British property or personnel in Poland. In each case, if the problem could be solved, there would be a direct benefit for Britain. The internal Polish political situation, on the other hand, was now off the table. In fact, nothing concerning the attacks on the PSL or the marginalisation of the PPS was even included in the briefing paper.

[29] TNA: FO 371/66092/N2537/6/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 24 February 1947; FO 371/66092/N2654/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 February 1947; FO 371/66092/N2586/6/55, Hankey minute, 12 March 1947; Foreign Office to Washington, 14 March 1947.

[30] TNA: FO 371/66093/N6707/6/55, Memo by John Russell, 28 May 1947.

[31] Howarth, *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary*, 221.

[32] TNA: FO 371/66092/N2537/6/55, 'Brief [on Poland] for Secretary of State to take to Moscow', February 1947.

Bevin to Moscow and Warsaw

By early 1947, the objective of consolidating Anglo-American cooperation in the newly established bizone and returning the region to economic self-sufficiency was the most pressing priority of British foreign policy in Europe. At the Moscow Council of Foreign Ministers, Bevin sought to persuade the Americans to drop the pretence of joint administration and accelerate the process of the division of Germany in order to facilitate the rebuilding of the bizone. The recovery of all of Western Europe depended on the German economy sputtering back to life, but progress was stalled as long as the ACC remained mired in discord. Recent historiography on Britain's occupation policy in Germany has moved away from the view that the drive to rebuild the western zones and return the region to economic self-sufficiency was aimed at countering the threat of Soviet expansionism.[33] Instead, the severity of Britain's economic crisis was the reason for Bevin's relentless insistence on achieving a breakthrough in the negotiations at Moscow. Britain simply could not wait any longer to be relieved of the burden of expenditure on its German occupation zone. The British economy had reached breaking point: insufficient production obliged the government to halve coal allocations to all industry in mid-January; a series of blizzards brought transport to a standstill and exacerbated the coal shortage, leading to the implementation of power cuts from the beginning of February, forcing the complete closure of many industries, which in turn drove the unemployment rate up to 15.5 per cent. The trade deficit had risen to $1.8 billion; the funds from the American loan were quickly drying up; and convertibility of the pound was due to be introduced in four months' time. Underscoring the sense of crisis, the government released two White Papers in February—one on defence and one on the economy, both of which stressed Britain's shortage of resources and inability to maintain all its current commitments.[34] This imperative to cut back on British overseas commitments in order to rebuild the domestic economy lends further weight to the interpretation that the economic crisis rather than the incipient Cold War was the most significant factor behind British foreign policy decisions at the beginning of 1947.

The Moscow Foreign Ministers meeting is widely regarded as the point at which the wartime Grand Alliance broke down irrevocably.[35] After

[33] Knowles, 'The British Occupation of Germany', 87.
[34] Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership*, 298–299.
[35] Ibid., 135.

weeks of discussion, the conference ended in acrimony, with Molotov accusing the British and the Americans of reneging on the Potsdam agreements.[36] These developments had important implications for Poland. The urgency of the British economic situation meant that Bevin went to Moscow seeking to break the stalemate over Germany, even at the expense of an open breach with the Soviets. By this point, the necessary precondition for Britain to exercise any influence in Poland was some form of ongoing Anglo-Soviet cooperation. Therefore, once Anglo-Soviet relations broke down completely, Britain forfeited the possibility of effective involvement in the Polish political situation. If Poland was now beyond Britain's reach, any substantial initiatives were futile. The only mention Bevin made to the Soviets about Poland at the Moscow meeting concerned the frontier, which he insisted had been fixed too far west and was liable to give rise to an irredentist movement.[37]

On his return from Moscow, Bevin stopped in Warsaw to meet with Polish leaders. Bevin made this stop reluctantly and it amounted to little more than a perfunctory courtesy visit. Bevin waited until the last minute to accept the invitation, shortly before he left Moscow, and decided to pay a visit only because the train schedule included a stop in Warsaw.[38] Bevin stayed for less than a day. He met with the foreign minister, Modzelewski, and the prime minister and PPS leader, Cyrankiewicz, but not with Bierut, as might have been expected according to the terms of diplomatic protocol. Bierut was officially a non-party president who maintained at least the pretence of a separation between the presidential office and party politics.[39] He therefore would have been the obvious person to meet if Bevin had wanted to broach difficult or sensitive subjects regarding internal Polish affairs.

Bevin met with Modzelewski in Warsaw on 27 April 1947. Bevin avoided discussion of the internal political situation in Poland almost

[36] TNA: FO 800/447, Bevin to Attlee, 16 April 1947.

[37] TNA: FO 800/447, 'Record of a Conversation at the Kremlin on Monday, 24th March, 1947'.

[38] Bevin finally accepted the invitation on 19 April. TNA: FO 371/66125/N4543/26/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 18 April 1947; FO 371/66125/N4581/26/55, Warsaw to Moscow, 19 April 1947.

[39] The separation was not genuine. Although Bierut had officially resigned from the PPR and set up his offices in the old presidential palace, he continued to attend meetings of the Politburo. Anita Prażmowska, *Władysław Gomułka: A Biography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 138.

entirely. Instead, the talks centred mainly on the issues of the Polish–German frontier and the Anglo-Polish financial and trade agreements. In response to Modzelewski's complaints about Britain's failure to ratify the financial agreement, Bevin promised to look into the matter, although he pointed out that ratification had been delayed as a direct result of the Polish government's failure to carry out its undertakings regarding the conduct of the elections. Modzelewski objected to Bevin's criticism, pointing out that the elections had been held, an amnesty had been granted to members of the underground, and the political situation had stabilised.[40]

Bevin also met with Cyrankiewicz on 27 April. At Cyrankiewicz's suggestion, the meeting was held in private. Judging by the record of the conversation, Bevin asserted himself somewhat more forcefully in his meeting with Cyrankiewicz than he had with Modzelewski. Again, the Anglo-Polish trade and financial agreements were the focus of the discussion. Cyrankiewicz deplored the lack of understanding between the British and Polish Socialist parties. He was upset that nothing had yet materialised from the negotiations for a trade agreement and he questioned why the financial agreement had not yet been ratified. This time, Bevin rebuffed the complaints by raising the issue of the nationalisation of industry in Poland, which he declared amounted to confiscation. He pointed out that the Labour government in Britain was also carrying out a programme of nationalisation but that compensation was paid not only to British owners but to foreign nationals who held interests in the enterprises. Cyrankiewicz sought to mollify Bevin on this point. He promised that talks on nationalisation would begin as soon as possible; he would ensure that Britain received terms 'in no way less favourable than those accorded to the United States Government'. In return, Bevin promised that the financial treaty would be ratified on his return to London. Cyrankiewicz also objected to the Polish Resettlement Corps and the continuation of the work of the Interim Treasury Committee. In his view, Britain should not continue to employ Poles in any organisation of that kind. Bevin agreed and suggested that there should be a British organisation under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour and the Treasury which would be under British

[40] TNA: FO 800/447, 'Anglo-Polish Conversations: Note by Mr. Broad, His Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires at Warsaw, on a Conversation with the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Warsaw', MSZ 6/47/3, 27 April 1947.

control.[41] The financial agreement was duly ratified shortly after Bevin returned to London.[42] The Resettlement Corps was already being wound down by this point, although it did not entirely cease to operate until the autumn of 1949.[43]

Thus, with the exception of the reminder to Modzelewski that the Anglo-Polish financial agreement had been delayed because of the Polish government's obstructionism over the elections, Bevin made no mention of the internal political situation in either of his meetings in Poland. Bevin's visit to Warsaw might have been used as an opportunity to seek a guarantee from the government regarding an end to the harassment of PSL members, or a pledge that the PPS would not be obliterated. The total absence of these issues from the discussion—as well as Bevin's indecision over whether to make the visit and the lack of an attempt to arrange a meeting with Bierut—suggests a strong sense of disengagement, a process of going through the motions rather than trying to broach any issues of substantial importance.

Contact Resumes with Mikołajczyk

Another clear indication of the change in British policy was the lapse in relations with Mikołajczyk. From the time of Cavendish-Bentinck's departure from Warsaw at the end of February until 7 May, when Russell met Mikołajczyk at PSL headquarters, there was no contact between any member of the British embassy staff and the PSL leader. After a year and a half of consistent and regular contact between Mikołajczyk and British officials, this interval represented a dramatic change. Russell acknowledged that Britain had neglected Mikołajczyk: 'I must confess that I felt slightly uncomfortable at first as, whichever way you cut it, we have in effect … dropped Mikolajczyk since the elections'.[44] Philip Broad, who took charge of the Warsaw embassy for the months between Cavendish-Bentinck's departure and Gainer's arrival, justified the lapse on the grounds that it

[41] TNA: FO 800/447, 'Record of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Polish Prime Minister at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Warsaw', 27 April, 1947.

[42] The instruments of ratification were exchanged in London on 19 June 1947. TNA: FO 371/66126/N7329/26/55, Foreign Office communiqué, 19 June 1947.

[43] Hope, *Abandoned Legion*, 219.

[44] Coutouvidis and Reynolds incorrectly attribute this comment to Gainer. In fact, Gainer did not arrive at his posting in Warsaw until 4 June 1947. See Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947*, 300.

would have been too 'dangerous' for Mikołajczyk to be associated with British diplomats at a time when the government they represented was 'publicly condemning as a fake the elections which had just returned his political opponents to power'. This reasoning seems disingenuous, given that the Warsaw embassy had maintained much closer and more frequent contact with Mikołajczyk at times when British criticism of the Polish government had been far more sustained and vociferous. A more likely explanation lies in Broad's next sentence: 'Conversely, it did not seem desirable at that time for this Embassy to continue to associate itself too openly with the most determined enemy of the Government to which it was accredited'. Mikołajczyk admitted to Russell that 'he had been hurt by the severance of relations' and he immediately accepted an invitation to a forthcoming reception at the British embassy to mark Gainer's arrival. Asked whether he would not be embarrassed by this invitation, Mikołajczyk replied that 'so far from being embarrassed, he would welcome such an invitation as it would show to his friends, as well as his enemies, that he and his party had not been forgotten by their former allies'.

Mikołajczyk told Russell that the Polish people had been disappointed by British policy after the elections. Mikołajczyk acknowledged that Britain was 'not in a position to afford [the Polish people] much physical assistance or to intervene actively between them and their new masters', but he did not understand why Britain suddenly felt compelled to 'whitewash' the situation. Since the elections, 'the people of Poland had seen no gestures out of England but of approval towards the Government which those fake elections had imposed. … The people of Poland were mystified, disappointed and offended by the billings and cooings that they saw going on between His Majesty's Government and the present Government of Poland'. Russell explained that Britain's policy was now to strengthen the PPS in their struggle with the PPR, but Mikołajczyk warned that Cyrankiewicz was not trustworthy. He did not represent the views of the rank and file of the PPS. He 'was becoming every day further divorced from the views of the Socialists and was tying himself up ever more inextricably with the communists.'[45] Mikołajczyk was 'extremely alarmed' by the trend towards the fusion of the PPR and the PPS. He feared the PPS would soon cease to exist. Mikołajczyk's assessment of the position of the PPS was accurate. Three days after Mikołajczyk and Russell's meeting,

[45] TNA: FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, 'Memorandum of a Conversation with Monsieur Mikolajczyk on May 7th'; Broad to Bevin, 16 May 1947.

Cyrankiewicz announced that the PPS' objective was organisational unity with the PPR.[46]

Mikołajczyk reported that the internal situation in Poland was worse than ever. PSL members were subjected to arrests, harassment, and censorship. The distributors of the PSL paper, *Gazeta Ludowa*, were regularly arrested, subscribers were visited by the security police, the youth wing of the PSL had been broken up, and PSL members were threatened with job losses unless they quit the party. The PSL had appealed against the results of the elections in almost every electoral district in the country within the time limit. Under the law, these complaints had to be investigated within a month by the Civil Supreme Court. So far, however, the only action taken was that the government had given copies of the protests to the security police who had promptly arrested all the PSL members who had signed them.[47]

The Foreign Office was not pleased that Broad had allowed contact with Mikołajczyk to lapse entirely. Hankey, now head of the Northern Department, noted that the Foreign Office did not 'envisage our present policy in Poland as permitting either the Socialists or the Communists to exclude us from having contacts with Poles of any political persuasion we please'.[48] Hankey instructed Broad along these lines, reminding him of the line of policy which had been agreed at the beginning of the year. Hankey's message suggests a disjunction between the Foreign Office and the Warsaw embassy under Broad's temporary stewardship. He tended to be less favourably inclined towards Mikołajczyk than had Cavendish-Bentinck and the Foreign Office. In his covering letter to Russell's report, for instance, Broad included a disclaimer regarding the information provided by Mikołajczyk: 'Monsieur Mikolajczyk is an honest man and a good Pole, but it is only natural that in conversation with a representative of His Majesty's Embassy he should not minimise his case. I think, therefore, that one should add a small pinch of salt to some of his complaints against the Government'.[49]

British priorities had shifted after the elections, but it appears that Broad went further than the Foreign Office intended or wanted by cutting

[46] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 207.

[47] TNA: FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, 'Memorandum of a Conversation with Monsieur Mikolajczyk on May 7th'; Broad to Bevin, 16 May 1947.

[48] TNA: FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, Hankey minute, 29 May 1947.

[49] TNA: FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, Hankey to Broad, 16 June 1947; Broad to Bevin, 16 May 1947.

off contact with Mikołajczyk. Although there was a new emphasis on resolving outstanding bilateral issues, the Foreign Office did not expect improved relations between London and Warsaw to preclude all contact with the PSL. Broad, on the other hand, seems to have concluded that it would be counterproductive to ruffle the new government's feathers by maintaining contact with its opponents during this period. Broad certainly welcomed the thaw in Anglo-Polish relations. He noted that the improvement was already reflected in the day-to-day dealings between the embassy and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly after the decision to ratify the financial agreement, which had been 'very well received in Poland'. He hoped the ratification could be followed by other non-political agreements.[50] It may well have suited Broad to shelve Mikołajczyk in order to facilitate the conclusion of these agreements and alleviate the tension in his routine dealings with the Polish government. It would seem that he misunderstood, however, that fewer hassles in the conduct of mundane matters would not necessarily lead to genuinely better Anglo-Polish relations in the long term.

Hancock commented on this misunderstanding: 'In the present atmosphere of an Anglo-Polish détente, there is some danger of forgetting that the Polish Government is a Communist dominated police regime basically hostile to the West. This is no reason why we should not pursue our present policy of trying discreetly to strengthen the hand of the Socialist element in the Polish Government and of liquidating the outstanding Anglo-Polish disagreements'.[51] Although the Foreign Office officials regarded the severance of contact as a mistake on Broad's part and were evidently glad that it had been restored, there is no evidence that they questioned Broad about Mikołajczyk or prodded embassy staff to get in touch with the PSL leader. The long delay between Cavendish-Bentinck's departure and Gainer's arrival in Warsaw also suggests British disengagement. The new ambassador arrived on 4 June 1947, over three months after Cavendish-Bentinck had returned to the UK. Gainer also took an extended period of leave in the late summer and early autumn.[52] The absence of an ambassador inevitably contributed to the policy drift. Further, the delay in Gainer's appointment would not have gone unnoticed by the Polish government and would have been interpreted as a

[50] TNA: FO 371/66093/N6707/6/55, Broad to Bevin, 3 June 1947.
[51] TNA: FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, Hancock minute, 23 May 1947.
[52] TNA: FO 371/66093/N7659/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 13 June 1947.

further indication that Britain intended to take a hands off approach to policy in Poland.

The lapse in contact with Mikołajczyk shows that there was a split within the British foreign policymaking establishment. On the one hand, Bevin, anxious to conserve his political capital for the showdown with the Soviet Union over Germany, sought to avoid any additional disagreements with the Soviets. He therefore regarded British withdrawal from Polish affairs, which had so far generated only increased Anglo-Soviet tension, as a necessity. He was not indifferent to events in Poland but he accepted that Britain no longer had the influence or strength to impose a particular outcome there. British support for the PSL must end because it would serve only to antagonise the Polish government. While the Foreign Office Northern Department, on the other hand, had conceded that the PSL was moribund as a political opposition force, it had done so only reluctantly. The Northern Department struggled to adjust to the new direction of policy. In particular, the officials whose association with the Polish opposition extended back to the wartime period, found it more difficult to accept the implications of British disengagement from Poland. The difficulty in adjusting applies most of all to Hankey, who had served in the Warsaw embassy from 1936 to 1939, and again as chargé d'affaires from 1945 to 1946 before returning to the Foreign Office, but also to Christopher Warner, the former head of the department, by then assistant undersecretary of state. As undersecretary and head of the department, they set the tone for their subordinates. In particular, Hancock, who was in charge of Polish affairs in the department, shared Hankey's approach, as evidenced, for instance, by his comments about Broad. The ambivalence of these officials is most clearly evident in relation to Mikołajczyk: on the one hand, they acknowledged that the PSL was a spent force, and yet bristled when Broad, a newcomer who had arrived in Warsaw in 1946 from Allied Forces HQ in Italy, failed to maintain contact with the PSL leader.

PPS Under Fire

In the spring of 1947, the PPR renewed its attempt to persuade the PPS to accept an immediate fusion of the two parties. Although Cyrankiewicz had espoused a commitment to eventual unification, a significant faction of the PPS, led by Edward Osóbka-Morawski, objected to this course. In particular, many socialists resented the underrepresentation of the PPS in the government and believed that the communists were acting in bad

faith.[53] The issue created a split in the party and bitter differences were aired at the executive council meeting at the end of June. Ultimately, Cyrankiewicz's motion for eventual unity with the PPR carried. Osóbka-Morawski lost his position as chair of the executive council, thus solidifying Cyrankiewicz's control over the leadership. Nevertheless, the PPS was still not prepared at this point to entirely abandon its identity as a separate party and be totally subsumed by the PPR.[54]

When the attempt at immediate unification failed, the PPR adopted a more aggressive approach. In July, Gainer reported that the PPR was employing the same tactics against the PPS that it had used to destroy the PSL. First a number of right-wing socialists were arrested on charges of anti-state and anti-Soviet propaganda and of collaboration with the intelligence services of a foreign power. Other arrests soon followed, primarily of PPS members in official positions in Warsaw and the provinces who were considered too independent. In Gainer's view, the PPR's intention was to send a 'warning to the PPS not to err from the path of strict collaboration with the Communists'.

The result was a complete collapse of PPS policy, which had aimed to exert a moderating influence on the PPR and eventually to overwhelm the party altogether by virtue of their superior numbers. After the wave of arrests, however, the PPS sought only to keep the party alive as a separate unit and hope for an improvement in the situation. Gainer described the strategy: 'Unable to defend themselves by the best method, attack, the leaders seem to have decided to try to show that they are at any rate "good boys"'. The chief concern of the PPS leaders was to avoid any suggestion that their members were engaged in 'right-wing' activities. To this end, the party chiefs had issued a series of communiqués urging PPS members to obey the party line. In trying to keep the party alive, however, its leaders were forfeiting their credibility as an independent force in Polish politics.[55]

Warner and Gainer discussed the policy options at the end of July when the latter was in London and decided to withdraw support for the PPS. Gainer argued that the basis of the policy of supporting the PPS in

[53] Prażmowska, 'Polish Socialist Party', 353.

[54] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 206–207; Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 377.

[55] TNA: FO 371/66094/N8234/6/55, Healey to Mayhew, 10 July 1947; FO 371/66094/N8539/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 21 July 1947; FO 371/66094/N8301/6/55, Gainer to Bevin, 11 July 1947.

the hope of strengthening their hands against the communists had eroded completely. Cyrankiewicz might at one time have genuinely wanted to assert socialist independence against the PPR, but he was no longer making any effort to do so. The PPS leaders were not putting up a fight to prevent the party from being broken up. In Gainer's view, it was by no means certain that the PPS was capable of effective resistance. No effort was being made to organise the rank and file in a showdown. Gainer declared that he was not ready to go on 'final official record' to this effect since he had only been in Poland for two months, but he felt quite confident that he was right. Warner agreed that a decision regarding a change in policy needed to be dealt with immediately. Bevin needed to be made aware of Gainer's grave doubts. Two days later, when Bevin met with Gainer, it was agreed that the PPS were 'not worth while putting our money on'.[56] The other Foreign Office officials expressed no fundamental objections to the policy change. Although Hancock favoured a continuation of 'discreet' support for the PPS, and the provision of help 'in small ways', even he concluded that Britain no longer had any basis on which to intervene. 'In general, I am afraid that we have no further means to hand of helping the Polish Socialists. They have got to stand up for themselves. Their spirit is weak and their prospects are bad.'[57]

Mikołajczyk in Trouble

In the summer of 1947, rumours that Mikołajczyk would be arrested and tried in the autumn began to circulate. The rumblings began in June after Mikołajczyk was accused—without grounds—of responsibility for the death of Sikorski, the former Polish prime minister. The attack led to speculation that this charge would serve as grounds for the PSL leader's arrest.[58] Fears were further heightened by the opening of the 'Kraków trial' on 10 September in which several prominent PSL members were charged with collaboration with members of the underground opposition.[59]

[56] TNA: FO 371/66094/N8539/6/55, Warner memo, 29 July 1947; N9082/6/55, Hancock memo, 2 August 1947; FO 371/66094/N9082/6/55, Hancock minute, 6 August 1947.

[57] TNA: FO 371/66094/N8539/6/55, Hancock minute, 22 July 1947.

[58] TNA: FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Gainer to Warner, 24 July 1947.

[59] Prażmowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 205; TNA: FO 371/66095/N10793/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 16 September 1947.

The Foreign Office response to the threat to Mikołajczyk was immediate. From the outset, the planning process was underpinned by a sharp awareness of Britain's 1945 promise to protect Mikołajczyk. Unlike British support for the Polish opposition as a whole, the Foreign Office regarded the commitment to Mikołajczyk as ongoing, regardless of the state of the PSL or the broader political situation in Poland. This sense of commitment is apparent both in the internal Foreign Office minutes and memos, and in the correspondence with the Warsaw embassy. First, Bevin and his officials agreed to take preventative measures to try to protect Mikołajczyk. Broad was instructed to deliver a personal message from Bevin to Cyrankiewicz, urging him to use his influence to prevent any action being taken against the PSL leader. The text of Bevin's message (which Broad was to deliver orally[60]) stressed that Mikołajczyk's decision to return to Poland had been much influenced by the 'emphatic advice of His Majesty's Government' and Britain's moral responsibility towards him was ongoing. Any action which endangered Mikołajczyk would be a setback to the recent improvement in Anglo-Polish relations from which it might 'not recover for a long time, if at all'.[61] In the instructions to Broad accompanying the statement, Warner emphasised Churchill's personal pledge to protect Mikołajczyk's safety. Warner reminded Broad of the details: when Churchill had persuaded Mikołajczyk and Jan Stańczyk to go to Moscow and enter into negotiations with Bierut, he had extended an assurance that the British government would 'back [Mikołajczyk] to the limit of their strength' and that he 'need have no fears for his personal safety'. Warner stressed that Churchill's pledge endured beyond the change of government in 1945: 'this was a matter which went far beyond politics'.[62] Upon hearing the rumours about the danger to Mikołajczyk, Churchill himself wrote to Bevin to remind him of the British commitment. Churchill clearly had an acute sense that Mikołajczyk would have been unlikely to return to

[60] Broad delivered the message to Cyrankiewicz on 19 September 1947. Broad reported that Cyrankiewicz had made no comment on the substance of the message, which he 'clearly did not like'. TNA: FO 371/66095/N10917/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 September 1947.

[61] TNA: FO 371/66094/N9082/6/55, Hancock memo, 2 August 1947; FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Gainer to Warner, 24 July 1947; Hancock minute, 5 August 1947; 'Message from the Secretary of State to the Polish Prime Minister about Mr. Mikolajczyk. To be delivered orally by His Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires in Warsaw'.

[62] TNA: FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Warner to Broad, 11 August 1947.

Poland had he not been persuaded: 'As you will see by consulting the records, I put the utmost pressure on him to return there'.[63]

Bevin replied to Churchill that he was 'very conscious of our moral obligation in the matter of [Mikołajczyk's] personal safety. I also share your fear that Mikolajczyk may be arrested and tried on a trumped-up charge'. Bevin informed Churchill in absolute confidence about the personal message to Cyrankiewicz. Explaining his decision to communicate his concerns privately to Cyrankiewicz rather than issue a public warning, Bevin referred to the case of Nikola Petkov, the Bulgarian peasant leader, who was arrested in June 1947 in spite of British representations. Bevin therefore concluded that a public protest about Mikołajczyk would be interpreted as a 'challenge' by the Polish authorities, who would seize the chance to 'represent the man in question as a tool of the western powers'.[64]

On 30 September, Mikołajczyk told D.P. Aiers, third secretary at the British embassy, that plans were in place to have the PSL 'formally and legally dissolved'. Mikołajczyk described how the party's regional headquarters had been closed in various parts of the country. Members of the Central Council of the PSL were frequently summoned to the security police and there faced with the demand that they should sign a formal renunciation of the PSL. Mikołajczyk predicted that once restrictions on the PSL had achieved as much as possible, the 'final drastic blow' would be delivered. He expected his own arrest could happen at any time.[65]

Mikołajczyk's Escape

Having determined that the Warsaw embassy would be unlikely to be able to provide sufficient protection for Mikołajczyk, the Foreign Office began making plans in August to help him disappear underground or to escape from Poland altogether if necessary. The Northern Department approached the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS; cover name: MI6) to devise several

[63] TNA: FO 371/66095/N11254/6/55, Churchill to Bevin, 19 September 1947.

[64] Vesselin Dimitrov, *Stalin's Cold War: Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria, 1941–48* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2008), 171; TNA: FO 371/66095/N11254/6/55, Bevin to Churchill, 30 September 1947.

[65] TNA: FO 371/66095/N11649/6/55, Aiers memo, 30 September 1947.

different possible means of escape.[66] The request for SIS assistance indicates Mikołajczyk's importance for the Foreign Office, since the service did not often agree to take on operations of this kind. In the immediate postwar years, the SIS was in the midst of restructuring and readjusting to the shifting circumstances and priorities of the period. For example, the Foreign Office initially restricted SIS involvement in the Soviet sphere of interest in order to avoid antagonising Moscow. Only gradually, as the residual optimism about continuing postwar Anglo-Soviet cooperation faded, did the service's work shift to focus on the countries of the emerging communist bloc.[67] In 1947, therefore, the SIS had not yet gained a firm foothold in Eastern Europe. Keith Jeffery explains the state of British postwar foreign intelligence gathering in the Soviet sphere: 'Such intelligence sources as there had been were mostly swept away, the overt collection of information was gravely impaired, and the demands on SIS escalated to include the most trivial details of everyday life in these obsessively well-protected countries'. On the other hand, the SIS's record of success during the war, together with the postwar incorporation of the Special Operations Executive (SOE)—with its focus on subversion and sabotage—into the service, encouraged a greater readiness within the organisation to undertake special operations, such as the exfiltration of individuals from the communist bloc.[68]

The SIS agreed to help arrange Mikołajczyk's escape because of his importance as a political figure, and also, according to Jeffery, to test the security and feasibility of safe routes for their own agents out of Poland.[69] Terence Garvey, the Foreign Office assistant to the SIS chief, told Warner and Hankey that helping Mikołajczyk escape would carry the risk of compromising the organisation's network in Poland.[70] The SIS would be prepared to organise the operation, even at the expense of losing their

[66] Throughout the discussions relating to the plans for Mikołajczyk's escape, the SIS is referred to obliquely as 'Mr Hayter's friends'.

[67] Rory Cormac, 'The Pinprick Approach: Whitehall's Top-Secret Anti-Communist Committee and the Evolution of British Covert Action Strategy', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16, no. 3 (Summer 2014), 7.

[68] Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service, 1909–1949* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 567–568, 655–656, 667.

[69] Ibid., 667.

[70] The position of Foreign Office assistant to the SIS chief was new, created in 1946 following a reorganisation of the chief's personal staff. It became the main link between SIS and the Foreign Office. Ibid., 621.

network, although they would regard it as a 'somewhat expensive price to pay' if the sole aim were 'the humanitarian one of saving Mikolajczyk's skin'. If, on the other hand, 'they were told that the necessity of the operation arose from Mr. Churchill's personal guarantee of Mikolajczyk's safety and that the Foreign Office considered it essential that this guarantee should be redeemed, they would feel that they had to do their best'.[71]

The SIS devised several possible escape routes for Mikołajczyk, the most promising of which involved two stages: clandestine escape from Poland to Czechoslovakia, followed by removal from Czechoslovakia to the American zone of Germany. The SIS judged, however, that even this plan carried only 'a rather better than even chance of success' given the 'considerable risk (Mikolajczyk's whole future and perhaps life; exposure of ourselves) if it failed'.[72] The uncertain chances of the plan's success prompted the Foreign Office to consider other options. Hankey asked Broad whether Mikołajczyk could be evacuated using the embassy aircraft.[73] In Broad's view, the risk of compromising the embassy was too great, and he doubted whether 'even our great responsibilities to [Mikołajczyk] would justify us in incurring it'. For the same reason, Broad advised against offering Mikołajczyk refuge in the Warsaw embassy. Moreover, Broad objected even to raising the subject of escape with Mikołajczyk, on the grounds that 'he would be inclined to resent any such approach'. Broad considered it unlikely that Mikołajczyk would ever seek asylum with either Britain or the US and would consider 'any discussion concerning possible flight … extremely repugnant'. Broad agreed with Warner's assessment that Mikołajczyk was not a man who would try to avoid trial. And if the situation did deteriorate and Mikołajczyk decided to flee, Broad argued that there were 'many ways open to him across the so-called "green" frontier which would be far easier than any plan which we could ourselves devise'.[74] Broad's response was in keeping with his generally lukewarm attitude to Mikołajczyk. Broad invoked Warner's assessment of Mikołajczyk as a 'brave man' who would rather 'stand his trial' and 'go down fighting' to suggest that he and Warner were in agreement

[71] TNA: FO 1093/445, Garvey minute, 23 September 1947.

[72] TNA: FO 1093/445, Garvey minute, 13 September 1947; Hankey minute, 18 September 1947.

[73] Gainer was away on leave during this period. He returned to Warsaw on 4 November 1947. TNA: FO 1093/445, Hankey minute, 31 October 1947.

[74] TNA: FO 1093/445, Hankey to Broad, 29 September 1947; Broad to Hankey, 8 October 1947.

on how to approach the matter.[75] But while Warner believed that Mikołajczyk would be unlikely to accept, he nevertheless considered it important for the British embassy to extend an offer of assistance. Broad, on the other hand, used Mikołajczyk's reputation for stoical resistance in order to justify his own reluctance to open the subject of asylum/escape and thus to avoid involvement in an operation which he regarded as unattractive.

Hankey was prepared to abide by Broad's wishes: 'I do not think we can, or should try, to push Mr. Broad beyond where he wants to go. In a matter of this sort we must trust his judgement'. Still, Hankey cannot have been entirely satisfied with this course of action, or rather absence of any action. His suggestion to use the embassy's plane to transport Mikołajczyk to safety is telling. This was a slightly hare-brained idea, particularly given how closely controlled the aircraft's movements were likely to be (as Hankey himself acknowledged). That he made the suggestion anyway suggests a deeply felt desire to help and possibly a degree of desperation, after learning that the chances of an SIS rescue succeeding were not very promising.[76]

Ultimately, the course of events overtook British planning. On 10 October, Mikołajczyk was warned that he and three of his closest colleagues[77] would be deprived of their parliamentary immunity when the *Sejm* convened at the end of October, brought to trial on charges of espionage and collaboration with the armed underground bands, and condemned to death.[78] Perhaps Mikołajczyk detected the British reluctance to put themselves on the line. In the end it was to the US that he turned first for help, although in spite of Broad's reluctance, the execution of the operation ultimately depended as much on the British diplomatic corps in Poland as on the American.

On the evening of 17 October, Mikołajczyk told George Andrews, the first secretary in the US embassy, that he had received warnings from two highly reliable sources that he would be arrested in about a week's time. A meeting of the American diplomatic corps convened the same evening to begin urgent discussions on how to get Mikołajczyk safely out of Poland.

[75] TNA: FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Warner to Broad, 18 September 1947.

[76] TNA: FO 1093/445, Hankey to Broad, 29 September 1947.

[77] The other three were Stefan Korboński, a former leader of the wartime underground movement, Wincenty Bryja, PSL treasurer, and Kazimierz Bagiński. Mikołajczyk, *Pattern of Soviet Domination*, 267.

[78] TNA: FO 1093/445, Record of Hankey's debrief with Mikołajczyk, 27 October 1947.

The first proposal was to hide Mikołajczyk in a convoy of American lorries which were leaving on 19 October for Berlin laden with the bodies of American war dead who had been buried in Poland. The possibility of hiding Mikołajczyk in a coffin among the fallen servicemen was suggested. Mikołajczyk rejected this idea both because of the inauspicious political symbolism if he were caught, and because the convoy would be too slow and his absence could not be concealed for so many hours. A second meeting was convened the next day, which Broad also attended. At this meeting, the diplomats lighted on a plan to smuggle Mikołajczyk out of Poland by ship from the port of Gdynia. This route was judged to have a better chance of success because it involved crossing only one frontier. Broad immediately dispatched the British naval attaché to Gdynia to find out whether any ships were leaving for Britain in the coming days. The S.S. *Baltavia* was due to sail from the port of Gdynia on 21 October and it was agreed that this option offered the best chance of escape.

On the evening of 20 October, Mikołajczyk was concealed in the back of an American embassy lorry among a pile of Broad's luggage bound for London. The lorry passed nine control points on the way from Warsaw to Gdynia; at one checkpoint, the guard insisted on examining the lorry's contents, even peering under the canvas cover with a flashlight. The driver reported that he had stood ready during the search with a large sum of bribery money[79] in one hand and a monkey wrench in the other, 'prepared to use either if necessary'.[80] Mikołajczyk boarded the *Baltavia* early in the morning of 21 October disguised in the American ambassador's coat and hat, surrounded by a group of Americans, while the British vice-consul in Gdańsk, Ronald Hazell, distracted the Polish guards.[81] The ship sailed without incident three hours later. The ship's British captain was also crucial in arranging the escape. He kept Mikołajczyk hidden throughout the journey to avoid any of the four Polish crew members recognising him.[82]

[79] In Andrews's account, the amount was 500,000 zlotys. Griffis recalls giving the driver 100,000 zlotys. *FRUS, 1947*, vol. 4, 463; Stanton Griffis, *Lying in State* (New York: Doubleday, 1952), 173.

[80] *FRUS, 1947*, vol. 4, 460–464.

[81] The Foreign Office later returned the coat and hat by diplomatic air bag to the American ambassador. The articles had been left in the care of the master of the S.S. *Baltavia*. TNA: FO 1093/445, Danzig [Gdańsk] to Foreign Office, 26 October 1947.

[82] The captain was put forward for an OBE in recognition for his help in facilitating Mikołajczyk's escape. TNA: FO 1093/445, Foreign Office Minute, 30 December 1948.

The Foreign Office files reveal differences between Bevin and the Northern Department in terms of how far they were willing to go to help with the escape. Hankey's draft reply authorised Broad to do 'everything possible' to assist Mikołajczyk 'in view of [the] clear and authoritative undertakings we have given to help him in case of need'. Bevin, however, noted at the end of the draft that the initiative should be left to the Americans since Mikołajczyk had made his approach to them. 'This is all to the good', he commented.[83]

The S.S. *Baltavia* arrived safely at London Bridge on 24 October.[84] The Foreign Office was very concerned that the details of Mikołajczyk's escape be kept strictly secret. At first, the Foreign Office worried that if the story leaked out before the ship was clear of the Baltic, it might be stopped by the Soviet navy. Officials also sought to protect both Hazell and the shipping line from any reprisals by the Polish authorities.[85] Almost all of the correspondence sent between Warsaw, Gdańsk, and the Foreign Office concerning Mikołajczyk's escape ends with instructions to 'burn after perusal'. No written account of the circumstances of Mikołajczyk's escape was circulated outside the Foreign Office. Bevin informed Attlee, the Home Secretary, James Chuter Ede, and Eden verbally on 27 October; Dixon informed Churchill the following day. Bevin sent instructions to the British embassy in Washington never to refer to the Mikołajczyk affair, 'even in conversation between staff'.[86]

The Foreign Office went to extraordinary lengths to conceal the real circumstances of Mikołajczyk's escape, concocting a cover story that he had fled via Czechoslovakia. To lend credibility to this story, Mikołajczyk had to be kept completely hidden for a period commensurate with the time it could be expected to take to travel from Czechoslovakia to the western zone of Germany.[87] The Foreign Office arranged for MI5 to take Mikołajczyk in complete secrecy straight to a secure place in the

[83] Broad's luggage was used in spite of Sargent's instructions. TNA: FO 1093/445, Hankey to Broad, draft telegram, 21 October 1947; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 20 October 1947.

[84] TNA: FO 1093/445, Danzig (Gdańsk) to Warsaw, 21 October 1947; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 25 October 1947.

[85] TNA: FO 1093/445, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 22 October 1947.

[86] TNA: FO 1093/445, Dixon minute, 28 October 1947.

[87] TNA: FO 1093/445, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 22 October 1947; Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 October 1947.

countryside immediately after the ship's arrival in London.[88] In order to cover their tracks completely, the Foreign Office arranged for a decoy flight to take Mikołajczyk from the British occupation zone to Manston airfield near Ramsgate on 3 November. The Foreign Office informed the British military governor in Berlin of the bare details of the plan, requesting that he explain the situation to the commander-in-chief and commanding air officer 'personally and most confidentially', and to confirm the Foreign Office's version of the story should he receive any press enquiries.[89]

Even internally, the Foreign Office kept two sets of records concerning Mikołajczyk's escape: one set—only released publicly in May 2013—which concerned the real arrangements, and a second, sanitised version, which supported the fictional account of Mikołajczyk's journey over the Czech border and across the Soviet zone of Germany. In the sanitised file, the first report—via an 'en clair' telegram from Broad—of Mikołajczyk's disappearance dates from 26 October 1947, by which time the PSL leader was already safely hidden in the English countryside.[90] There followed a series of bland telegrams recounting press reports and official reaction, as well as repeating speculation as to how the escape might have been effected.[91]

Mikołajczyk created an entirely fictitious account of his escape in his memoirs, published in 1948. In this invented account, described with cinematic vividness, the escape began with a car chase through the streets of Warsaw, in which Mikołajczyk's chauffeur cleverly succeeded in outwitting

[88] Mikołajczyk agreed willingly to remain hidden in England. Bagiński and his wife, Bryja, and Mikołajczyk's secretary, Maria Hulewiczowa, with the help of the Americans, had made an escape attempt via the Polish frontier into Czechoslovakia at the same time as Mikołajczyk had been taken to Gdynia. Mikołajczyk did not want to stage his reappearance until he was sure that they had managed to get out of Poland safely. The escape attempt of Hulewiczowa, Bryja, and Bagiński was entirely an American affair about which Broad had not been consulted. Bagiński and his wife reached the American zone of Germany on 29 October. Hulewiczowa and Bryja were arrested. Hulewiczowa was imprisoned and tortured; she served three years in jail. TNA: FO 1093/445, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 October 1947; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 25 October 1947; Warsaw to Foreign Office, 3 November 1947; Warsaw to Foreign Office, 5 November 1947; Foreign Office to Washington, 6 November 1947: Janusz Gmitruk, *Maria Hulewiczowa Sekretarka Stanisława Mikołajczyka* (Warsaw: Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego, 2010), 40–42.

[89] TNA: FO 1093/445, Foreign Office to Berlin, 31 October 1947.

[90] TNA: FO 371/66095/N12250/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 26 October 1947.

[91] TNA: FO 371/66095/N12337/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 October 1947.

the security police. Instead of sticking to the version of the story in which he fled via the Czech border, in his memoirs Mikołajczyk invented the story of a journey across western Poland. After reaching an unnamed village near Krotoszyn, Mikołajczyk created a succession of brave individuals—including a forest guard and his daughter, and a fake communist who entertained Polish and Russian soldiers in his home while Mikołajczyk hid upstairs—who smuggled him over the German border and across the Soviet zone, eventually depositing him in a small unnamed German village in the British zone. At this point, Mikołajczyk's version dovetails with the official British record, as he recounts that he was flown by RAF plane to Britain.[92]

Mikołajczyk in Britain

The Foreign Office found itself again at odds with Broad over Mikołajczyk's right to claim asylum in Britain. On 27 October, the undersecretary of state in the Foreign Office, Christopher Mayhew, announced in the House of Commons that Mikołajczyk would receive asylum if he came to Britain (Mikołajczyk was of course already in hiding in Britain at this point).[93] While the Foreign Office insisted that the British government must stand by that promise, Broad fretted that Anglo-Polish relations would be 'embittered' if Mikołajczyk stayed in Britain for long, with the result that 'the position of [the Warsaw] Embassy would become far more difficult even than it is now'. He suggested that a 'neutral' capital such as Paris or Lisbon would be preferable as a destination for Mikołajczyk, and until he had reached 'some such place' it would be best if his whereabouts remained secret.[94] Hankey commented that Broad was becoming 'jumpy', which Hankey attributed to the pressure on the Polish employees of the Warsaw embassy, one of whom had been arrested, with another facing arrest and a third about to stand trial.[95] In any case, Mikołajczyk intended to leave Britain for the US, where he believed that the large Polish community would be of greater help to him and his supporters than the London Poles

[92] Mikołajczyk, *Pattern of Soviet Domination*, 267–278. The Americans published details of the escape in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series in 1972. The involvement of the SIS appears to explain the delay in the release of the British files.

[93] 443 H.C. Deb 5s, column 493.

[94] TNA: FO 1093/445, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 October 1947.

[95] TNA: FO 1093/445, Hankey minute, 28 October 1947.

who were for the most part 'lukewarm' in their support.[96] This exchange serves as further evidence that there was a misalignment of views and objectives between the Foreign Office and Broad. In a note at the bottom of Hankey's minute, Warner asked when Gainer was due to return to Warsaw. 'He knows our mind on the question of asylum etc', commented Warner, the implication being that Broad did not understand or execute Foreign Office policy so well.[97]

The reaction from the Polish government itself was relatively low-key. On 31 October, Broad reported that although the PPR was 'secretly rabid' that Mikołajczyk should have managed to escape from under their noses, they were actually quite pleased to have gotten rid of him.[98] Once Mikołajczyk's arrival in Britain was made public, Gainer was summoned to see the Polish minister for foreign affairs. Modzelewski gave no indication that he knew the true circumstances of Mikołajczyk's escape. He expressed a fairly mild objection to Mikołajczyk's removal from the British zone in an RAF aircraft, which essentially amounted to official auspices. The minister's main concern was that Mikołajczyk should not be formally received by the prime minister, the foreign secretary, or by any other British official. The Polish government had no objection to Mikołajczyk residing 'quietly' in Britain as a private individual, as long as he was not treated as an 'official personage'.[99]

Conclusion

By early 1947, the idea of Europe divided into two spheres of interest was beginning to take on firm contours. This was the result of an inadvertent slide precipitated largely by the prospect of economic collapse, rather than one of clear design. The urgency of the economic situation meant that Britain needed to be relieved of responsibility for overseas commitments for which it was directly responsible. In the case of Germany, the consolidation of the bizone arrangements became an urgent necessity, even at the cost of a breach with the Soviet Union. Bevin sought to persuade the Americans to abandon four-power administration of Germany in order to accelerate the rebuilding of the western zones. Underpinning Bevin's

[96] TNA: FO 1093/445, Record of Hankey's debrief with Mikołajczyk, 27 October 1947.
[97] TNA: FO 1093/445, Warner minute, 31 October 1947.
[98] TNA: FO 1093/445, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 31 October 1947, No. 1559.
[99] TNA: FO 1093/445, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 6 November 1947, No. 1556.

desire to hive off the western zones of Germany was an implicit bargain, which precluded American and British involvement in the Soviet sphere of influence. Britain had to relinquish any stake in the political future of Poland or indeed any other Eastern European state. Bevin therefore observed a "hands off" policy towards Poland from early 1947 on. This approach is particularly evident in his decision not to deliver the statement on the Polish elections in the House of Commons, and in the strictly limited scope of his talks with Modzelewski and Cyrankiewicz in April. Bevin was eager to resolve the remaining points of contention which dogged Anglo-Polish bilateral relations. He disassociated himself virtually completely, however, from Poland's internal political affairs. The Foreign Office was less quick to withdraw support entirely, as evidenced by the Office's irritation with Broad for allowing contact with Mikołajczyk to lapse completely, as well as in its insistence that support should be extended to the PPS wherever possible. Thus, a degree of drift and disjunction continued to characterise British policy towards Poland.

CHAPTER 7

From High Cold War to Early Détente, 1948–1956

Introduction

The period from 1948 to 1956 saw a gradual shift in British policy from maintaining a blanket rule of non-interference in the Soviet orbit in Eastern Europe to the development of distinctive policies towards individual states aimed at reintroducing Western influence into the region, achieving partial normalisation of relations with the most independently inclined East European states, and ultimately at preparing for the possibility of undermining Soviet control in the region if the right circumstances arose. This was an extremely tentative process which was limited and then halted altogether by Britain's chronic shortage of resources, the focus on other areas of foreign policy which had more direct consequences for British prestige and prosperity, and by Britain's heavy reliance on the US and consequent unwillingness to diverge from American policy. Nevertheless, a discernible change had occurred in the British official mindset by the mid-1950s: it was less circumscribed by the conception of the international system as defined by two rigidly demarcated, implacably hostile sides; détente was no longer understood as achievable only through high-profile, superpower-led summit meetings; the British were more alive to the possibility that East–West tension could be relaxed in incremental steps through quiet diplomacy with smaller powers.

A. Mason, *British Policy Towards Poland, 1944–1956*, Security, Conflict and Cooperation in the Contemporary World,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94241-4_7

Poland was the catalyst for this transformation in British thinking. A series of challenges to Soviet domination and to the communist system in Poland in the early 1950s, followed by the regime's move towards liberalisation and greater independence from Moscow, prompted a re-evaluation of British policy first towards Poland and then across Eastern Europe. The review highlighted the potential for prising Poland loose—at least partially—from Moscow's control through low-key support for 'national communism', positive propaganda, economic concessions, and recognition of the postwar territorial changes to Poland's western border. These changes were conceded with considerable reluctance in some quarters of the policymaking establishment. Ideological rigidity, that is, misgivings about being seen to condone or legitimise communism; concern about the implications of a new East European policy for Britain's key alliances; and above all, lack of funds for countries of less than vital strategic significance were obstacles which could not be completely overcome. Ultimately, the process of change stalled as the question of policy towards Eastern Europe was swept aside by the foreign and economic crises which engulfed Britain after Suez in 1956. Nevertheless, the conclusions reached in the mid-1950s had an important influence on British policy in the longer term.

Late 1940s: A "Hands Off" Approach in Eastern Europe

After Mikołajczyk's escape and the destruction of the PSL, Britain withdrew from involvement in Polish internal politics. The late 1940s was a period of high tension in the emerging Cold War conflict. The last vestiges of cooperation between the former wartime allies collapsed and fear and uncertainty about Soviet intentions prevailed. The end of the decade was punctuated by events which carried ominous signs of Soviet power and an apparent determination to extend Soviet influence: the coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948, the Berlin crisis in 1948–1949, and the first Soviet nuclear test in August 1949. A review of Soviet policy by the British intelligence services in early 1949 emphasised the risk of Russian infiltration of Western Europe, especially Germany. The review found that there was 'no evidence … that the Russians are in any way calling off their sabotage activities in the West of Europe'.[1] The future of Germany

[1] TNA: FO 1093/564, 'Top Secret Review of Russian Policy', covering memo, 1 February 1949.

was a particularly acute concern: West Germany was formally established as a separate state, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), in May 1949, but the possibility that Germany could still be lured into the Soviet orbit with the promise of unification and border revisions continued to frighten Western statesmen.[2]

As a consequence of these fears of Soviet intentions, Britain adopted a policy of non-interference in Eastern Europe in order to avoid provoking Soviet retaliation in the West. This approach was evident in Britain's reaction to the split between Stalin and the Yugoslav leader, Josip Broz Tito. Britain recognised that the disagreement between Moscow and Belgrade, which culminated in the Cominform's expulsion of the Yugoslav Communist party at the end of June 1948, had the potential to encourage other independently minded East European leaders who had chafed against Moscow's control but had previously seen 'no alternative to Stalinism on the one hand and right-wing reaction on the other'. The Foreign Office Russia Committee noted that particularly in Poland and Hungary, Tito's stand had opened up 'a third possibility, namely national Communism, independent of, and even opposed to Moscow'. In late 1947, immediately after the founding congress of the Cominform, Władysław Gomułka, the secretary general of the Polish communist party, had asserted that Poland had the right to follow its own 'road to Socialism', thus implicitly rejecting the Soviet right to impose policies on the national communist parties.[3] Although the Russia Committee recognised the potential of Titosim as a subversive force which could weaken the communist bloc, the possibility of supporting other nationalist communist leaders was dismissed. The committee judged that the chances of success for Gomułka or László Rajk in Hungary to achieve an 'anti-Moscow coup' akin to that of Tito were poor because of the ongoing presence of the Red Army in their countries. Instead, Britain should focus on building up the Western bloc and preventing Soviet infiltration of Western Europe. In this respect, the propaganda value of the Tito-Stalin split lay primarily in its potential use to discredit the Western European communist parties, rather than to encourage subversion in Eastern Europe.[4]

[2] R. Gerald Hughes, 'Unfinished Business from Potsdam: Britain, West Germany, and the Oder-Neisse Line, 1945–1962', *The International History Review* 27, no. 2 (June 2005): 266, 275.

[3] Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 152–153.

[4] TNA: FO 1093/583/RC/15/50, Russia Committee, 'Anti-Stalinist Communism', 2 February 1950.

Early 1950s: First Steps Towards Détente

The early 1950s saw tentative steps in Britain towards détente with the Soviet Union. The Attlee government made the first attempt at rapprochement in 1950–1951 in order to try to defuse the crisis atmosphere as the rapidly escalating Korean conflict and the decision to proceed with West German rearmament provoked fears of a war with the Soviet Union. This effort foundered primarily against American and Soviet intransigence.[5] When Churchill returned to office in 1951, he hoped to leave his mark as a 'peacemaking prime minister' by achieving a breakthrough in relations with the Soviet Union. In May 1953, Churchill seized the opportunity afforded by Stalin's death in March of that year to make a grand gesture. He announced in the House of Commons that the time was now right for détente and proposed a conference of the 'leading powers'. Churchill declared his willingness to accept the existing Polish–German border as a condition for détente with the Soviet Union. Invoking the Locarno era, he declared that 'Russia has a right to feel assured that as far as human arrangements can run the terrible events of the Hitler invasion will never be repeated and that Poland will remain a friendly Power and a buffer'.[6]

With this statement, Churchill opened up one of the most deeply entrenched obstacles to better East–West relations: the disputed Polish–German border. The westward shift of Poland's frontier at German expense to the Oder–Neisse line provisionally agreed at the Potsdam conference remained formally unrecognised by the Western powers. According to the Potsdam protocol, the final delimitation of the frontier was to be specified in the peace treaty. The failure to conclude a peace treaty allowed for two opposing interpretations of the protocol: Poland, supported by the Soviet Union, insisted that the border was fixed for all time, while the FRG, supported by NATO, refused to recognise the border as final on the basis of the terms of the protocol. For the FRG, recognition of the Oder–Neisse line would have entailed an acceptance that the loss of territory and the division of Germany were permanent. The first West German

[5] For the Attlee government's initiative see: Spencer W. Mawby, 'Detente deferred: The Attlee Government, German Rearmament and Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1950–51', *Contemporary British History* 12, no. 2 (1998): 1–21.

[6] HC Deb, 5th Series, v. 515, c. 896, 11 May 1953. See also: Martin Gilbert, *Never Despair: Winston S. Churchill, 1945–1965* (London: Heinemann, 1988), 827–832; R. Gerald Hughes, *The Postwar Legacy of Appeasement: British Foreign Policy since 1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 38–39.

chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, exploited the tension between the Soviet bloc and the West in the early 1950s to solidify NATO support for his policy of territorial revision. Adenauer enjoyed particularly strong support from the Americans. For the US, the spectre of a unified, neutralised—or worse, Soviet-leaning—Germany, drawn into the eastern orbit by the promise of border revisions was to be avoided at almost any cost. Marshall made a number of public statements indicating that the US did not regard the Polish–German border as fixed.[7] Eisenhower, in pursuit of his policy of 'rolling back' communism, offered even stronger support: in the summer of 1953, Adenauer secured a pledge from the new president that the US would never recognise the Oder–Neisse line in any new treaty.[8] For the Soviet Union, on the other hand, Western acceptance of the border would have signalled recognition of the boundaries of the Soviet sphere of influence, thus assuaging Soviet security fears. These deeply entrenched, irreconcilable positions made the Oder–Neisse line a major obstacle for East–West détente.

Publicly, Britain supported the FRG's position, although privately, the British attitude was more pragmatic: there was a general consensus that agreeing to the Oder–Neisse line had been a bad decision, but the disruption involved in any revision of the border would now be too great, and therefore it was best to accept the status quo.[9] The Oder–Neisse line was a significant flash point in relations with the Soviet Union, therefore Western recognition of the border would eliminate this as a potential source of conflict. The border—though not ideal—was now fixed and could be accepted. Further, a resolution to this dispute would ease Britain's perpetually straitened economic circumstances by reducing defence expenditure in Europe, allowing spending to be diverted to areas of crucial strategic importance. Against these advantages to recognition, however, stood the potential damage to Britain's relations with its NATO allies—especially the US—which would result from such a significant departure from collective Western policy.[10]

Churchill's initiative was thus short-lived. Eden and the Foreign Office acted immediately to put a stop to the prime minister's plans. Alarmed at

[7] Beate Ruhm von Oppen, ed., *Documents on Germany Under Occupation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 223–224, 262.

[8] Hughes, 'Unfinished Business', 276.

[9] Ibid., 268.

[10] Hughes, *Postwar Legacy of Appeasement*, 10.

the implications for other areas of foreign policy, Foreign Office officials and members of the Cabinet warned him that his initiative threatened to alienate both the US and the FRG, undermine NATO's strategy of forward defence, and create an opportunity for the Soviets to extend their influence.[11] Both Adenauer and Eisenhower responded swiftly with public statements making clear their opposition to Churchill's initiative.[12] The threat of a rift with Britain's NATO allies, the potential damage to Anglo-American relations and the possible weakening of the FRG's links with the West persuaded Churchill to abandon his plans.[13] In a meeting with Adenauer a few days after his House of Commons speech, Churchill assured the chancellor that Britain 'would not fail in our obligations towards Western Germany', and 'hoped that he had dispelled any anxieties in the Chancellor's mind arising out of his speech'.[14]

British adherence to the policy of non-recognition was formally reaffirmed the following year. Britain, along with France and seven other NATO member states, asserted the provisional status of Germany's frontiers in the Final Act of the London Conference of Western foreign ministers in October 1954. In May 1955, the Allied occupation regime in West Germany came to an end; the FRG regained full sovereignty and became a full member of NATO. The Paris Agreements governing these changes stated that a final German peace treaty was an important objective of Western policy and 'a final determination of Germany's borders must be postponed until such a settlement is achieved'.[15] Nevertheless, despite this public position, Churchill refused to abandon his 'peace campaign'. He insisted that the Oder–Neisse line need not be a barrier to détente, waging a war of attrition in an attempt to wear down Foreign Office opposition until near the end of his premiership.[16]

[11] TNA: PREM 11/449, Strang to Churchill, 30 May 1953; PREM 11/428, Macmillan to Churchill, 9 June 1953; Salisbury to Churchill, 11 June 1953.

[12] R. Gerald Hughes, *Britain, Germany and the Cold War: The Search for a European Détente, 1949–1967* (London: Routledge, 2007), 24–25.

[13] TNA: PREM 11/449, Churchill to Strang, 31 May 1953. See also: Hughes, *Postwar Legacy of Appeasement*, 39.

[14] TNA: PREM 11/905, 'Visit of the German Chancellor to the United Kingdom, May 14–16, 1953'.

[15] Hughes, *Britain, Germany and the Cold War*, 32, 42–43.

[16] TNA: PREM 11/449, Churchill memo, 6 July 1953. On Churchill's 'peace campaign', see John W. Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign: Britain and the Cold War, 1951–5* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 318–319.

Throughout the early 1950s, the aim of these détente initiatives was limited to achieving a relaxation of tension with the Soviet Union. Indeed, they were explicitly predicated on a 'hands off' policy in Eastern Europe. For example, ahead of the Geneva conference in 1955, Churchill wrote: '[I]t would be wrong to alarm the Russians by openly raising … the subject of the satellites', including the issues of 'frontiers or forms of Government'.[17] The discussions surrounding détente were conducted without reference to Polish interests; Poland was treated as indistinct from the Soviet Union, essentially as a western extension of Soviet territory. As the British ambassador to Warsaw, Andrew Noble, commented in 1955, 'I am frankly not at all sure what is our policy towards Poland, or even whether we have one'.[18] It was not the case, however, that Polish and Soviet interests were identical as far as the border was concerned. For Poland, the great nightmare was the conclusion of an East–West deal over its head, with a Soviet territorial concession at Polish expense in exchange for the greater prize of a unified, neutralised Germany. The western territories were a constant source of anxiety for Warsaw: rumours about possible border revisions regularly generated waves of panic within the administration. In 1949, following the formal establishment of the GDR, there was widespread fear that the Soviets would return the port city of Szczecin [Stettin] to East Germany.[19] Even the conclusion of the Treaty of Görlitz in 1950, according to which the GDR formally recognised the border as final, did little to quell Polish fears. Poland was particularly sensitive to any developments in the international sphere which might have repercussions for the border. Anxiety reached fever pitch ahead of Adenauer's visit to Moscow in 1955. '[E]ven the leading Polish communists trust their Russian patrons little more than we do', commented Noble.[20] Similarly, Warsaw sought assurances ahead of the Geneva summit that the Oder–Neisse line was not on the agenda.[21] The disputed status of the border meant that Poland was hostage to the Soviet Union, dependent on Soviet protection for its security. The corollary was that Western recognition of the Oder–Neisse line offered the possibility of prising

[17] TNA: PREM 11/905, Churchill to Eden, 21 June 1955.

[18] TNA: FO 371/116508/NP1014/25, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 16 August 1955.

[19] TNA: FO 371/86583/NP1015/1, Warsaw to Attlee, 16 December 1949.

[20] TNA: FO 371/116515/NP10318/3, Noble to Macmillan, 12 July 1955; FO 371/116522/NP1081/2, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 15 June 1955.

[21] TNA: FO 371/116508/NP1014/18, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 14 June 1955; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 30 June 1955.

Poland loose from Soviet control. But the British conception of détente at this stage was narrowly circumscribed, limited to the objective of an improvement in relations with the Soviet Union, rather than a more significant shift in the broader East–West dynamic. Britain accepted that an essential condition for détente was Western recognition of Soviet control over its East European satellites, and therefore there was no question of treating Poland independently.

Liberalisation in Poland

In Poland, meanwhile, by the mid-1950s a process of liberalisation was underway. There were three important components which sparked this process, gave it impetus, and allowed it to survive: an internal power struggle within the ruling Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*—PZPR), a 'current of revolt' at grassroots level, and external geopolitical changes, specifically internal divisions within the Soviet leadership in the years immediately following Stalin's death, which diminished Soviet control over its satellite states.[22]

The process of change in Poland was initiated by an internal opposition group within the PZPR, which was increasingly critical of the leadership of the ruling triumvirate of Bolesław Bierut, Jakub Berman, and Hilary Minc. The position of this oppositional faction was boosted by the outcome of the struggle for power in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death, which concluded with the liquidation of security chief Lavrentii Beria, who was arrested in June 1953 and executed in December. What followed in the Soviet Union was a reining in of the powers of the security apparatus and instructions from Moscow to the satellite states to do the same. The Polish leadership reluctantly began a process of reform. This process—which the party leadership would have preferred to keep secret—was accelerated and dramatically publicised in September 1954, when Radio Free Europe ran a series of interviews with Józef Światło, formerly deputy director of Department X, a section of the Ministry of Public Security (*Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*—MBP), who had defected to the West at the end of 1953. Światło revealed details of the destruction of the non-communist political opposition after the war; the

[22] Andrzej Werblan, 'The Polish October of 1956—Legends and Reality', in *The Polish October 1956 in World Politics*, ed. Jan Rowiński (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2007), 15–16.

extent of the arrests, torture, and executions which had occurred during the purges; the extent of the MBP's reach; and details of the privileges enjoyed by PZPR leaders—revelations which were 'dynamite'. The regime's efforts to jam the broadcasts failed; they were listened to by 'all who had radios' and they became the subject of intense public discussion.[23]

Paweł Machcewicz argues that the 'Światło affair painfully affected the ruling group, accelerating its demoralization by making them lose faith in their methods of government and prying open a little more the gate to new political currents'. In November and December 1954, party activists sharply criticised the leadership. There was renewed criticism and calls for change at the PZPR's Third Plenum in January 1955. In December 1954, the MBP, which had largely been responsible for carrying out the purges and show trials of the Stalinist period, was abolished, its functions were dispersed, past sentences were reviewed, and thousands of prisoners were released. Gomułka was quietly released from prison at the end of 1954. There was greater freedom of expression and the press began to take a more 'courageous' tone. Nevertheless, even as the current of opposition spread to society at large, the party managed to retain control of the process of transformation up until the end of 1955.[24]

In February 1956, Khrushchev delivered his famous denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Bierut, who had led the Polish communist party throughout the Stalinist period, died a month later. These two events converged to give a powerful impetus to the reform movement in Poland. Khrushchev's speech—which seemed to call into question the very legitimacy of the system Stalin had created and therefore also of the Stalinist regimes in the satellite states—coincided with the death of the man who was the preeminent representative of that system in Poland.[25] The text of Khrushchev's speech was rapidly disseminated in Poland. The secretariat of the PZPR itself distributed copies to party activists. [26] The wide circulation given to Khrushchev's speech meant that the debate surrounding

[23] Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 174–175.

[24] Paweł Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, trans. Maya Latynski (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 15–16; Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 178.

[25] Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite*, 20.

[26] Poland was the only state within the Soviet bloc in which the communist party itself distributed copies of Khrushchev's speech.

Poland's political future and calls for reform quickly filtered down to all levels of society: factories, trade unions, universities, political and literary journals, discussion clubs, and student societies.[27]

On 28 June 1956, the pace of events accelerated beyond the control of the party when strikes broke out in Poznań. The immediate cause was a dispute about new rates of pay, but the strikes quickly took on a much larger political significance. 'The Poznań events were a genuine mass protest against all the different aspects of the existing reality—socioeconomic, ideological, and political.'[28] The demonstrators called for the destruction of the communist system and a full-scale national uprising. The demonstration transformed into an armed revolt as the crowd destroyed the district headquarters of the PZPR and stormed the security service headquarters, the prison, and the court buildings. The regime responded by flooding the city with troops to crush the demonstrations, killing approximately 70 people.[29]

The Poznań revolt precipitated a crisis for the party leadership. The regime's legitimacy was damaged by its heavy-handed response to the demonstrations. Unrest spread across the country, as workers in hundreds of factories and other institutions sought to show their solidarity. Poznań also sharpened the divisions within the party between the younger, radical faction, known as the Puławy group, which called for democratisation and far-reaching reform of the economic system, and the conservative faction, the Natolin group,[30] which sought to quell the rising national discontent with largely superficial gestures.[31] At the Seventh Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee in July 1956, the Politburo was forced to make a number of concessions, including increased party accountability and greater participation in decision-making for the party's rank-and-file.[32]

[27] Anita Prażmowska, *Poland: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 182–183.

[28] Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite*, 120.

[29] Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 191–192; Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom*, trans. Jane Cave (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 273.

[30] The Puławy group's name derived from a government apartment complex on Puławska Street in Warsaw. Natolin was a small town near Warsaw, where many government dignitaries had villas. Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours*, 271.

[31] Specifically, the Natolin group proposed to raise wages and publically scapegoat those officials who could be held responsible for excesses of the Stalinist period. Ibid.

[32] Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 194–195.

Unrest continued throughout the summer of 1956, reaching crisis point by the early autumn. An opposition movement which had at its core an alliance of young intellectuals and radical workers coalesced. The literary journal, *Po Prostu,* run by the Union of Polish Youth (*Związek Młodzieży Polskiej*—ZMP) openly called for Gomułka's return to power. As the leader who had advocated a 'Polish road to socialism', who had had the audacity to challenge the Stalinist line, and who had served time in prison for his defiance, Gomułka had become associated—both in the public mind and by a significant faction within the party—as the leader who could best meet the demands for change.[33] In early October, after a bitterly divisive debate within the Politburo, Gomułka was readmitted to the PZPR and in mid-October, the Politburo agreed to his return to the leadership. On 17 October, it was decided that the Politburo would be completely reconstituted, with the exclusion of the most hard-line, pro-Soviet members, including Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, the Polish-born Soviet officer who served as Polish defence minister and who was widely 'regarded as the most humiliating symbol of Soviet domination'.[34]

These dramatic changes in the leadership, coupled with Gomułka's demand for the dismissal of Soviet officers serving in the Polish armed forces, aroused deep disquiet in Moscow. On 19 October, just as the Eighth Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee was about to convene to formalise the leadership changes, a Soviet delegation, including Khrushchev, Molotov, and other senior members of the Presidium,[35] Nikolai Bulganin, Anastas Mikoyan, and Lazar Kaganovich, together with the commander-in-chief of Warsaw Pact forces, and other high-ranking Soviet military officers, arrived in Warsaw. The ensuing talks between the Soviet delegation and Gomułka and other Polish leaders were fraught with tension. Khrushchev was infuriated by the Poles' failure to consult Moscow before making such radical changes in the leadership of the party. He feared that Gomułka's intention was to embark on an independent line of foreign policy.[36] Khrushchev went so far as to threaten military intervention

[33] Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 194–197, 200; Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite*, 207.

[34] Leszek Gluchowski, 'Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomulka, and the "Polish October"', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 5 (Spring 1995), 38–39; Paweł Machcewicz, 'Social Protest and Political Crisis in 1956', in *Stalinism in Poland, 1944–1956*, ed. and trans. Anthony Kemp-Welch (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 114.

[35] In the pre- and post-Khrushchev eras, the Presidium was called the Politburo.

[36] Mark Kramer, 'The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings', *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (1998), 169.

and ordered Soviet troops stationed in the north and west of Poland to advance towards Warsaw. A number of units of the Polish Internal Security Corps—which were outside of Rokossovsky's control—took up positions around Warsaw and might have been prepared to engage Soviet troops if they entered the capital.[37]

The talks ended inconclusively in the early hours of 20 October and the Soviet delegation returned to Moscow. For a few days, the Soviet Politburo debated the possibility of military intervention in Poland, but ultimately backed down and accepted the leadership changes within the PZPR. The reasons for the Soviet retreat are a source of historiographical disagreement. The decision seems to have been influenced by several factors. The Soviets were shaken by the strength of the anti-Soviet sentiment on the streets and throughout the industrial sector as mass mobilisation took place across Poland in support of Gomułka and in protest against Soviet interference. Further, the stand-off on 19 October highlighted the risk of a Polish–Soviet conflict—or of a Polish civil war, with the possibility of Internal Security Corps troops facing off against units under Rokossovsky's command. Khrushchev was also partly reassured by Gomułka's commitment to maintain the communist system, by his commitment to the Warsaw Pact and to ongoing Polish–Soviet friendship, and by his promise to quell the rising mobilisation. The opposition of the Chinese leadership to Soviet military intervention in Poland might also have helped to dissuade Khrushchev and finally, the outbreak of the revolution in Hungary on 23 October—confronting the Soviets with the prospect of simultaneous military intervention in two satellite states—was a crucial factor.[38]

On 20 October, in a speech at the Plenum that was broadcast across the country, Gomułka promised an end to the Soviet exploitation of Poland. Gomułka could not, however, completely repudiate Poland's relationship with the Soviet Union. Speaking publicly on 24 October, he stressed that the Soviet Union remained Poland's great ally and partner. Nor did he call for the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Polish territory. The disputed Polish–German border made this impossible. The Soviet Union remained the only guarantor of Poland's western frontier. Nevertheless, the outcome of the crisis marked a significant step towards greater Polish

[37] For a discussion of the evidence on the orders issued to the Internal Security Corps, see Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite*, 166–167.

[38] Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 201–202; Kramer, 'The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises', 168–172.

independence from Moscow.[39] On 30 October, the Soviet Union issued a declaration promising to Poland '"absolute equality, respect for territorial integrity, national independence and sovereignty, and mutual non-integration in [the] internal matters of each country"'.[40] Moscow withdrew its advisors from the Polish security apparatus and, with a few exceptions, Soviet officers serving in the Polish army were also withdrawn. In November, Rokossovsky was recalled. During talks held in Moscow in mid-November, it was agreed that the Polish authorities would be given jurisdiction over all Soviet troop movements on Polish soil. In the economic sphere, the Soviet Union cancelled Polish debts and extended credits. Cumulatively, these changes amounted to an end to 'the Stalinist nightmare'.[41] The Polish leadership had 'won the right to define Poland's internal policies'.[42]

Policy Review

The cumulative effect of the changes in Poland was sufficiently dramatic to prompt a review of British policy by 1955. The process was initiated—and pushed doggedly—by Noble. In March, he began by arguing that in view of the increasing independence of Polish leaders from Moscow, coupled with the undiminished anti-Soviet hostility and nationalism of the population, Britain needed to develop an independent policy towards Poland. By the middle of the year he was pushing for a radical overhaul of policy with the long-term objective of encouraging Warsaw to 'defect' from Moscow. Noble acknowledged that the likelihood of Poland breaking away from the Soviet sphere was slight, but insisted that Britain should 'do everything that we can to encourage the Poles to feel that they can get on with us and the Americans more easily than with the Russians'. At the least, this would serve as a means of undermining Soviet control in Poland by helping to transform Poland into an 'unwilling all[y]', which would be 'more of a liability than an asset' to the Soviets.[43]

Noble recommended four main changes in British policy, all with the long-term objective of detaching Poland from the Soviet bloc. First, he

[39] Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite*, 170; Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 203–209.
[40] Quoted in Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 209.
[41] Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite*, 210–211.
[42] Prażmowska, *Gomułka*, 209.
[43] TNA: FO 371/116508/NP1014/25, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 16 August 1955.

urged explicit support for Polish national communism. This would require British acceptance of Poland's communist system of government: 'We should show Polish leaders that we oppose not Communism but Soviet imperialism, and that they would be welcomed as Titos'. He stressed the importance of showing Polish leaders that the West would welcome them if they were to assert a greater degree of independence from Moscow, that they would not be met with demands to abandon the communist system altogether. '[O]nly their subjection to Soviet imperialism … stands between them and the moral and material support which the West has already offered in the form of the Marshall Plan and stands ready to offer again.'[44]

Second, before Poland could consider moving closer to the West, Britain would need to provide reassurance about the inviolability of Poland's western frontier.[45] Noble argued that the disputed status of the Oder–Neisse line constituted both the strongest tie binding Warsaw to Moscow but also the issue with the greatest potential to bring about a Polish–Soviet rupture. If the Soviets were ever 'to do a bargain with Germany', the issue would 'become critical'.[46] Noble insisted that the British position on the Oder–Neisse line needed to be made clearer 'if we are to deprive Communist propaganda of its appeal to Polish fears of German revisionism supported by the Western Powers'. He suggested the adoption of an unequivocal new formula on the border issue: Germany must accept that it would not get the territory back.[47]

Third, Noble recommended economic incentives to draw Poland closer to the West. He argued that Poland, as a large, populous, industrialising country, had a stronger interest than the Soviet Union in developing trade with the West.[48] Specifically, Poland's drive to industrialise was being undermined by a shortage of modern machinery. The offer of commercial credits to facilitate the purchase of these products would be a significant enticement. Finally, British propaganda should shift away from criticism of communism towards showcasing the advantages of the British way of life.[49]

[44] TNA: FO 371/116520/NP1053/2, Noble to Eden, 29 March 1955.
[45] TNA: FO 371/116520/NP1053/2, Noble to Eden, 29 March 1955.
[46] TNA: FO 371/116508/NP1014/25, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 16 August 1955.
[47] TNA: FO 371/116520/NP1053/2, Noble to Eden, 29 March 1955.
[48] TNA: FO 371/116508/NP1014/25, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 16 August 1955.
[49] TNA: FO 371/116508/NP1014/25, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 16 August 1955.

The Foreign Office was not prepared to go as far as Noble suggested. Some officials baulked at the prospect of 'encouraging' communism as a legitimate system of government. Doing so risked weakening Britain's alliances and diminishing British prestige internationally. Deputy undersecretary Jack Ward highlighted the inconsistency in this objection, commenting that 'we swallow it cheerfully in Yugoslavia!' He agreed with Noble that the changes in Poland were significant enough to warrant a change in British policy; Britain should not tie its hands in order to adhere to a rigid ideological position. Ward argued that Britain could not 'exclude the possibility of internal upheaval in Russia which might enable the Poles to assert a great deal more independence; if that happened, I think we would be foolish to hold aloof out of objection of principle towards Communism'.[50]

By October 1955, a significant shift had occurred in British policy. Following discussions with Ward, the foreign secretary, Harold Macmillan, agreed to three major changes. First, the "hands off" policy vis-à-vis the East European states would be dropped. Instead, Britain would attempt 'to wean the Satellites from Russia'. This required a second change: it was no longer appropriate for Britain to have a collective policy towards the East European states. Poland should be treated as distinct from the other satellites. Macmillan did not think Britain 'need bother about Roumania, Bulgaria and Hungary, or possibly even Czechoslovakia', but 'Poland was in a class by itself' because of Warsaw's greater degree of independence from Moscow coupled with Poland's strategic importance. '[I]f Germany were reunited it was in Poland that we should have our best chance of re-establishing Western influence in Eastern Europe.' Third, Macmillan was prepared to accept a 'national communist' system: 'He did not see any objection to our welcoming national Communism as a phase in the break-away from the present regime'.[51] Collectively, these decisions amounted to an important change in British policy. Britain's rule of non-interference in the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe was dropped. By agreeing to encourage Warsaw's independence from Moscow with the longer-term objective of a partial or complete break, Macmillan was moving towards a different form of détente, less ostentatious but ultimately more radical and with the potential for more thoroughgoing and permanent change.

The implementation of these changes into actual policy initiatives stalled in 1956. First, following the brief thaw after Stalin's death,

[50] TNA: FO 371/122617/NP1052/6, Foreign Office Minutes, 20 & 27 January 1956.
[51] TNA: FO 371/116520/NP1053/10, Minute by Jack Ward, 15 October 1955.

suspicions about Soviet intentions surged again. In March 1956, Noble pressed his Foreign Office colleagues in London for a final response to his request for a new policy towards Poland. He sought to impress upon them that a significant change had taken place in Poland: '[I]t was difficult to convey in despatches the complete change in atmosphere which had taken place in Poland in the last six months. The Poles showed much greater self-confidence and willingness to criticise the Russians. In general, the atmosphere was very much freer'.[52] And a month later: '[E]vents in Poland since the death of Bierut, and particularly since Khrushchev's attack on Stalin, have supported my contention that there are powerful forces in Poland that are not merely not reconciled to Communism, but still strenuously resisting many of its manifestations'.[53]

Ward's response indicates that doubts had set in about how far Poland could actually distance itself from the Soviet Union and whether the attempt to do so was indeed genuine or a charade designed for Western consumption. Ward wrote that despite the supposed thaw in East–West relations, Khrushchev's policy of anti-colonial propaganda and subversion in the developing world threatened to 'destroy the external power of the United Kingdom and France'. The new Soviet practice of 'fair words and harmless exchanges in the cultural field' was merely designed to 'keep us amused', while Moscow went about undermining key Western interests in the developing world. Ward admonished Noble for believing that Polish leaders could deviate from the Soviet line even if they wanted to do so. The relaxation in tension to which Noble referred was merely an indication that Poland was following the same policy as the Soviet Union. No substantive change had occurred. Poland was circumscribed by the limits set by the Soviet Union.[54]

Second, and underlying everything, was Britain's chronically bad economic situation. As R. Gerald Hughes notes, 'In any analysis of post-war British policy, it must be remembered that economics dominated decision-making by virtue of almost perpetual economic decline'.[55] The Foreign Office files in 1955 and 1956 are littered with comments about the shortage of funds to support the proposed changes to policy in Poland. For

[52] TNA: FO 371/122617/NP1052/9, Foreign Office Minutes, 6 April 1956; FO 371/122617/NP1052/7, Noble to Ward, 1 March 1956.

[53] TNA: FO 371/122617/NP1052/11, Noble to Ward, 23 April 1956.

[54] TNA: FO 371/122617/NP1052/5, Ward to Noble, 12 March 1956.

[55] Hughes, *Britain, Germany and the Cold War*, 41.

example, in January 1956, Ward commented on 'the well-known limitations of money' as an inhibiting factor in the proposed attempt to draw Poland away from the Soviet Union.[56] In early 1956, Britain experienced a crisis in its external finances. This financial crisis, coupled with the shift in Soviet policy which saw Soviet leaders 'pursuing their aims of promoting world revolution with new vigour', meant that there was no money available to offer economic incentives or introduce extensive propaganda campaigns in Poland. Overseas spending had to be directed towards countering the Soviet drive to extend its influence to the neutral states, particularly areas of vital strategic significance to Britain in the Middle East.[57] Even in October and November 1956, as revolutionary turmoil engulfed Poland, requests for funds for the country were rejected. The response to a request from the consulate in Gdynia was: '[W]e have absolutely no money to cover information activities in Poland'.[58] Similarly, a month later: 'We are … handicapped by shortage of funds'.[59]

In August 1956, Noble was recalled from Warsaw after several months of argument with his colleagues in London. Although the Northern Department agreed with Noble that Poland was the 'best bet' as an entry point for infiltrating the Soviet bloc, they did not share his trust in the Polish leadership. The Department believed that Noble was prepared to stake too much on his conviction that the Polish regime sought to break with Moscow. Crucially, his insistence that it was possible to 'woo' Polish leaders away from the Soviet Union had the potential to embarrass Britain: 'Had we adopted … Noble's suggestion, we should have been in an embarrassing and rather foolish position when the Poznan riots occurred'. The 'unilateral adoption by [Britain] of [Noble's] recommendations would have … confused the Polish people' and 'led to trouble with the U.S.A. and the other members of NATO'.

Nevertheless, discussions on British policy towards the East European satellites continued. At about the same time as Noble's departure from Warsaw, Selwyn Lloyd, Macmillan's successor as foreign secretary, directed that discussions should be opened with the Americans with a view to agreeing 'a more forthcoming policy towards the satellites'. The British planned to propose the adoption of a more 'flexible' attitude towards the

[56] TNA: FO 371/122617/NP1052/6, Foreign Office Minutes, 27 January 1956.
[57] TNA: FO 371/122617/NP1052/9, 'Policy Towards Poland', 28 March 1956.
[58] TNA: FO 371/122617/NP1052/12, Foreign Office to Gdynia, 15 October 1956.
[59] TNA: FO 371/122618/NP1052/22, Brimelow to Evans (Gdynia), 8 November 1956.

satellites; the assertion of 'friendship with the Satellite peoples' both in official statements and in propaganda; and finally an increase in expenditure on information. The unresolved dilemma was the 'problem of how to encourage more liberal tendencies among the leaders of the present regimes without discouraging the anti-Communists by lending respectability to their Governments'.[60] The proposed lines of discussion with the Americans were thus not too distant from the suggestions pressed by Noble. The only substantive difference was the Foreign Office's preoccupation with avoiding the embarrassment of offering overt support to a communist government.

The talks with the State Department on a joint Anglo-American policy towards Eastern Europe were due to take place in mid-October 1956. There is no record that the discussions actually took place, however, and it seems likely that they were swept aside by Suez, and the ensuing financial and diplomatic crises which engulfed Britain. Suez also partly explains the muted British response to the Polish revolution in October 1956. As Anne Deighton has noted, Northern Department officials were not involved in planning the Suez operation, but it seems safe to say that the issue would have absorbed virtually all of the attention of government ministers, as well as making them disinclined to intervene.[61] Further, potential Soviet military intervention in Poland worried both the Warsaw embassy and the Northern Department. British intelligence services kept careful track of Soviet troop movements in Poland; in addition to the Joint Intelligence Committee reports of Soviet troop movements on the GDR–Polish border, the embassy staff reported the presence of a Soviet cruiser and three destroyers in the Polish port of Gdynia.[62] These fears intensified after the Soviet invasion of Hungary. William Hayter, the ambassador to Moscow, sent a stark warning that the 'Soviet Government are in a more than usually unpredictable mood … I should say it was fairly certain that if the Gomulka Government goes one inch beyond its present position, Soviet reaction will be immediate and violent'. Hayter warned that the Soviet army 'is certainly ready and willing to act'. Zhukov was reported as

[60] TNA: FO 371/122618/NP1052/19, Brimelow minute, 24 September 1956.

[61] Anne Deighton, 'British Responses to the Polish Events, June—November 1956', in *The Polish October 1956 In World* Politics, ed. Jan Rowiński (Warsaw: The Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2007), 262.

[62] TNA: CAB 179/1, Joint Intelligence Committee Reports, weeks ending 25 October 1956 and week ending 1 November 1956; FO 371/122599/NP10110/153, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 October 1956.

saying that '"we could crush them like flies"'.[63] In the circumstances, officials concluded that the British response to the Polish October should be restrained: Britain must not 'gloat'.[64]

The Polish October had little immediate influence on British policy towards Poland. Partly this was a result of Poland's strategic vulnerability: Poland would not break off relations with the Soviet Union as long as it was the guarantor of Poland's western frontier. As Noble's successor, Eric Berthoud, noted, '[M]uch as the Polish population hate the Russians, they fear the Germans still more'.[65] There was also a clear recognition of the limits of British strategic, economic, and diplomatic influence. Summing up the Polish situation at the end of 1956, Berthoud acknowledged that Britain was 'not in a very good position' to challenge the Soviet presence on Polish soil. Similarly, Britain would be unable to offer substantial economic assistance to support the Gomułka regime 'because of present preoccupations with the Middle East and economic difficulties in Western Europe'. Finally, Suez had left Britain 'vulnerable' diplomatically. 'Western unity' needed to be restored before Britain could think of launching any initiative towards the satellite states.[66]

Even as the Foreign Office admitted the current constraints on British power, longer-term plans for a new policy towards the satellite states were being developed. Britain had 'underestimated' the anti-Soviet sentiment and the opposition to the communist system of the Polish and Hungarian people. The Foreign Office argued that 'there now does seem to be a good case for transferring to certain Satellites some at least of the effort which has in recent months been put into the extension of Anglo-Soviet contacts of all sorts'. With regard to Poland specifically, British policy should 'encourage the Gomulka Government to be as independent as is possible without a violent Soviet reaction as in Hungary'.[67] It took several years for this thinking to be translated into concrete policy initiatives, with

[63] TNA: FO 371/122600/NP10110/209, Moscow to Foreign Office, 12 November 1956.

[64] TNA: FO 371/122600/NP10110/197, 'Suggested Ministerial Statement on Poland', 23 October 1956.

[65] TNA: FO 371/122600/NP10110/193, Warsaw to Lloyd, 30 October 1956; FO 688/91, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 November 1956.

[66] TNA: FO 688/91, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 November 1956; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 10 December 1956.

[67] TNA: FO 371/122081/N1052/10G, 'Relations with the Soviet Union and the Satellites', November 1956.

Britain's secret recognition of the Oder–Neisse line extended only in 1962.[68] Nevertheless, the events of the mid-1950s brought about a marked change in the British approach to détente, from a sole focus on achieving a rapprochement—however limited and superficial—with the Soviet Union, to one with the more ambitious long-term aim of encouraging the East European satellite states to assert their independence from Moscow.

Conclusion

The Polish process of reform and revolution drew British attention back to Eastern Europe, resulting in a reversal of policy. The concept of détente was reconfigured, with a recognition that the rigid bipolarity which bound the international system could be loosened by normalising relations with the Eastern European states. This transformation was limited, however, to one of outlook, as economic decline diminished Britain's ability to undertake steps which might have advanced the normalisation process earlier, more quickly, and with more significant results. At a time when resources were severely limited, they were bound to be directed towards areas such as the Middle East, where vital British economic and strategic interests were at stake. Further, perpetual economic problems led to increasingly heavy reliance on the US, restricting Britain's freedom to pursue an independent foreign policy. Britain was confined within the narrow and inflexible limits set by the US, which contributed to the delay of the introduction of a more constructive and pragmatic Western policy vis-à-vis Eastern Europe until well into the 1960s.

[68] Hughes, 'Unfinished Business', 291–292.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

The picture which emerges from this study is one of considerable uncertainty and frequent inconsistency in the formulation of British foreign policy during a period of transition from war to peacetime, and one in which the international system was in the process of being reconfigured. This study has shown how British planning for postwar Poland was thrown into disarray not long after the end of the war. It has also demonstrated that the British did not regard the derailment of their Polish policy as inevitable. On the contrary, there was an expectation on the part of British leaders and policymakers that they would continue to exert influence on the postwar political settlement in Poland. What looks like misplaced optimism in hindsight was actually the product of sustained observation and analysis of Soviet policy and actions throughout the war years which, by early 1944, had sharpened into several distinct assumptions about the probable direction of Soviet postwar policy. There was a shared consensus across the British policymaking establishment that a combination of the Soviet need for postwar economic assistance and Stalin's *realpolitik* would quell the instinct to interpret the security imperative too widely, and ensure that the Soviet Union would not cross the limits of what Britain considered acceptable.

These were the assumptions that underpinned the British attempt from early 1944 onward to bring about a resolution of the Polish–Soviet dispute and secure an acceptable territorial and political settlement for

A. Mason, *British Policy Towards Poland, 1944–1956*, Security, Conflict and Cooperation in the Contemporary World,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94241-4_8

Poland. There were some grounds for British optimism: a deal was very nearly reached in early 1944,[1] and again during the talks with the Soviet ambassador, Lebedev, in the spring.[2] After a rocky spell in the post-Yalta period, British officials detected signs of a more cooperative Soviet approach in relations with Britain,[3] and a shift in Soviet policy towards Poland. They saw Stalin's agreement to Mikołajczyk's inclusion in the new provisional government as an important indication of a change after the frustrating months of negotiations on the Three Power Commission.[4] This is not to suggest that the British were not often beset with doubts, uncertainty and hesitation about future Soviet policy vis-à-vis Poland. Apart from analysis of Soviet intentions, however, British policy was also based on the conviction that the weakness of the PPR would leave the party no choice but to form a broad-based coalition government, in which Mikołajczyk, as the leader of the party with the strongest popular support, would have a key role. Once established as part of the leadership, the British calculated that the PSL would have a good chance of emerging as the dominant political force in the country.[5]

British leaders and policymakers considered their commitment to Poland as ongoing even after the dissolution of the Polish government-in-exile and Mikołajczyk's return to Poland. It is clear that the British had a sense of an as yet undischarged obligation to see that Poland was reconstituted as a free and independent state after the war. This sense of obligation arose primarily from the accumulation of political commitments made to the Polish exile leaders in exchange for their military contribution to the British war effort. The persistence with which the British pursued a settlement long after the end of hostilities was unusual, and did not conform to the more detached British approach in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. Comments by the Foreign Office and embassy officials in

[1] TNA: PREM 3/355/8, Record of a Meeting Held at 10 Downing Street attended by Churchill, Eden, Cadogan, O'Malley, Mikołajczyk, Romer and Raczyński, 16 February 1944; Foreign Office to Chequers, 19 February 1944; Colville to Foreign Office, 20 February 1944.

[2] TNA: FO 371/39404/C9097/8/G55, 'Record by O'Malley of a Conversation at Dinner at the Foreign Office on the 29th June [1944]'; FO 371/39404/C9172/8/G55, Eden to O'Malley, 11 July 1944.

[3] Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 171.

[4] TNA: FO 371/47595/ N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; N7508/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 2 July 1945.

[5] TNA: FO 371/47594/N7295/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; N7297/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945.

particular suggest that individual British policymakers had a sense of an unmet moral obligation towards the Polish opposition, which helps to explain the longevity of their involvement in Polish political affairs after the war.

Initially, there was continuity in British policy towards Poland, as evidenced by Bevin's approach in the negotiations with the leaders of the Polish provisional government at the Potsdam conference, his instructions to Cavendish-Bentinck before the latter's departure for Warsaw and the preparations to challenge the Soviets at the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting over the repression of the opposition parties in Poland and the continued presence of the Red Army on Polish territory.[6] By early 1946, however, British policy towards Poland had started to unravel. Anglo-Soviet relations began to deteriorate in the wake of the breakdown of the London meeting, and the crises over Greece and Iran. Bevin's approach at first was to try to eliminate sources of disagreement with the Soviets in order to keep conflict to a minimum and restore relations. The postwar British government saw the maintenance of good Anglo-Soviet relations as essential to establishing a stable security system in Europe and securing Britain's long-term interests. The importance of preventing Anglo-Soviet relations from descending into open acrimony was reinforced by the belief that the American presence in Europe after the war would be short-lived.[7] Britain sought to avoid a scenario in which it was left alone in Europe facing a hostile Soviet Union. For this reason, Bevin tried to disentangle the Polish issue, which was a perpetual source of friction, from the Anglo-Soviet relationship.

The problem of the future of Germany—with its attendant consequences for Britain's economy and security—became the central foreign policy preoccupation in 1946. The German dilemma had an important impact on the reconfiguration of British policy towards Poland. As the arrangements agreed at the Potsdam conference for the joint administration of Germany faltered and then failed, Bevin concluded that the only solution was to call a halt to four-power cooperation. This conclusion had two main consequences for Bevin's Polish policy. First, the end of joint

[6] TNA: FO 371/47603/N9922/6/G55, Record of a Meeting at the Foreign Secretary's House, Potsdam, 31 July 1945; FO 371/47706/10656/211/55, Bevin to Cavendish-Bentinck, 23 August 1945; FO 371/47608/N12851/6/55, 'Brief for discussion on Poland in Council of Foreign Ministers', 15 September 1945.

[7] Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, 276–277.

administration in Germany threatened to create an open breach with the Soviet Union, leading Bevin towards ever greater circumspection in other areas of policy in order to avoid further antagonising the Soviets. Second, Bevin urgently needed the Americans to agree to his plan for Germany and take on a larger share of the cost of maintaining the western zones. Until the arrangements had been finalised, he sought to avoid any policy initiatives which departed too sharply from the American line. This determination to stay in step with the Americans was clearly evident in British policy towards Poland in 1946 when Britain refrained from making strong representations to the Warsaw government when the US disagreed or changed its mind. This pattern was evident in the British decision to moderate the tone of the protest note concerning the PPR's pre-referendum campaign of repression against the PSL, and in the decision to drop the plan to bring the Polish issue before the UN General Assembly after Byrnes objected to the idea.[8]

The collapse of British policy towards Poland caused consternation in the Foreign Office and the Warsaw embassy. Officials attempted to steer Bevin back to the established policy. They had some success, for example in persuading him not to withdraw support for the PSL.[9] Nevertheless, the absence of strong British support for Mikołajczyk at key junctures, such as before and after the referendum, at the time of the introduction of the new electoral law, and in the run-up to the general election, further undermined the position of the PSL as the PPR moved more aggressively to marginalise the party. Britain also missed a potentially significant chance to influence the shape of the final political settlement in Poland when it failed to throw its support behind the faction of the PPS which sought greater autonomy from the PPR.

After the Polish elections, the Foreign Office attempted to keep up its support for the opposition. But the PSL had been seriously weakened in the period preceding the elections and the independently inclined wing of the PPS had been defeated, leaving little scope for meaningful British intervention. British withdrawal from involvement in internal Polish politics was underscored by the withdrawal of Cavendish-Bentinck, who had been an active supporter of Mikołajczyk and the PSL. From this point on,

[8] TNA: FO 371/56437/N5068/34/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 19 April 1946.

[9] TNA: FO 371/56434/N2624/34/55, Sargent Memo, 14 February 1946; FO 371/56435/N2912/34/55, Warner Minutes, 6 March 1946; Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 13 March 1946.

British relations with Poland centred mostly on the resolution of outstanding bilateral issues. The threat to Mikołajczyk's safety brought about a temporary reversal of the process of British withdrawal from Polish affairs, as Churchill's 1945 promise was invoked. Foreign Office officials showed great determination to live up to this commitment. At the same time, however, the episode of the escape highlights the way in which the original British commitment had diminished over the course of the two and a half years since the end of the war.

British involvement in Poland lapsed from the end of 1947 until the mid-1950s, when the Polish government underwent a process of liberalisation and asserted a greater degree of independence from Moscow. These changes prompted a reassessment of British policy, leading to a reconceptualisation of how the Cold War international system might be reconfigured by prising the satellite states loose from the edges of the Soviet bloc. Ultimately, British success in this regard was limited by its waning global influence, lack of resources, and by diplomatic constraints. Nevertheless, the events in Poland in the 1950s initiated a significant shift in the British official mindset, which would translate into concrete policy initiatives a few years later in the early 1960s.

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