

The London School of Economics and Political Science

'This Forlorn Adventure': British Policy Towards Poland, 1944-1947

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Abstract

This thesis offers a study of British policy towards Poland from 1944 to 1947. It traces the British attempt to negotiate a postwar political settlement for Poland that would meet the expectations of both the Polish government-in-exile, to which Britain had committed its support in return for Poland's substantial wartime military contribution, and the Soviet Union. During the last year and a half of the war, British policymakers struggled to mediate between the two sides and accommodate their competing demands. Ultimately, a compromise was reached, which saw the former prime minister of the exile government, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, return to Poland at the end of the war to join the provisional government. Mikołajczyk agreed to return on the basis of a British commitment to provide ongoing support in reconstituting a sovereign Polish state and establishing a democratic government.

This thesis charts the outcome of that commitment, from the negotiations for the formation of the new Polish government under the auspices of the Three Power Commission in the summer of 1945, to the Polish referendum of June 1946, and the elections in January 1947. It shows that British policymakers struggled to meet the commitment to Poland within the changing context of the postwar international system. In the circumstances of the emerging Cold War, as the reality of the Soviet resolve to absorb Poland into its sphere grew clearer, Britain's political promises to the Polish democratic opposition became increasingly difficult to fulfil. Not all sections of the British policymaking establishment were immediately prepared to accept their dramatically circumscribed power to influence the shape of the Polish political settlement. Whereas the foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin reconciled himself to the new circumstances with pragmatic speed, the Warsaw embassy, and many of the Foreign Office Northern Department officials, were less willing to abandon the original terms of the British commitment. Thus, while some diplomatic and Foreign Office officials continued to lend support to the democratic Polish opposition parties, Bevin increasingly sought to limit Anglo-Polish relations to bilateral issues, including negotiations for financial and trade agreements, the repatriation of former members of the Polish armed forces, the final demarcation of Poland's western frontier, and the transfer of the German population from western Poland to the British occupation zone. The result of these different priorities was a lack of uniformity in British policy.

Much of the scholarship on Britain's early postwar policy towards Poland takes one of two approaches: either it assumes that Britain understood immediately in 1945 that Poland was 'lost' to the Soviet Union, or it sees a reprehensible cynicism in the British approach, without due acknowledgement of the limits which constrained British policy options. This thesis offers a different interpretation; it argues that Britain adjusted much more slowly and unevenly to its diminished position after the war, and that its limited capacity to shape the Polish political settlement was understood only gradually, and at different times in different parts of the policymaking establishment, creating an overall inconsistency in policy.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---|
| AK | Armia Krajowa (Home Army) |
| GOP | Grupy Ochronno Propagandowe (Protection-Propaganda Groups) |
| KRN | Krajowa Rada Narodowa (National Council of the Homeland) |
| MBN | Ministerstwo Bezpiecze stwa Narodowego (Ministry of National Security) |
| NIK | Najwy sza Izba Kontroli (Supreme Chamber of Control) |
| NKVD | Narodovy Komisariat Vnutrich Dyel (Soviet 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 Rz d Jedno ci Narodowej (Provisional Government of National Unity) |
| UB | Urz d Bezpiecze stwa (Security Office) |
| WiN | Wolno i Niezawisło (Freedom and Independence) |

WRN Wolno Równo i Niepodległo (Freedom, Equality and Independence)

ZPP Związek Patriotów Polskich (Union of Polish Patriots)

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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 work offers an analysis of the origins 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 restricted British influence. It 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 1939 British guarantee 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

The military contribution is important in explaining the extent of British involvement in the Polish issue. 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

¹ The National Archives: Public Record Office (hereafter TNA: PRO) FO 371/66090/N658, 'Mr Churchill's conversation with M. Mikołajczyk', 15 June 1945.

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: PRO FO 371/39436/C11513/62/55, 'Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Polish Government regarding Mutual Assistance', 25 August 1939.

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, when Britain was without European fighting allies and was desperately short of resources. The heroism and sacrifice of the Polish forces caught Churchill's attention and won his loyalty, which helps to explain his unusually close interest – particularly for the prime minister of a country at war – in matters relating to the exile government of a small state.³

Britain had specifically committed to securing the restoration of an independent Polish state in return for the Polish military contribution. The extent of British involvement in the negotiations with the Soviet Union over Poland's future is nevertheless surprising: Poland was a relatively minor ally; Britain had no particular strategic interests in Eastern Europe; the British government did not involve itself in the same way in the affairs of the other London-based exile governments. Yet Churchill and the foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, persisted in their efforts to secure a settlement for Poland even when the negotiation process became mired in discord. This persistence defies an easy explanation but seems to have had three main components. 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 Polish military contribution created a strong sense of obligation on the part of British leaders and policymakers, particularly given the dispersal of Polish forces across British theatres of command and away from Poland. Third, the future of Poland was wrapped up in Britain's broader

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

conception of the shape of postwar Europe, which was based on an assumption of ongoing Anglo-Soviet cooperation. Thus, the attainment of a deal over Poland was equated to some extent with confirmation that this outcome would be feasible.

In the summer of 1945, Britain accepted Soviet conditions as a basis for the formation of Poland's postwar provisional government: the cession of Polish territory east of the Curzon line⁴ and the participation of only a small number of leaders from outside the Soviet-sponsored rival to the London-based exile government, the Polish National Committee of Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego – PKWN).⁵ This decision has been cast in the existing literature either as a cavalier discarding of an ally whose importance had diminished or as a regrettable but inevitable consequence of Soviet military dominance throughout Central and Eastern Europe.⁶ Little attention, however, has been devoted to the analysis and assumptions which formed the basis for this decision. This work will argue 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. This work establishes that Churchill's sense 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.

⁴ The Curzon line had been proposed as Poland's eastern border by the British foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, after the First World War. Ultimately the border had been set approximately 150 miles further east between 1920 and 1939. Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin agreed at the Tehran conference that the Curzon line with a few modifications should form Poland's postwar frontier. Adrian Webb, *Routledge Companion to Central and Eastern Europe since 1919* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 328.

⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/47595/N7369/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 23 June 1945.

⁶ 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), 164-8; 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, 144-5.

After the war, the new Labour government struggled to fulfil the British commitment to Poland within the context of the shifting international system. This work traces the evolution of British policy towards Poland through the uncertain period of the immediate postwar years. It argues that British policy towards Poland underwent a gradual process of downscaling concurrent with the foreign secretary Ernest Bevin's shift towards the conclusion that workable collaboration with the Soviet Union was going to prove impossible, and that as a consequence, Britain would have to accept Poland's absorption into the Soviet sphere of control in Eastern Europe. Bevin adjusted his foreign policy to the new postwar reality relatively quickly. The officials of the Foreign Office and the Warsaw embassy, on the other hand, were much more reluctant to withdraw support from the Polish democratic opposition, particularly as Mikołajczyk increasingly came under attack. This work charts the growing divergence between the direction of Bevin's policy and that of his officials in the two and a half years following the end of hostilities. It argues that far from a seamless withdrawal from Polish affairs, British policy during this period was characterised by an overall inconsistency: sporadic interventions in Polish political affairs followed by quiet lulls; support for Mikołajczyk which waned and then resumed.

Structure and approach

This work follows a chronological approach beginning immediately after the Tehran conference, when Churchill and Eden initiated a negotiation process aimed at restoring Soviet-Polish relations and achieving a satisfactory territorial and political settlement for Poland after the war. British postwar policy towards Poland had its origins in the wartime relationship with the Polish exile government; it is therefore important to examine the extent of British involvement in Polish affairs during the war in order to establish the expectation of continuity of policy once hostilities had ended. The first chapter shows how this involvement deepened in the last year and a half of the war as the British government attempted to mediate the Polish-Soviet dispute, eventually taking over the negotiations from the exile administration altogether. As successive rounds of negotiations failed, the British concluded that part of the problem was the implacable hostility towards the Soviet Union of a significant section of the Polish exile leadership. The British calculated that once Mikołajczyk was free to negotiate with the

Soviets and the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza – PPR) without the constraints of the exile government, it would be possible to reach a settlement. The first chapter also charts the course of Anglo-Soviet relations over the last year and a half of the war. The much-criticised British decision to accept the Soviet terms in the summer of 1945 must be understood as the result of both an accumulation of experience of dealing with the Soviets, and a set of assumptions about the likely direction of postwar Soviet policy, both of which suggested that although unlikely to be smooth and uncomplicated, Anglo-Soviet collaboration would continue after the war.⁷ It was this analysis which conditioned the British decision to encourage Mikołajczyk to return.

The second chapter analyses the transformation of British policy over the second half of 1945. After the war, Bevin initially adopted the same approach to the Polish issue as his Conservative predecessors. His sense of responsibility for the establishment of a democratic Polish political system was in evidence at the Potsdam conference, where he 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 expectation on the part of both the Cabinet and the party that the Labour government would pursue closer relations with the Soviet Union on the basis of shared socialist principles. Bevin's policy of avoiding the Polish question with the Soviets stood in contrast to the views of the Foreign Office Northern Department and the Warsaw embassy, which urged a robust British defence of Mikołajczyk as the PPR attempted to marginalise his party. The beginning of this divergence between Bevin and his officials over Poland was in evidence at the first Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in London, where Bevin made a last-minute change of tactics, choosing not to confront the Soviet Union over the repression of the Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL).

⁷ Martin H. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 167-8, 171.

By early 1946, Bevin was beginning to fear that it would be very difficult to restore viable relations with the Soviet Union. At this stage, however, the US – on which economic weakness was making Britain increasingly reliant – was still committed to pursuing cooperation with the Soviet Union. Further, Bevin's foreign policy was beginning to come under criticism both in the Cabinet and in the wider party for its perceived anti-Soviet, anti-communist character. Bevin's response was to pursue a 'dual policy' towards the Soviet Union: outwardly civil and in search of cooperation and common ground while at the same time beginning to plan on the basis of an eventual breach of Anglo-Soviet relations.⁸ The third chapter analyses the consequences of this approach for British policy towards Poland. Bevin sought to avoid open conflict with the Soviet Union as much as possible in order to dispel domestic criticism of his policy and avoid alienating the Americans. The consequence was a further distancing from Poland's political affairs, including a request from Bevin for a review of the policy of exclusive British support for the PSL. 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 Warsaw embassy as Mikołajczyk struggled to hold his ground in the face of an increasingly determined campaign to undermine his position.

The campaign against the PSL reached a critical point in the months leading up to the general elections in Poland in January 1947. The Warsaw embassy pleaded for greater support for the PSL, including international supervision of the elections in order to prevent the party from being eliminated entirely. At exactly the same time, throughout the second half of the year, Bevin was engaged in negotiations with the Americans for the fusion of the western occupation zones of Germany, the first step towards the formal division of the country, and 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. Britain's increasingly precarious financial position meant that the arrangements for the fusion of the occupation zones needed to be finalised as quickly as possible. Further, the dissatisfaction with Bevin's

⁸ Anne Deighton, *The Impossible Peace: Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 35.

foreign policy within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) 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. In these circumstances Bevin became increasingly reluctant to actively support the Polish opposition movement. He sought to avoid challenging the Soviet Union or the communist-dominated Polish government at such a strategically delicate point in the negotiations over Germany. He also sought to avoid exposing himself unnecessarily to further domestic charges of anti-Soviet bias.

The fifth chapter covers the period following the Polish elections, which saw a marked British withdrawal from Polish affairs. There seemed little chance that any intervention by Britain could disrupt the process of consolidation of communist control in Poland. The Polish opposition had been seriously diminished over the course of the election campaign: the PSL had been decimated and the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna – PPS) was moving closer to a merger with the PPR, leaving Britain without a viable political force to support. Bevin had no appetite to enter into another wrangling session over Poland with the Soviet Union, particularly since Britain and the United States were about to open a new round of negotiations with the Soviets over Germany. By this point, Bevin was convinced that the only way of protecting western Germany from Soviet interference was to abandon entirely the pretence of four-power cooperation in Germany. The implication of this step towards the formal division of Germany was an acceptance that if the Soviet Union was to be expected not to interfere in the west, Britain could no longer involve itself in the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe. A notable shift in British policy towards Poland was signalled by the withdrawal of the first postwar ambassador, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, whose tenure had been associated with a policy of more active British intervention in Polish affairs. From this point on, Bevin 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. The Foreign Office launched an operation to help Mikołajczyk 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.

What emerges from this analysis is a picture of a struggle to formulate an appropriate policy which would fulfil the obligations incurred by Britain to Poland in wartime in the midst of the rapid realignment of the international system after the war. Bevin's recognition of Britain's diminished capacity to exert influence in areas outside those of vital importance to Britain – particularly where a clash of interests with the Soviet Union was involved – occurred relatively quickly. Bevin carried out a quick reshuffle of policy priorities and concluded that it was not in Britain's interest to enter into conflict with the Soviet Union over Poland. He was ready to accept the establishment of separate zones of western- and Soviet-dominated influence in Europe, eventually concluding that this was the only way of ensuring Britain's security and economic recovery, although a formalisation of this arrangement was slowed by resistance from within the Cabinet and the PLP, as well as by American uncertainty. Bevin accepted that one of the consequences of this reconfiguration of the international system would be a forfeiture of British influence in the Soviet sphere. The Foreign Office officials, on the other hand, while deeply involved in the transformation of British policy towards the Soviet Union, were not prepared to accept the implications of these changes to the international system for British policy towards Poland. In a sense, then, Bevin moved ahead of the Foreign Office into policymaking of the Cold War era, whereas the officials, with their reluctance to accept the "loss" of Poland to the Soviet Union, remained a few steps behind.

This work is based on the premise that the role of the Foreign Office, as well as that of political leaders was significant in determining the direction of British policy. In the first 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 fairly 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 the Soviet leader, Josef 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 always consulted Eden, and his messages were often drafted or at least reviewed before dispatch by the 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.⁹ Churchill tended to erupt into this orderly way of conducting business when he sought to obtain a particular result, in which case he was not content to allow the civil servants 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 the officials’ assessment of the PSL’s strength, for instance, that underpinned the decision to urge Mikołajczyk to join the new provisional government.¹⁰

Once the Labour government came to power, a more conventional way of conducting foreign affairs was restored. The new prime minister, Clement Attlee, did not often involve himself directly in foreign policy. Bevin allowed the Foreign Office to take the lead on matters concerning Polish affairs. There was almost complete continuity between the pre and postwar periods in the Foreign Office personnel. Sargent and Warner were promoted to permanent and assistant undersecretary respectively in February 1946. Warner in particular remained closely involved in Polish affairs. Robin Hankey, chargé d’affaires in the British embassy in Warsaw for eight months after the war, returned to London to take over as head of the Northern Department; Hankey’s assistant was Denis Allen, who had been responsible for Polish affairs as first secretary in the Central and Northern Departments during the war. Patrick Hancock, who joined the Northern Department after the war, also dealt with Polish affairs.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/47594/N7295/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; N7297/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; TNA: PRO FO 371/47595/ N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; N7508/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 2 July 1945.

Historiography

There has been no thorough study, based on all the available sources, of British policy towards the Polish government-in-exile from 1944 to 1945. In the literature on diplomatic relations within the Grand Alliance, Poland is most commonly dealt with only insofar as it was a source of discord. While the effect of the Polish issue on the relationship between the three great powers has been the focus of much scholarly attention, the actual substance of British policy towards Poland is seldom covered.¹¹ Studies of British wartime foreign policy often assume that British policy vis-à-vis Poland was formulated with reference only to the Soviet Union. This approach ignores the importance of issues in the Anglo-Polish relationship which shaped British policy, including Britain's political commitments to the exile government and the importance of retaining the participation of Polish troops under British command. Studies that situate Poland only in the context of great power relations also tend to overlook the Polish government itself. There is an implicit assumption that the Polish government's foreign policy, its strategies for gaining influence and the effect of internal divisions on its position had little impact and therefore do not merit examination.

Even works which specifically address the theme of Anglo-Polish relations during the war seldom offer a comprehensive analysis of the aims and intentions underlying British policymaking. There are a number of studies that chronicle the course of relations between Britain and the Polish exile government without examining the factors that shaped British policy. Antony Polonsky's introduction to his documentary study, *The Great Powers and the Polish Question, 1941-1945*, traces the escalating tension between the Soviet Union and Britain over the Polish issue but does not attempt to analyse the process of British policymaking.¹² Similarly, Victor Rothwell includes a

¹¹ Works which take this approach include: Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin: The War They Fought and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Remi Nadeau, *Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt Divide Europe* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Robin Edmonds, *The Big Three: Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin in Peace and War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991); Lloyd C. Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe, From Munich to Yalta* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993); David Reynolds, et al, eds., *Allies at War: The Soviet, American and British Experience, 1939-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994); Keith Sainsbury, *Churchill and Roosevelt at War: the War They Fought and the Peace They Hoped to Make* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 2nd ed.

¹² Antony Polonsky, 'Introduction', in *The Great Powers and the Polish Question, 1941-1945: A Documentary Study in Cold War Origins* (London: London School of Economics, 1976), 11-48.

section on British policy towards Poland during the war in *Britain and the Cold War, 1941-1947* which essentially chronicles the evolution of British policy.¹³

In *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile, 1939-1945*, George Kacewicz analyses the Anglo-Polish relationship during the war. This work does not fully exploit the available archival sources held at Britain's National Archives. Although Kacewicz does make use of the minutes and papers of the War Cabinet, he does not refer to the files of the Foreign Office, without which it is impossible to gain a full understanding of the formulation of British policy towards Poland.¹⁴ The most frank and revealing comments by officials, the secretary of state and the prime minister were often noted in the relatively private channel of the internal minutes of the Foreign Office. Likewise, Edward J. Rozek's *Allied Wartime Diplomacy: A Pattern in Poland* was published in 1959 before the release of British public records from the wartime period in the mid-1970s and thus does not provide a full account of British policy.¹⁵

Anita J. Pra mowska's *Britain and Poland, 1939-1943: The Betrayed Ally* covers the earlier period of the war, providing an in-depth analysis of the policies pursued by both the British and Polish governments and including careful consideration of all the factors which influenced the direction of those policies. Pra mowska demonstrates that Polish leaders pursued a strategy of attempting to link Polish military assistance to a guarantee of British support and a prominent role in the postwar peace negotiations. She conveys the constant tension between the British commitment to Poland and the pursuit of closer cooperation with the Soviet Union. Pra mowska's detailed account of Polish military contributions and the political results Polish leaders hoped these contributions would yield, as well as the pattern of British response provides a basis for a sound understanding of the dynamics of Anglo-Polish relations in the last years of the war and in particular the sense on both sides that Britain had accrued a debt to the Polish government which remained to be discharged.¹⁶ Pra mowska's essay on Churchill's relations with the Polish government in a collection edited by R.A.C. Parker, *Winston Churchill: Studies in Statesmanship* further elucidates the Polish exile leaders' pursuit of political influence. This essay establishes the origins of Churchill's involvement in

¹³ Victor Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War 1941-1947* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982).

¹⁴ George Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile, 1939-1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979).

¹⁵ Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy: A Pattern in Poland* (New York: Wiley, 1958).

¹⁶ Anita J. Pra mowska, *Britain and Poland, 1939-1943: The Betrayed Ally* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

the Polish issue, beginning in June 1940, after the fall of France, when he intervened to ensure that Polish troops were evacuated to Britain, where they were reequipped and furnished with the facilities necessary to carry on with recruitment and further training.¹⁷

Bernadeta Tendyra's doctoral thesis is a study of the internal politics of the government of Władysław Sikorski, Mikołajczyk's predecessor as prime minister. She focuses on the effect of internal opposition to Sikorski's policies on the government-in-exile's foreign relations and postwar domestic objectives. She seeks to ascertain whether Sikorski could have succeeded in maintaining good relations with the Soviet Union throughout the war if he had managed to overcome this opposition. She concludes her study in 1943, the year of Sikorski's death.¹⁸ Evan McGilvray's study, *A Military Government in Exile: The Polish Government-in-Exile, 1939-1945, A Study of Discontent*, includes a short chapter on the 1944-45 period but the coverage is cursory as he concludes that by this point the exile government no longer had any relevance for Britain. He does not cover British planning for postwar Poland, which was the primary focus of British diplomatic activity by this point in the war.

There are also several works which focus specifically on the Polish forces who served under British command during the war. Mark Ostrowski's doctoral thesis details the dilemma which faced Polish servicemen in 1945 as they chose between repatriation to Poland and resettlement in Britain. Ostrowski's starting point is that the British government treated these troops with extreme callousness. He argues that the British government was fully aware of the security situation in Poland after the war, particularly that returnees were often subject to imprisonment or deportation, but officials nevertheless waged a deliberate disinformation campaign, concealing or minimising news from Poland and exerting relentless pressure on Polish troops to return home. After the war, the British government assumed responsibility for the nearly 250,000 Polish servicemen (and their dependants) who had served under British operational command.¹⁹ This was a huge challenge – and one for which no advance

¹⁷ Pra mowska, 'Churchill and Poland', 110-23.

¹⁸ Bernadeta Tendyra, 'General Sikorski and the Polish Government in Exile, 1939-1943: A Study of Polish Internal Émigré Politics in Wartime', (PhD dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1999).

¹⁹ Anita J. Pra mowska, '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.

planning had taken place. Repatriation for as many as possible was the policy objective pursued by the British government, and officials did sometimes express frustration over the many difficulties with which they had to contend. Ostrowski has a tendency, however, to take these expressions of irritation as an indication of wider British policy. Nevertheless, he provides a detailed study of the development of British policy vis-à-vis the issues of repatriation and resettlement. Michael Hope's *The Abandoned Legion: A Study of the Background and Process of the Post-War Dissolution of Polish Forces in the West* covers much of the same material as Ostrowski's thesis.

The diaries and memoirs of the former members of the Polish government-in-exile are helpful in completing the picture of wartime Anglo-Polish relations. Particularly valuable is the carefully recorded diary of the Polish ambassador to Britain, Edward Raczyński. In 1944 Raczyński was present at almost all the meetings held between representatives of the British and Polish governments. He also met frequently with Foreign Office officials. He was thus well-placed to give a full account of the negotiations for a resolution to the Polish-Soviet dispute in 1944. Raczyński vividly recounts the pattern of Churchill's cajoling and threats as the negotiations wore on.²⁰ Jan Ciechanowski's memoir covering his time as Polish ambassador to Washington contains useful insights but his observations on British policy were made from a distance and he naturally focuses on American policy. His account ends in July 1945.²¹

Mikołajczyk's memoir sheds light on his discussions with Churchill and Eden in 1943 and 1944. Mikołajczyk also records how Churchill persuaded him to return to Poland to join the new government. Mikołajczyk's memoir, published in 1948, reflects the difficult circumstances in which it was written, immediately following his escape from Poland, and must therefore be treated with some circumspection as a source.²²

Equally, the statements in the memoirs published by British leaders and policymakers cannot always be accepted at face value. Written and published in the political climate of the Cold War, these accounts seek to obscure any aspects of British policy that would suggest that Britain might have done more to save Poland from falling into Soviet clutches. There is a tendency to claim that the British foresaw that the wartime alliance

²⁰ Edward Raczyński, *In Allied London* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962).

²¹ Jan Ciechanowski, *Defeat in Victory* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1947).

²² Stanisław Mikołajczyk, *The Pattern of Soviet Domination* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1948).

with the Soviet Union would collapse with the end of hostilities, and that the Soviet Union would move aggressively to assert total control over Poland, leaving Britain powerless to exert any influence over the shape of the postwar settlement there.

Chief among these memoirs is Churchill's own account of the war years. Churchill presents a sanitised version of his relations with the Polish government-in-exile, depicting himself as the steadfast champion of Polish interests, valiantly challenging the Soviet Union but ultimately defeated by an intransigent Stalin and an uninterested President Franklin Roosevelt. There is no hint of the constant tension and conflicting interests which the British had to negotiate in their relations with the Polish government-in-exile on one side, and the Soviet Union on the other. In *Triumph and Tragedy*, the sixth volume of Churchill's history of the war, published in 1954, he seeks to emphasise his firm commitment to preventing Soviet abuses wherever possible. In the early 1950s at the height of western panic over the "communist menace", there were obvious advantages (of which Churchill was certainly not unaware) in establishing a reputation as the seer who had foreseen the Soviet threat before all others.

For instance, Churchill records his alarm at the Soviet failure to fulfil the Yalta agreements to broaden the Polish government to include all parties and to admit foreign observers into Poland. He recalls his attempt to persuade Roosevelt to make a joint Anglo-American representation to Stalin. Churchill records that he did not realise at the time how seriously Roosevelt's health had deteriorated and how remotely involved he was in the day-to-day duties of governing. Consequently, Roosevelt's aides drafted the responses which Churchill received in the president's name. 'The tendency of the State Department was naturally to avoid bringing matters to a head while the President was physically so frail.' Churchill's mild language does not mask the admonishment. A few lines later he writes: 'These were costly weeks for all.' In other words, had it not been for the American delay, Churchill might have succeeded in securing the admission of foreign observers to Poland, whose presence would have halted or at least curbed the abuses occurring there. On 11 March 1945, Roosevelt replied to Churchill's request for a direct Anglo-American approach to Stalin at the highest level. Roosevelt preferred to allow the British and American ambassadors to appeal first to Soviet foreign commissar, Vyacheslav Molotov before making an approach directly to Stalin.

Knowing that 'there was a deadlock in Moscow', Churchill agreed to Roosevelt's wish only 'with much reluctance' as 'no progress of any kind had occurred' since the Yalta

conference and ‘[t]ime was all on the side of Lublin, who were no doubt at work to establish their authority in such a way as to make it impregnable.’ Britain could ‘make no progress without American aid, and if we got out of step the doom of Poland was sealed.’²³ Churchill suggests that had Britain been powerful enough to pursue an independent foreign policy without having to defer to the US, he would have adopted a far tougher stance. Without making an explicit statement, he hints that the overall international situation and the fate of Poland in particular might have evolved quite differently had Britain been the steward of Anglo-American policy towards the Soviet Union.

Churchill’s account reflects his desire to avoid giving the impression that he was duped into trusting the Soviets. It was the case that Churchill sent a series of messages to Roosevelt in March 1945, urging the adoption of a more robust Anglo-American stance in response to Soviet obstructionism on the Three Power Commission, the body set up at Yalta to reach a preliminary agreement on the composition of the Polish provisional government. British doubts about Soviet intentions in Poland did become more acute in the months following the Yalta conference. The Foreign Office revisited its assessment of Soviet policy and concluded that the Soviet preoccupation with security was leading the regime to take excessive measures to ensure that a Polish government which would be “friendly” to the Soviet Union was put in place. Officials concluded that a change of tactics was required: the British must handle the Soviets more firmly, and take an uncompromising position on the limits of what was acceptable. What this amounted to was a different strategy for dealing with the Soviets, not an indication that the British had abandoned the idea of collaboration with the Soviets in implementing a solution to the Polish issue altogether.²⁴ Further, Churchill’s proposal for a direct approach to Stalin reflected his suspicion that while the Soviet leader himself was generally reasonable and trustworthy, there was a hardline, anti-western faction in the Kremlin which asserted itself periodically.²⁵ Churchill might have hoped that by making Stalin aware of Anglo-American displeasure over the lack of progress by the Three Power Commission, he would be able to intervene and break the deadlock. Thus, Churchill’s March messages to Roosevelt were not an indication that he had completely lost faith in the Soviet

²³ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume VI: Triumph and Tragedy* (London: Cassell, 1954), 367-68, 373.

²⁴ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 148-50, 160-1, 166.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 83, 85, 135, 138, 144-5.

Union, but rather a reflection of a broader change in thinking within the British policymaking establishment about the most effective way of eliciting Soviet cooperation. Finally, Churchill had an extremely poor opinion of the “Lublin Poles”, considering them incapable of governing.²⁶ He shared the Foreign Office assessment that no postwar Polish government would be viable without the inclusion of Mikołajczyk. Thus it is unlikely that he actually foresaw, as he implies in his memoirs, that the Lublin government would succeed in establishing total control over the country.²⁷

Eden also implies that his view of the Soviet leadership was mainly one of distrust. He makes frequent reference in his memoirs to his scepticism about the Soviet Union generally and about Soviet promises regarding the future of Poland specifically. Eden highlights instances where he expressed doubt about Soviet sincerity in his diary or correspondence. He refers, for instance, to Mikołajczyk’s optimism following a talk in May 1944 with Oskar Lange, a Polish expatriate professor of economics at the University of Chicago who acted occasionally as an unofficial emissary on behalf of Roosevelt. In his memoir, Eden notes that he and Churchill warned the Polish exile leaders not to be overly optimistic about Lange’s report that Stalin had promised to stay out of Polish domestic affairs.²⁸ In fact, at the time, Lange’s report from Moscow created a surge in optimism back in London about the chances for a resolution to the Polish-Soviet dispute.²⁹ Eden gets in a few sly digs at Churchill as well, suggesting that the prime minister was more inclined than he to take a ‘cheerful view of U.J.’.³⁰

Frank Roberts, who, as head of the Foreign Office Central Department during the war, worked closely with the Polish government-in-exile, gives an interpretation similar to that of Churchill. In his account of the Yalta conference, Roberts argues that Churchill took ‘the lead in fighting the Polish case’, but was undermined by Roosevelt’s lack of support. Roberts concludes that ‘diplomacy is a matter of documents, and war is a matter of where armies end up.’ It was the Red Army which ‘decided the fate of the

²⁶ *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations* (hereafter *DOPSR*) (London: Heinemann, 1967), vol. 2, doc. 239.

²⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/47594/N7295/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; N7297/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945.

²⁸ Eden, Anthony [Earl of Avon], *The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning* (London: Cassell, 1965), 465.

²⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/39400/C6694/8/G55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20-21 May 1944; C7370/8/G55, Minute by Roberts, 30 May 1944; FO 371/39402/C8476/8/G55, Foreign Office Minutes, 30 May 1944.

³⁰ U.J. was a short form for ‘Uncle Joe’, the nickname bestowed upon Stalin by Churchill and Roosevelt. Eden, *The Reckoning*, 466.

world and above all that of Eastern Europe.³¹ Again, Roberts's account reinforces the image of Britain being brushed aside helplessly by the overwhelming might of the Red Army.

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. Many of the histories of the origins of the Cold War accept as a given that the outcome of the European settlement was decided by the position of the military forces at the end of the war.³² Other historians are more critical, taking the position either that the British deliberately pushed Mikołajczyk into an unsatisfactory settlement in spite of their clear understanding of Soviet postwar plans for Poland,³³ or, finally, that they were foolish enough to believe Stalin's assurances that Poland would regain its independence after the war.³⁴

All three of these interpretations imply that the British government had clear foreknowledge of the shape that the international system would take by the late 1940s, with an escalation of tension between the Soviet Union and its former allies, and the

³¹ Frank Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators: The Destruction and Revival of Europe, 1930-1970* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), 75-77.

³² Elisabeth Barker, *Churchill and Eden at War* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 247, 260; Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, 358, 361; Martin Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 272-3; Geir Lundestad, 'The United States, Great Britain and Eastern Europe: The Period from Yalta to Potsdam', in Paola Brundu Olla, ed. *Yalta: un mito che resiste; relazioni e comunicazioni presentate al convegno internazionale organizzato dalla Provincia di Cagliari, 23-26 aprile 1987* (Rome: Ateneo, 1987), 191; Sean Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War, 1945-91* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 8. Another variation on this argument, following the line set out by Churchill in his memoirs, is that Britain would have taken a stronger line to defend Poland against the Soviet Union had the Americans been prepared to offer their support. See, for example, William Hardy McNeil, *America, Britain, & Russia: Their Co-operation and Conflict, 1941-1946* (New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1976), 557; Norman A. Graebner, 'Yalta, Potsdam, and Beyond: The British and American Perspectives', in Ann Lane and Howard Templerley, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the Grand Alliance, 1941-45* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 227-8.

³³ Works which put forward this interpretation are: Dilks, *Epic and Tragedy*, 29-30; Ostrowski, 'To Return to Poland', 164-8; Hope, *Abandoned Legion* (London, 2005), 14; McGilvray, *Military Government In Exile*, 133, 144-5. This is also the implication of more general sweeping statements which frequently appear in the literature, such as: 'The military and moral dilemmas posed by Soviet conduct were so acute that the line of resistance for the West in 1945 was to write Eastern Europe off as a hopeless case.' Norman Davies, *Europe East & West* (London: Pimlico, 2007), 39.

³⁴ John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory. A Political Biography*. (London: John Curtis, 1992), 558-61, 591, 614-15; Norman Davies, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 160-1. Sean Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office: Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the Modern World* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2008), 189. In contrast to the argument he sets out in *Britain and the Cold War, 1945-91*, here Greenwood argues that '[W]here the British are open to criticism was in allowing a kind of desperate optimism to blunt their critical faculties towards the Soviet Union not only at Yalta, but long before.'

hardening of spheres of influence into mutually hostile, strictly divided power blocs. All three ignore the extent to which the formulation of British policy towards Poland rested on the belief that some measure of cooperation with the Soviet Union would continue. Britain was not without doubts about how easily achievable this would prove to be, but detailed analysis of Soviet priorities and intentions led British political leaders and policymakers to conclude that the Soviet Union would have to pursue postwar collaboration with its western allies. Highly critical accounts of British policy towards Poland at the end of the war often point to British frustration with Soviet obstructionism after the Yalta conference as a sign that Churchill knowingly forced Mikołajczyk into a doomed venture.³⁵ If British policy in the immediate post-Yalta period is considered in the context of the preceding year, however, a different picture emerges. The British had subjected Soviet policy to close scrutiny and concluded that in spite of bouts of infuriating and sometimes bewildering obstreperousness, ultimately the long-term Soviet intention was to pursue continued cooperation. Further, Britain had weathered difficult periods in its relations with the Soviet Union and had always eventually managed to reach a reasonably satisfactory compromise.

My understanding of the development of British policy towards the Soviet Union during the war owes a great deal to Martin Folly's work, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*. It was this study that helped me to piece together the assumptions that underpinned the British approach to the negotiations with the Soviet Union over Poland. Folly shows that the British expectation that the Soviet Union would pursue ongoing collaboration with its wartime alliance partners was based on extensive analysis carried out mainly by the Foreign Office. The British concluded that the Soviet Union's far-reaching reconstruction needs could only be met with western assistance, and thus would oblige the Soviets to pursue postwar cooperation. This conclusion was supported by the British assessment of Stalin as a realist who would prioritise the best interests of the Soviet state over adherence to revolutionary ideology. Stalin's *realpolitik*, and his awareness of the limits of western tolerance, would ensure that the Soviets would not allow their security obsession to spill over into a bid for expansion, especially as the westward advance of the Soviet armed forces brought with it new temptations in this regard. Folly shows that the British thesis of a 'cooperative Soviet Union', was genuine, and not merely 'an empty set of phrases designed to sustain the temporary wartime

³⁵ Davies, *Rising '44*, 446, 453, 629-31.

relationship.³⁶ It was a thesis that was subject to doubt, certainly, and was frequently revisited and revised following particular events or changes in Soviet behaviour but it nevertheless held good until the end of the Churchill coalition government, which is the point at which Folly's study ends. David Reynolds's analysis in *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* has also been very helpful in furthering my understanding of British expectations of ongoing postwar cooperation with the Soviet Union, particularly during the transition period in the months following the war.³⁷

Churchill again set the tone for secondary literature on the postwar period. He depicts Mikołajczyk's departure from London as the end of close British involvement with the democratic Polish political parties. 'It is difficult to see what more we could have done', he concludes blandly.³⁸ He does not mention the promise of support which he made when Mikołajczyk left for Moscow to participate in the negotiations for the formation of the new Polish government.³⁹ Historians have for the most part followed this line of interpretation in assuming that Britain bore no particular responsibility for the outcome of the political settlement in Poland. In explaining the omission of Poland from his study of British policy in Eastern Europe after the war, Rothwell states that the exclusion is justified because Poland had 'almost completely lost the importance in British foreign policy which it had had during the war'.⁴⁰ The assumption that Poland's significance diminished to nothing is not usually stated so bluntly but it is clearly shared because there has been no work published on British policy towards Poland during the immediate postwar period.⁴¹

This interpretation rests on the assumption that Anglo-Polish relations during the war had no bearing on the period from 1945 to 1947. In fact, the end of the war did not bring

³⁶ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 6.

³⁷ David Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chapters 13-15.

³⁸ Churchill, *Triumph*, 564, 507.

³⁹ TNA PRO: FO 371/66090/N658, Annex to 'British Policy Towards Poland – Mr Churchill's Conversation with M. Mikołajczyk, 15 June 1945'.

⁴⁰ Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, 2.

⁴¹ Works on British postwar foreign relations which either omit Poland entirely or state that Britain had no further involvement there include Christopher Mayhew, 'British Foreign Policy since 1945', *International Affairs*, 26, no. 4 (1950); Elisabeth Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe, 1945-1970* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972); F. S. Northedge, *Descent from Power: British Foreign Policy, 1945-1973* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974); James L. Gormly, *From Potsdam to the Cold War: Big Three Diplomacy* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1990); Robert Self, *British Foreign and Defence Policy Since 1945: Challenges and Dilemmas in a Changing World* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2010).

with it an end to British responsibility for the Polish issue. The Labour government inherited not only the problems of looking after the Polish servicemen and their families, as well as the logistical challenges of dissolving the exile government and arbitrating the transfer of power from the London government to the new provisional administration in Warsaw, it also inherited the commitment to support the democratic opposition parties as they struggled to retain a share of power in the new Polish government. This thesis intends to fill the gap in the existing literature by presenting a full analysis of British postwar policy towards Poland with an emphasis on the outcome of the British government's commitment to support the democratic opposition in light of earlier promises.

The secondary literature of relevance to this second part of my thesis is fairly limited. The third volume of Alan Bullock's biography of Ernest Bevin, covering his time as foreign secretary, provides a helpful starting point for its sweeping survey of British foreign policy in the second half of the 1940s, as well as conveying Bevin's broad overall approach to the problems of the period.⁴²

Anne Deighton's *The Impossible Peace: Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War* has been crucial in clarifying the stages by which Bevin gradually abandoned the objective of establishing lasting cooperation with the Soviets. The plan for four-power administration of Germany, agreed at the Potsdam conference, fairly soon proved unworkable. Bevin and the Foreign Office concluded that the solution was a merger of the western zones – the first step towards the formal division of the country. Deighton also explains that Bevin pursued a dual policy: he continued to seek an improvement in relations with the Soviet Union even after he himself no longer believed it to be achievable while he waited for the US – and to some extent his own government – to accept that four-power administration of Germany would not be feasible in the long-term. Bevin's approach to the German problem had direct implications for his policy towards Poland: his willingness to accept the creation of spheres of Soviet and western influence carried with it the implication of non-interference in the countries within the Soviet sphere.⁴³

⁴² Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951* (London: Heinemann, 1983).

⁴³ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 7-8.

There are a number of works which have been essential to my understanding of the Labour Party's attitude towards the Soviet Union and the communisation of Eastern Europe.⁴⁴ This overview of the currents of thought within the Labour Party was essential to understand that Bevin's stance put him at odds with a significant swathe of the party. Particularly valuable has been Bill Jones's *The Russia Complex*, with its detailed account of the coalescing of the internal opposition to Bevin's policy.⁴⁵

I have relied on several studies of the political situation in postwar Poland. Pra mowska's *Civil War in Poland, 1942-1948* provides an extremely detailed analysis of the fierce jostling for position that occurred among the political parties and the underground resistance groups in Poland both during and after the war.⁴⁶ Krystyna Kersten's *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948* is another excellent study.⁴⁷ John Micgiel's essay on the suppression of the opposition in Poland is particularly helpful for the detail it provides on the Soviet presence in Poland between 1944 and 1946.⁴⁸ Other works which focus on Polish internal politics are *Poland, 1939-1947* by John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds,⁴⁹ and Padraig Kenney's *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950*.⁵⁰ Although limited to the 1943-1945 period, Polonsky and Bolesław Drukier's *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland*

⁴⁴ Works that cover internal Labour Party politics and the prevailing attitude within the party towards the Soviet Union are: Michael R. Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy, 1914-1965* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969); Robert J. Jackson, *Rebels and Whips: An Analysis of Dissension, Discipline and Cohesion in British Political Parties* (London: Macmillan, 1968); Hugh B. Herrington, *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons, 1945-55* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1973); Kenneth Harris, *Attlee* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982); Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945-1951* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); Trevor Burridge, *Clement Attlee: A Political Biography* (London: Cape, 1985); Raymond Smith and John Zametica, 'The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee Reconsidered, 1945-7', *International Affairs* 61, no. 2 (1985); Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain, 1945-1951* (London: Vintage, 1993); Robert Pearce, *Attlee* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁴⁵ Bill Jones, *The Russia Complex: The British Labour Party and the Soviet Union* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).

⁴⁶ Anita Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland, 1942-1948* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004).

⁴⁷ Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, trans. John Micgiel and Michael H. Bernhard, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁴⁸ 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): 93-110.

⁴⁹ John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds, *Poland, 1939-1947* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986).

⁵⁰ Padraig Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communism, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

(1980) also provides some helpful detail on the initial attempts by the PKWN to strengthen its position.⁵¹

Sources

The dilemmas and debates over Poland within the British government from 1944 to 1947 are extensively documented in the files of the Foreign Office, War Office, Cabinet, Records of the Prime Minister's Office, and the private office papers of Anthony Eden and Ernest Bevin, all of which are held at Britain's National Archives Public Record Office in Kew.⁵² The section on Mikołajczyk's escape in the final chapter is based primarily on files just released in May 2013. I have supplemented the government files with reference to the papers of Winston Churchill and Ernest Bevin (Churchill Archives Centre, University of Cambridge), and Oliver Harvey (British Library).

It has frequently been noted that Bevin disliked committing his thoughts to paper and conducted much of the daily Foreign Office business verbally instead. Further, Bevin was not as actively engaged with Polish affairs as Eden had been. In order to get a sense of Bevin's views on a particular issue, it has often been necessary, therefore, to rely on the comments by Foreign Office officials in the minutes reporting Bevin's viewpoint or decision on a particular issue. I found the diary of Captain George Leggett, who was the interpreter for the Anglo-Polish exchanges at the Potsdam conference, to be very valuable for its precise observations of Bevin's approach in the negotiations. Leggett's son deposited his father's diary at the Churchill Archives Centre in early 2014. To the best of my knowledge, at the time of writing, it has not been consulted by other researchers.

This thesis draws on a number of published primary sources: the first series of *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series produced by the State Department's Office of the Historian, and *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations, 1939-*

⁵¹ Antony Polonsky and Bolesław Drukier, *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland* (London: Routledge, 1980).

⁵² Anthony Eden's private office papers are copies of the original papers held at the University of Birmingham.

1945, compiled by the Sikorski Institute in London. Of the contemporary accounts of the wartime period by British policymakers, the diaries of Cadogan and Harvey are the most valuable.⁵³ The diaries of John (Jock) Colville, Churchill's assistant private secretary, and those of his private physician, Lord Moran are also useful for the insights provided by two men who spent a considerable amount of time in close proximity to the prime minister.⁵⁴ The memoirs of Arthur Herbert Birse, who served as personal interpreter for the British ambassador to Moscow, Archibald Clark Kerr, and also acted as interpreter between the British and Soviets at the Moscow, Tehran and Yalta conferences, are particularly useful for their observations of Churchill and Stalin's attitude towards the PKWN politicians at the second Moscow conference in October 1944.⁵⁵

The private written accounts from the postwar period devote very little attention to the Polish problem. Of some use are the biography of Pierson Dixon, who served as principal private secretary to Bevin from 1945 to 1947, the memoirs of Gladwyn Jebb, assistant undersecretary of state in the Foreign Office who worked very closely with Bevin from 1946 on, and again Birse's memoirs for his account of the Potsdam conference and the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Berlin.⁵⁶

Cavendish-Bentinck, the British ambassador to Warsaw, did not publish a memoir, although the American ambassador Arthur Bliss Lane's *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, does refer to joint Anglo-American initiatives in Poland and conveys the sense of mounting frustration on the part of both ambassadors at the increasing reluctance of their governments to intervene in a meaningful way in Polish affairs.⁵⁷ Lane's successor as ambassador, Stanton Griffis, also published a memoir, which includes information on

⁵³ David Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan* (London: Cassell, 1971); John Harvey, ed., *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey* (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1978).

⁵⁴ John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries, 1939-1955* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985); Lord Moran, *Churchill at War, 1940-45* (London: Robinson, 2002), revised ed.

⁵⁵ A.H. Birse, *Memoirs of an Interpreter* (London: Michael Joseph, 1967).

⁵⁶ Hugh Dalton, *High Tide and After. Memoirs, 1945-1960* (London: Frederick Muller, 1962); Birse, *Memoirs*; Piers Dixon, *Double Diploma: the Life of Sir Pierson Dixon, Don and Diplomat* (London: Hutchinson, 1968); Lord Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972).

⁵⁷ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed: An American Ambassador Reports to the American People* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1948).

Mikołajczyk's escape.⁵⁸ The Italian ambassador Eugenio Reale's memoir makes reference to meetings and discussions with British embassy officials.⁵⁹

Although the focus of this dissertation is on British policy towards Poland, I have supplemented the British source base with Polish sources in some sections. At the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, I have made use of the papers of the wartime Polish exile government, primarily the files of the Prime Minister's Office. These files contain useful accounts, from the Polish perspective, of the wartime meetings with British leaders. I have consulted Mikołajczyk's private papers, which are held at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. Mikołajczyk's papers for the period under investigation are somewhat sparse because of the circumstances in which he fled Poland in 1947. The most valuable source for this work has been his private diary, which contains useful detail on the pressure he faced from within the exile government not to accept the Soviet demands for territorial and political changes during the negotiations in 1944. Finally, at the Archiwum Akt Nowych I have consulted the records of the PPR Central Committee and at the archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych), I have consulted the files of the British Department, including a record of Modzelewski's meeting with Bevin in April 1947.

⁵⁸ Stanton Griffis, *Lying in State* (New York: Doubleday, 1952).

⁵⁹ Eugenio Reale, *Raporty: Polska, 1945-1946* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1991).

Chapter 1: Britain and the Polish government-in-exile, January 1944-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 the 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. 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 interpretation 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 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.⁶⁰ The second, more moderate 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 implies that Britain was overwhelmed by sheer helplessness, with no means to exert influence on the course of events.⁶¹ The third interpretation 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

⁶⁰ See, for instance, Dilks, *Epic and Tragedy*, 29-30; Ostrowski, 'To Return to Poland', 164-8; Hope, *Abandoned Legion*, 14; McGilvray, *Military Government In Exile*, 133, 144-5.

⁶¹ For example, Barker, *Churchill and Eden at War*, 247, 260; Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, 358, 361; Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union*, 272-3; Lundestad, 'The United States, Great Britain and Eastern Europe', in Olla, ed. *Yalta: un mito che resiste*, 191; Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, 8.

signals because they were so determined to preserve the alliance with the Soviet Union beyond the end of the war.⁶²

There are elements of truth in all of these interpretations. British policy vis-à-vis Poland was formulated within the larger context of 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 illusions that cooperation would continue once this shared objective had been secured. As Martin Folly argues, however, this approach ‘judge[s] British actions in terms of the subsequent course of Anglo-Soviet relations’ and assumes that the highly negative Cold War British perception of Stalin’s practices and intentions was already set as early as 1941.⁶³

Folly shows 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

⁶² Charmley, *Churchill*, 558-61, 591, 614-15; Davies, *Rising '44*, 160-1; Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office*, 189.

⁶³ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 1-3.

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 Stalin as a realist who grasped that lasting cooperation with the western powers was in the interests of the Soviet state.⁶⁴

British perceptions of the Soviet Union had clear implications for its 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 strong opposition from the Polish government-in-exile. Polish leaders did not share the British willingness 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.⁶⁵ There was a deeply rooted resistance in Polish policy 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 make political concessions to their old enemy whose nearly two-year occupation had been scarcely less brutal than that of Nazi Germany.

British mediation efforts collided with this determined Polish defence of their national interests. Throughout the first half of 1944, Churchill, Eden and the Foreign Office attempted to persuade the government-in-exile to accept the 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

⁶⁴ 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.

⁶⁵ TNA: PRO FO 954/19B/587, Eden to Churchill, 24 December 1943.

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: during the Warsaw uprising, at the time of Mikołajczyk's resignation in November 1944 and in the post-Yalta period, when the British government was at pains to emphasise its continuing loyalty to the exile government in order to avoid disquiet among the troops.

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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷ British leaders recognised that the terms proposed for a resolution of the 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. In the buoyant period following the Moscow and Tehran conferences, when British leaders felt that they had succeeded in establishing a greater degree of trust with Stalin, there was genuine optimism among British policymakers that a satisfactory resolution of the

⁶⁶ See for example, Ostrowski, 'Return to Poland', 216; Davies, *Rising '44*, 161.

⁶⁷ 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 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, 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 right up to the end of the war. This interpretation of future Soviet intentions coloured British policy towards Poland, even in June 1945, when Mikołajczyk and a few other minor politicians from outside the PKWN returned to join the provisional 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-March 1944

At the Tehran conference, Churchill and Roosevelt agreed that the Curzon line should become Poland's new eastern border, while its western border would be shifted westward at German expense to the Oder line. 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. As Churchill commented after Tehran: 'Considering that Russia has lost perhaps thirty millions of citizens in the two devastating wars of the last twenty-five years, they have the right as well as the power to have their western frontier properly secured.'⁶⁸ British policymakers also considered it important to show

⁶⁸ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1944.

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.⁶⁹

After Tehran, Churchill assumed responsibility for persuading the Poles to accept the territorial agreement reached by the Big Three at Tehran.⁷⁰ 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 Polish-Soviet conflict. He predicted that the Soviet government would not insist on the inclusion of members of the Soviet-based Union of Polish Patriots (Związek Patriotów Polskich – ZPP), the rival Polish authority to the London government, in the new Polish government, maintaining that this condition was not particularly important for the Soviets.⁷¹ Stalin had hinted that he would be unwilling to resume relations with the Polish government in its present form, declaring at Tehran that although the Soviet Union desired good relations with Poland, 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.’⁷² Nevertheless the British government judged that immediate Polish acquiescence to the territorial changes would still suffice to placate Stalin, whose rumblings about the Polish government they 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, which had been productive and successful overall, with the Soviets appearing less suspicious of Britain and the US, more inclined towards collaboration. 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

⁶⁹ TNA: PRO CAB 65/45, WM(44)11thCA, 25 January 1944; Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 114. Interestingly, Mikołajczyk perceived the desire on Churchill’s part to ‘gain the trust’ of the Soviet Union. PISM PRM/121, 6 March 1944.

⁷⁰ *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.

⁷¹ TNA: PRO CAB 66/43/28, WP(43)528, 22 November 1943.

⁷² *FRUS Tehran*, 598.

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 mind-set at the Moscow Foreign Ministers Conference in October 1943.⁷³ 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. Folly calls this strand of thinking in the British assessment of the Soviet Union the ‘sensitivities thesis’.⁷⁴ The willingness of Eden and the American secretary of state, Cordell Hull to make the long journey to Moscow to meet Molotov, and 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.⁷⁵

Eden came away from Moscow with a strong sense of the importance of treating the Soviets as equals. Folly argues that after Moscow, the Foreign Office ‘concluded that Stalin was testing British attitudes with his frontier demands.’ The demands were ‘a test of sincerity, with future collaboration in mind.’ British officials believed Stalin to be ‘experiment[ing] with cooperation’ to ‘see how far his allies would meet his basic security requirements.’⁷⁶ This conclusion was strengthened by Stalin’s generally more agreeable demeanour at Tehran,⁷⁷ and by the positive Soviet press and radio coverage of the conference, which proclaimed a ‘new spirit of Allied cooperation’.⁷⁸ 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, therefore, it was important for the British to tread carefully,

⁷³ 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. Harvey diary, 22 October 1943. On the convoy issue see Martin Gilbert, *Road to Victory: Winston S. Churchill, 1941-1945* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 289-90, 311-12.

⁷⁴ 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.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 104-5.

⁷⁷ Reynolds describes, for instance, how Stalin moderated his negotiating style from Tehran onward. In 1941-2, 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. Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 240.

⁷⁸ Vojtech Mastny, *Russia’s Road to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 132.

not to stumble into a misunderstanding which might cause the Soviets to retreat again.⁷⁹ 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. As Folly argues, ‘one of the consequences of the increased faith in Soviet cooperativeness that followed the Moscow and Teheran Conferences was that Churchill, Eden, the FO and the Labour ministers saw hopes for a reasonable settlement of the Polish problem if the Poles *did* make a concession.’⁸⁰

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 war frontiers’ before the Soviet armies crossed the frontiers of prewar Poland.⁸¹ 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.⁸² Churchill’s messages during the weeks of his convalescence in late December and early January indicate that he believed that only a small window of time remained before the arrival of the Soviet armies onto prewar Polish territory, and that 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.⁸³ The longer the London Poles prevaricated on the frontier issue, the higher the risk of Stalin establishing a rival Polish government in Warsaw.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 114, 118.

⁸⁰ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 135.

⁸¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/34590/C15105/258/55, Churchill to Eden, 20 December 1943.

⁸² Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 91; Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 237.

⁸³ 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 1941-2. 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; Martin H. Folly, *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004), maps 25 and 37.

⁸⁴ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1944.

Churchill instructed Eden to proceed on the basis of the agreement reached at Tehran: Poland's eastern frontier would follow the Curzon line, excluding the city of Lwów, while in the west, Poland would be compensated with East Prussia to the line of the Oder, including most of Oppeln.⁸⁵ Eden set out the proposed territorial changes at the first of a series of meetings with Mikołajczyk, the foreign secretary, Tadeusz Romer and Raczyński, on 20 December.⁸⁶ 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 Romer, on the other hand, believed they would have to negotiate with the Soviet Union. 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. 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 (Stronnictwo Ludowe – SL)⁸⁷ leader to London to replace Mikołajczyk.⁸⁸ Thus, Mikołajczyk's position was tightly circumscribed and the talks dragged on inconclusively for several weeks.⁸⁹

As a compromise, Eden proposed that the Poles express a general readiness to discuss territorial changes with the Soviet Union without making explicit reference to the Curzon line. The exile government edged slightly closer towards acceptance of the changes but the cession of Lwów was a sticking point, and the division within the Polish government was a major obstacle.⁹⁰ Romer went as far as proposing that the Polish government could provide a secret assurance to the Soviets regarding the cession of the eastern territories, leaving the final arrangements until after the war. Cadogan was

⁸⁵ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Churchill to Eden, 4 January 1944.

⁸⁶ 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*, 178-90.

⁸⁷ Mikołajczyk later changed the name of the wartime SL to Polish Peasant Alliance (PSL). Prałkowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 137-8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 70-1.

⁸⁹ TNA: PRO FO 954/19B/587, Eden to Churchill, 24 December 1943; PREM 3/355/7, Eden to Churchill, 6 January 1944.

⁹⁰ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Eden to Churchill, 8 January 1944.

not certain whether Romer was actually speaking on behalf of his government, or just floating his own idea.⁹¹ The Poles' prevarication in spite of the rapidly changing military situation in Eastern Europe worried Eden. He feared that they did not grasp the 'realities of the situation' and resorted to requesting assistance from Churchill, who sent a strongly-worded message for Eden to deliver to the Polish government.⁹² The prime minister maintained that the proposed settlement would constitute a 'full discharge' of all Britain's 'promises and obligations to Poland.' 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 the Polish government were to reject reasonable proposals.⁹³ Churchill adopted a similarly uncompromising approach when he returned from Marrakech, determined to take control of the stalled negotiations.⁹⁴

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 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.'⁹⁵ 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. As Folly argues, Churchill's 'geopolitical outlook' led him 'to try to pin the Soviets down to agreements, while he had something to negotiate with.' He was 'apprehensive about

⁹¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/39385/C303/8/G55, Minute by Cadogan, 7 January 1944.

⁹² TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Eden to Churchill, 24 December 1943; Eden to Churchill, 9 January 1944; Eden to Churchill, 12 January 1944.

⁹³ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1944.

⁹⁴ TNA: PRO 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.

⁹⁵ Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 238.

the possibilities open to the Soviets and determined to limit them where it was in his power to do so.⁹⁶ 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.

On 10 January the British government received two indications about the possible formation of a new Polish government in Warsaw under Soviet auspices. A ZPP statement referred to the need to replace reactionaries with new leaders in moments of crisis. Then, in New York, Oskar Lange, the University of Chicago economist who had met with Stalin in 1943 at Roosevelt's request and who later returned to Poland to join the provisional government in 1945,⁹⁷ stated that Polish-Americans favoured the establishment of a new government that would not 'allow reactionaries once more to seize power in Poland' and would adopt a political platform 'analogous to that' of the ZPP. Lange specified that at least half the members of the new government should be composed of people who had remained in Poland under the German occupation.⁹⁸ On 11 January, the Soviet Union issued a statement attacking the Polish government as unrepresentative of the Polish people and levelled 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'.⁹⁹

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 course of two difficult meetings with Mikołajczyk, Romer and 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

⁹⁶ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 134-5.

⁹⁷ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 132; Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 183.

⁹⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/39385/C424/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 10 January 1944.

⁹⁹ 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: PRO FO 371/39387/C995/8/G55, Declaration of the Polish Government, 5 January 1944; Soviet Statement of 11 January 1944; Raczyński, *In Allied London*, 181.

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.¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹

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.’ Eden warned Feodor Gusev, the Soviet ambassador to Britain, that progress would never be made if the Soviet Union continued to deliberately misconstrue the Polish government’s statements.¹⁰² 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. In the view of John Balfour,¹⁰³ Clark Kerr’s deputy, 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 inevitably implant the seeds of future trouble and defeat the avowed objective of the Soviets which is to ensure the existence on their flank of a Poland permanently animated by the wish to maintain friendly relations with the U.S.S.R.’ 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.¹⁰⁴

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

¹⁰⁰ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Eden to Churchill, 15 January 1944.

¹⁰¹ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Moscow to Foreign Office, 16 January 1944.

¹⁰² TNA: PRO 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.

¹⁰³ Folly notes that Balfour was ‘astute’; his ‘scepticism balanced Clark Kerr’s optimism.’ *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 41.

¹⁰⁴ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Moscow to Foreign Office, 17 January 1944.

interpret the messages emanating from Moscow. As the Soviets expressed increasing hostility towards the Polish exile government, Balfour worried that he had misread Soviet intentions. He observed that the Soviet Union was beginning to treat ‘the Polish question exclusively as a matter affecting Polish-Soviet relations without reference to wider European considerations’. The Soviets seemed to be going back on Molotov’s assurance at Moscow that the Soviet Union ‘did not favour the division of Europe into spheres of influence’. Balfour suggested that the British government remind the Soviets of their Moscow pronouncements and point out that unilateral action in Poland would be incompatible with the agreement reached there, particularly at a time when the Soviets were ‘enjoying all the advantages of full participation with the United States and [Britain] in settling problems relating to the rest of Europe and the world at large.’¹⁰⁵

There followed 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 Russian 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.’¹⁰⁶

Balfour’s messages and the subsequent Cabinet discussion help to shed light on the way assumptions about the Soviet Union affected British policy towards Poland. Balfour’s comments illustrate the way in which the thesis of a cooperative Soviet Union

¹⁰⁵ Balfour acknowledged that a British draft declaration on spheres of influence had not actually been adopted at the Moscow conference but he noted that when it was discussed Molotov made a ‘clear pronouncement to the effect that the Soviet Government did not favour division of Europe into spheres of influence.’ TNA: PRO FO 371/39387/C905/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 20 January 1944.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: PRO CAB 65/45, WM(44)11thCA, 25 January 1944.

influenced British policy towards Poland. 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; and on this basis the British concluded that Soviet behaviour could be moderated. This view was particularly in evidence in the relatively buoyant 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.¹⁰⁷ Churchill adhered to the strategy of acknowledging Soviet security concerns and providing reassurance that these would be taken into account in any agreement. He then emphasised Britain's objections to Soviet interference in Poland's political affairs, attempting to persuade Stalin to withdraw his demand for changes in the Polish government.¹⁰⁸ On 3 February Clark Kerr reported that after meeting with Stalin and Molotov, he 'had no hope of moving them' from their refusal to deal with the Polish government in its present form. The Soviet leaders had 'made a litany of the need of reconstructing' the existing government. On the other hand, they had 'made it equally clear' that they would be willing to resume relations with a reconstituted government.¹⁰⁹

A message from Stalin to Churchill on 4 February seemed to confirm Clark Kerr's assessment. The territorial issue stood out as the overriding Soviet concern. Stalin stated that 'the very first question which must be completely cleared up . . . is that of the Soviet-Polish frontier.' He declared that the Soviet Union would be satisfied with *official* Polish acceptance of the Curzon line. Stalin's message also suggested that he sought only limited changes to the composition of the Polish government. Although he insisted that he could not reestablish relations with the government in its present form, he allowed that 'the removal from it of pro-fascist imperialist elements and the inclusion of democratic-minded people' would facilitate the resolution of outstanding disputes with the Soviet Union and the renewal of normal Soviet-Polish relations.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/8, Churchill to Stalin, 28 January 1944.

¹⁰⁹ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/8, Moscow to Foreign Office, 3 February 1944.

¹¹⁰ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/8, Stalin to Churchill, 4 February 1944.

Churchill and Eden found this response relatively encouraging. Eden noted that 'Stalin's immediate reactions to your message are certainly more favourable than might have been expected'. In his conversation with Clark Kerr, Stalin had at last named the individual members of the Polish government to whom he objected: Sosnkowski, the commander of the Polish armed forces; Stanisław Kot, the minister of information; and General Marian Kukiel, the minister of defence. Eden found the limited scope of the changes reassuring. He 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.¹¹¹ The Foreign Office, on the other hand, accepted the demand less readily. They objected that the Soviet claims against Sosnkowski, Kukiel and Kot were unfounded. They noted that Kukiel and Kot were both ministers who favoured a Polish-Soviet rapprochement. Kukiel, for instance, had done much to prevent members of the Polish army from engaging in anti-Soviet activities. The Foreign Office thought the removal of Sosnkowski was particularly ill-advised. Since his appointment as commander-in-chief, he had restricted himself to military duties and refrained from interfering in politics. 'The removal of the commander-in-chief of the Polish forces, who enjoys the confidence of his troops and who particularly distinguished himself in fighting against the Germans during the Polish and French campaigns, must prove a considerable embarrassment not only to the Polish Government but to us'.¹¹²

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

¹¹¹ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/8, Eden to Churchill, 5 February 1944.

¹¹² TNA: PRO FO 371/39392/C2567/8/55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 13 February 1944.

did not contain any members ‘to whom the Soviet Government could legitimately object’.¹¹³

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 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.’¹¹⁴

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

¹¹³ TNA: PRO 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.

¹¹⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/39392/C2793/8/G55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 23 February 1944.

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.¹¹⁵

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, the day after Stalin's message was received in London. 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 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. As he explained to Churchill and Eden, if he 'were honestly convinced that the Russians were acting in good faith,' he would be willing to give the territorial changes 'serious consideration.' 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

¹¹⁵ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/8, Eden to Churchill, 5 February 1944.

reconstitution of the Polish Government were trifles compared with the frontier question and would fade away if the latter were settled.¹¹⁶

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.’¹¹⁷

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.¹¹⁸ As far as Clark Kerr was concerned, the only positive sign to emerge from this discouraging 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

¹¹⁶ TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/8, Record of a Meeting Held at Chequers, 6 February 1944; Raczyński, *In Allied London*, 193-194.

¹¹⁷ TNA: PRO 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.

¹¹⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/39392/C2793/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 28 February 1944; Foreign Office Minutes, 29 February 1944.

himself with the more extremist of his advisers'.¹¹⁹ 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.¹²⁰

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 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. As Churchill explained to the Polish leaders during the difficult meeting on 16 February, 'he was addressing himself to a very powerful Ally which had broken the German army as no other nation could have done. We would have to march together with them through what would be a very bloody year.'¹²¹ Churchill and Eden often felt that the Poles were 'ask[ing] too much', rendering the British task 'impossible', as Eden noted rather despairingly in the course of the negotiations.¹²²

¹¹⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/39392/C2884/8/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 29 February 1944.

¹²⁰ 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.

¹²¹ TNA: PRO FO PREM 3/355/8, Record of a Meeting Held at 10 Downing Street, 16 February 1944.

¹²² TNA: PRO PREM 3/355/7, Eden to Churchill, 22 January 1944.

What Churchill and Eden underestimated or simply disregarded – although Foreign Office officials understood better – was the difficulty of Mikołajczyk's position.¹²³ 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 actually 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.¹²⁴

The Negotiations Lapse, March-July 1944

Churchill persisted in his attempt to elicit Stalin's agreement to a Polish-Soviet deal throughout the spring of 1944. He provided Stalin with more specific assurances as to the willingness of the Polish government to accept the Curzon line, but Stalin replied that the leaders of the exile government were 'incapable of establishing normal relations' with the Soviet Union.¹²⁵ More serious misgivings began to set in about Soviet intentions in Poland at this point. 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

¹²³ 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: PRO FO 371/39392/C2793/8/G55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 20 February 1944.

¹²⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/39392/C2793/8/G55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 20 February 1944.

¹²⁵ *Stalin's Correspondence*, vol. 1, docs. 249-250.

position: the Soviet Union should have no doubt that Britain would continue to recognise the Polish government in London ‘as the Government of the Ally for whom [it] had declared war upon Hitler’. 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.¹²⁶ 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 stiffened 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 upset 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.’¹²⁷ In response, Churchill reaffirmed British support for the Polish government-in-exile in the House of Commons. He denied 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.¹²⁸

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

¹²⁶ TNA: PRO CAB 65/45, WM(44) 28th Conclusions, Minute 1, Confidential Annex, 6 March 1944.

¹²⁷ TNA: PRO WO 214/54, General Alexander to CIGS, 8 March 1944.

¹²⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/39397/C4302/8/G55, 27 March 1944.

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’.¹²⁹ 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’.¹³⁰

This interpretation of Soviet intentions was reinforced by reports from the Moscow embassy in May. Following several meetings with Stalin and Molotov, Lange reported to Clark Kerr that the ‘[w]hole tenour’ of Stalin’s remarks about Poland led him to conclude that the Soviet leader regarded ‘the question of Poland’s future strictly from [the] standpoint of Soviet security.’¹³¹ According to Lange, Stalin had remarked frequently that ‘he had no intention of interfering in the domestic affairs of Poland.’ Further, in reply to Lange’s question regarding the possibility of a resumption of relations with the exiting Polish government, Stalin had ‘remarked without hesitation

¹²⁹ TNA: PRO CAB 65/46, W.M.(44)47th Conclusions, Minute 2, Confidential Annex, 11 April 1944.

¹³⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/39397/C4302/8/G55, Minute by Roberts, 27 March 1944.

¹³¹ Both the Moscow embassy and the Central Department considered Lange to be a reliable source. Allen referred to Lange as ‘shrewd’. TNA: PRO 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: PRO 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.

“the door to an understanding is never closed.”¹³² In the view of the Central Department, Lange’s conversations provided ‘a not unencouraging picture’. Officials were pleased to note that the Soviets were ‘still well disposed’ towards Mikołajczyk, and concluded he was the ‘chief hope of effecting a reconciliation with Stalin’. Because Sosnkowski was particularly objectionable to the Soviets, the Foreign Office now accepted that it would be necessary to arrange his removal.¹³³

The other important conclusion which the Foreign Office drew from Clark Kerr’s account of Lange’s discussion with Stalin was that the Soviets understood the weakness of the ZPP, which would not be capable of garnering enough support among the Polish population to form a viable administration. The ZPP’s shortcomings would prevent Stalin from shutting the London Poles out of the postwar political settlement altogether. Foreign Office officials acknowledged that the Soviet Union was steadily trying to weaken the Polish exile government’s position and erode its bargaining power, but judged that the Soviet Union had ‘clearly not ruled out the possibility of collaboration with M. Mikołajczyk himself and with other well-disposed members of his administration should this eventually prove the best way of restoring stable conditions in Poland.’¹³⁴

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’.¹³⁵ The time had come therefore to give Mikołajczyk ‘a judicious push’. The Foreign Office recognised that Mikołajczyk himself understood the need to reach an accommodation with the Soviets, and was

¹³² TNA: PRO 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.

¹³³ TNA: PRO FO 371/39400/C6694/8/G55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20-21 May 1944.

¹³⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/39400/C6694/8/G55, Minute by Allen, 20 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.

¹³⁵ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (PISM), PRM 124, 15 May 1944.

prepared to scale back Sosnkowski's role but he continued to face strong opposition from within his government.¹³⁶ 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.¹³⁷

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 Czech 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 Czech 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.¹³⁸

This promising news did not, however, translate into the much desired agreement. Upon his return from a trip to the US to see Roosevelt, Mikołajczyk took over from Grabski. Mikołajczyk requested an immediate resumption of diplomatic relations, a joint strategy

¹³⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/39400/C7370/8/G55, Minute by Roberts, 30 May 1944; FO 371/39402/C8476/8/G55, Foreign Office Minutes, 30 May 1944.

¹³⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/39402/C8477/8/G55, Record of Meeting at No. 10 Downing Street on Wednesday 31st May, 1944.

¹³⁸ Eden, *The Reckoning*, 439-40; TNA: PRO 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.

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. In the circumstances, Britain could not intervene publicly in this particular set of negotiations.¹³⁹ Eden urged Mikołajczyk and Romer to make a significant gesture to the Soviet Union which would signal their desire for the resumption of talks, suggesting that they press ahead with the replacement of Sosnkowski. Although Mikołajczyk and Romer agreed with Eden’s suggestions, by 11 July no progress had been made in their implementation.¹⁴⁰

Review of British commitments to Poland

In July 1944, just as the Polish-Soviet negotiations foundered once again, Eden and the Foreign Office examined the extent 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

¹³⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/39403/C8860/8/55, Foreign Office to Moscow, 8 July 1944.

¹⁴⁰ TNA: PRO 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.

the 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 did not recognise any territorial changes effected in Poland since August 1939 and would not do so in any future agreement with the Soviet Union. Eden had repeated these assurances to 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.

Another cause for concern in the Foreign Office was a note from Eden assuring Raczyński that the British government regarded Article 2(b) of the Secret Protocol as constituting recognition of the importance of the independence of Lithuania to Poland. Eden lamented: 'I am bewildered as to why I ever wrote the letter of 6 May 1942.'¹⁴¹ 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.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Allen returned to the 1942 correspondence and reported that at the time the Polish ministers had been in a 'condition of considerable strain and excitement' because of Britain's negotiations with the Soviet Union. Had Britain not extended the assurance about Lithuanian independence, the Polish government would have been unlikely to agree to the Anglo-Soviet treaty at all. Under the terms of the Anglo-Polish treaty, the British were obliged to consult the Polish government before concluding any agreement with the Soviet Union. TNA: PRO FO 371/39436/C11513/62/55, Minute by Allen, 4 August 1944.

¹⁴² TNA: PRO 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

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 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 policy 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'.¹⁴³

The Warsaw Uprising

On 26 July Mikołajczyk and Romer flew to Moscow to meet with Stalin.¹⁴⁴ Mikołajczyk was convinced that he had to make an attempt to reestablish 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.¹⁴⁵ 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

¹⁴⁴ 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.

¹⁴³ TNA: PRO CAB 66/53, WP(44)436, 9 August 1944

¹⁴⁴ 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: PRO 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.

¹⁴⁵ In Wołyńia the Red Army had already disarmed the local AK units and arrested their leaders. Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 98.

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.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the talks began reasonably well. The PKWN representatives and the Soviet leaders agreed to Mikołajczyk remaining prime minister. Although the PKWN initially proposed the creation of a new government in which only four cabinet posts would be allocated to representatives of the London government, they seemed prepared to compromise.¹⁴⁷ 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 UJ.' 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'.¹⁴⁸ 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.¹⁴⁹

This apparently promising beginning collapsed because the political talks were eclipsed by the Warsaw uprising, which began on 1 August while Mikołajczyk was 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 insurgents.¹⁵⁰ The outbreak of the uprising stoked Polish-Soviet antagonism: the Soviets objected to the failure of the AK to inform Soviet headquarters about the action beforehand; the Soviets provided almost no help to the AK, although Soviet troops had reached the outskirts of Warsaw by the time the uprising began.¹⁵¹ 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

¹⁴⁶ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 98-100.

¹⁴⁷ Harvey diary, 13 & 15 August 1944.

¹⁴⁸ 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.

¹⁴⁹ PISM, A/48/2/C4, 5 August 1944.

¹⁵⁰ *Stalin's Correspondence*, vol. 1, doc. 321.

¹⁵¹ *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers, 1944. The British Commonwealth and Europe*, vol. 3 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1965), 1374-1377.

German reinforcements sent in to reestablish control of the city.¹⁵² A number of historians argue that Marshal Konstanty Rokossovski's army group was actually dangerously exposed with overstretched communication and supply lines, at least during the first two weeks of the uprising.¹⁵³ The Red Army did resume its advance in early September, only to draw to a halt on the right bank of the Vistula river. This stoppage and Stalin's refusal (up until mid-September) to make ammunition drops to the insurgents, in spite of his promise to Mikołajczyk that he would do so, were politically motivated.¹⁵⁴ As Pra mowska argues, 'while never stated explicitly [the AK's] defeat by the German forces made the task of bringing the PKWN much easier.'¹⁵⁵

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.¹⁵⁶ The uprising also 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.¹⁵⁷ 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 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

¹⁵² 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. Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 102–6; *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, s.v. 'Warsaw Uprising' (by Christopher Bellamy) <http://www.oxfordreference.com> [accessed 4 January 2014].

¹⁵³ Jan Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 250–1; Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 469; Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, 280–1.

¹⁵⁴ DOPSR, vol. 2, doc. 189.

¹⁵⁵ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 104.

¹⁵⁶ 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 continued to press for assistance periodically throughout the first half of 1944. Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 97; Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, vol. 3 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971), 203.

¹⁵⁷ 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. Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 94.

high command had planned to reserve the parachute brigade for the invasion of Poland. This brigade 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.¹⁵⁸ 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. On 4 August Britain did order an air operation from Italy but the RAF suffered high losses in the course of this operation, leading to unwillingness on the part of the military to undertake any further supply drops over Polish territory.¹⁵⁹

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. I feel sure that they will be much comforted if they knew we were doing all we could to help them.'¹⁶⁰ 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.¹⁶¹

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

¹⁵⁸ The British eventually used it in a poorly-planned operation at Arnhem in November, which ended in retreat and the loss of nearly a quarter of the brigade. *Ibid.*, 95-6.

¹⁵⁹ Harvey diary, 15 August 1944; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 204; Raczyński, *In Allied London*, 303-4, 320-1; Ciechanowski, *Warsaw Rising*, 67; Pramowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 95-6.

¹⁶⁰ TNA: PRO WO 214/54, ADV HQ AAI to AFHQ, 1 August 1944.

¹⁶¹ 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: PRO CAB 121/454, Foreign Office to Central Mediterranean, 8 August 1944.

increasingly urgent pleas for arms and ammunition drops to the insurgents.¹⁶² The Soviets also refused to allow British and American planes to use Soviet landing strips to stop and refuel.¹⁶³ 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.¹⁶⁴ 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.¹⁶⁵ 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.¹⁶⁶ 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.¹⁶⁷ 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.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately, however, and with varying degrees of confidence, officials 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

¹⁶² *FRUS, 1944*, vol. 3, 1374-1377; *Stalin’s Correspondence*, vol. 1, docs. 321, 311, 316, 317.

¹⁶³ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 221.

¹⁶⁴ 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.

¹⁶⁵ The Foreign Office persuaded Churchill that this step would be counterproductive. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, fn. 215.

¹⁶⁶ *Secret Wartime Correspondence*, doc. 431.

¹⁶⁷ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, 218-221.

¹⁶⁸ Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union*, 232.

Soviet attempt to use the uprising to undermine Mikołajczyk's position.¹⁶⁹ 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'.¹⁷⁰ 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.'¹⁷¹

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 angry 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.¹⁷² 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 Normandy, would bring success'.¹⁷³ 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

¹⁶⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/39410/C11186/8/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 25 August 1944.

¹⁷⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/39410/C11277/8/G55, Minute by Warner, 29 August 1944.

¹⁷¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/39499/C12788/1077/G55, Eden to Churchill, 13 September 1944.

¹⁷² 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 diary, 11 October 1944.

¹⁷³ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 136.

greater leverage to take a firmer line with Stalin.¹⁷⁴ This argument was in accordance with his existing view that Stalin responded better to a tougher approach.¹⁷⁵

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.’¹⁷⁶ 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’.¹⁷⁷

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.¹⁷⁸ In an attempt to reach a compromise, Churchill proposed agreement on the Curzon line ‘as a point of reference’, with the final settlement to be agreed at the peace conference. Stalin refused the idea.¹⁷⁹ In a private meeting with the Polish leaders the next day Churchill adopted an unusually harsh approach. He asserted that the Curzon line was ‘the crux of the situation’. If the Poles could accept the border change, all the other issues, including the composition of the

¹⁷⁴ Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, doc. C-760.

¹⁷⁵ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 137.

¹⁷⁶ TNA: PRO CAB 66/53, WP(44)436, 9 August 1944.

¹⁷⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/39499/C12788/1077/G55, Eden to Churchill, 13 September 1944.

¹⁷⁸ TNA: PRO 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.

¹⁷⁹ PISM A/48/2/C5, 14 October 1944.

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.’” Referring to Anders’s recent suggestion that after the defeat of Germany, the western allies should attack the Soviet Union, Churchill added: “‘If you want to conquer Russia, we shall let you go your own way. You ought to be in a lunatic asylum!’”¹⁸⁰ 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’.¹⁸¹

There is a virtual consensus that, as Roy Jenkins notes in his biography of Churchill, the prime minister behaved with ‘peculiar harshness’ towards the Polish leaders in Moscow.¹⁸² There is no question that Churchill tried to bully Mikołajczyk. As in early 1944, 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

¹⁸⁰ DOPSR, vol. 2, doc. 241; Mikołajczyk, *Pattern of Soviet Domination*, 108-11. 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: PRO CAB 121/454, Eden to Foreign Office, 16 October 1944; Harvey diary, 15 October 1944. 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.’” Moran, *Churchill at War*, 244.

¹⁸¹ TNA: PRO 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 dos. 239 & 245; Raczyński, *In Allied London*, 239.

¹⁸² 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*, 590-1.

him.¹⁸³ 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.¹⁸⁴ He was also contemptuous of the Lublin Poles, 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.¹⁸⁵ 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.¹⁸⁶ 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.'¹⁸⁷

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 to bring the Poles round to seeing the situation from his point of view.¹⁸⁸ 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.¹⁸⁹ A tearful Churchill might simply have been an appealing dramatic device for

¹⁸³ Churchill, quoted in Jenkins, *Churchill*, 762.

¹⁸⁴ 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: PRO CAB 121/454, Churchill to War Cabinet, 17 October 1944; Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 138.

¹⁸⁵ DOPSR, vol. 2, doc. 239.

¹⁸⁶ TNA: PRO CAB 121/454, Eden to Foreign Office, 14 October 1944.

¹⁸⁷ Birse, *Memoirs*, 172.

¹⁸⁸ Churchill summarises the Polish-Soviet negotiations in Moscow in his memoirs but does not make specific reference to this particular meeting.

¹⁸⁹ Mikołajczyk, *Pattern of Soviet Domination*, 111.

Mikołajczyk's memoirs but Moran 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."¹⁹⁰ 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.¹⁹⁰

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.¹⁹¹ 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.¹⁹² At the end of May, as France's defeat appeared imminent and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was trapped around Dunkirk with the initial expectation that only 30–50,000 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.¹⁹³ 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.¹⁹⁴ In any case, the Polish exile leaders and servicemen captured Churchill's attention and remained part of his thinking

¹⁹⁰ Moran, *Churchill at War*, 245.

¹⁹¹ Anthony P. Adamthwaite, 'British Diplomacy Before the Conference in the Crimea', in Olla, ed. *Yalta: un mito che resiste*, 46; Pra mowska, 'Churchill and Poland', 117.

¹⁹² 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 Richard Langhorne, ed. *Diplomacy and Intelligence During the Second World War: Essays in Honour of F.H. Hinsley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 148.

¹⁹³ Important members of the government, including Halifax and David Lloyd George believed Britain ought to seriously consider a negotiated peace. *Ibid.*, 149–50.

¹⁹⁴ Pra mowska, 'Churchill and Poland', 117.

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, although the precise reasons were never made explicit, Churchill assumed 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-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.¹⁹⁵ A new government was formed under the socialist Tomasz Arciszewski, which maintained an entirely uncompromising stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Churchill hoped that this government would collapse, paving the way for Mikołajczyk's return. In a message to Stalin, Churchill maintained that he did not believe the Arciszewski government would have 'a long life' and 'should not be surprised' to see Mikołajczyk 'back in office with increased prestige and with the necessary powers to carry through the programme discussed between us in Moscow.' To Roosevelt, Churchill wrote that Mikołajczyk retained the support of important sections of the Polish political parties in London. Churchill therefore hoped that Mikołajczyk's return to power might still be possible in the New Year.¹⁹⁶

Nevertheless, Churchill granted recognition to the Arciszewski government, although its 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. Churchill disagreed with a warning from Clark Kerr that British recognition of the new Polish government would lead to serious difficulties with Stalin. In Churchill's

¹⁹⁵ Mikołajczyk diary, 16 December 1944, Stanisław Mikołajczyk Papers, Box 13, Folder 17, Hoover Institution Archives; *DOPSR*, vol. 2, docs. 248, 250, 259; TNA: PRO CAB 121/454, Foreign Office to Moscow, 24 November 1944; *FRUS*, 1944, vol. 3, 1335-1336.

¹⁹⁶ TNA: PRO CAB 121/454, Churchill to Roosevelt, 16 December 1944.

view, 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.¹⁹⁷ 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. They are now making an appreciable contribution to the United Nations' war effort in Italy, Holland and elsewhere.'¹⁹⁸ 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.¹⁹⁹ The British government publicly announced that it would continue to recognise the London government, although it was anxious not to prolong circumstances in which Britain and the Soviet Union maintained relations with different Polish governments.²⁰⁰ The Foreign Office briefly considered the possibility of pushing for Mikołajczyk's return to power in order to strengthen the London government. 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.'²⁰¹

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 hands of the Lublin government, Britain needed to reach an arrangement with the Soviets which would include some of

¹⁹⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/39418/C16777/8/G55, Churchill to Eden, 26 November 1944; Eden to Churchill, 26 November 1944.

¹⁹⁸ *Stalin's Correspondence*, vol. 1, doc. 362.

¹⁹⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47576/N568/6/55, Soviet Communiqué of 5 January 1945.

²⁰⁰ *DOPSR*, vol. 2, doc. 797, fn. 293.

²⁰¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47575/N198/6/G55, Foreign Office, Minutes, 8 January 1945.

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 representatives of the three centre and left-wing parties in Poland, including Mikołajczyk and a few other representatives of the London government.²⁰²

In early January, Arciszewski attempted to persuade Mikołajczyk to rejoin the exile government. Mikołajczyk clearly did not want to associate himself with Arciszewski. He described his successor as a ‘hopeless case’. Arciszewski continued to refuse to enter into any agreement with the Soviets or the Lublin committee; instead he pinned his hopes on the military defeat of the Soviet Union, although how this would be achieved and by whom was not specified.²⁰³

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

²⁰² Eden approved this memo, requesting that a copy be sent to Churchill and that another be brought to Yalta. TNA: PRO FO 371/47577/N1038/6/G55, ‘Brief on Poland’, 27 January 1945.

²⁰³ Mikołajczyk diary, 4 January 1945, Stanisław Mikołajczyk Papers, Box 13, Folder 17, Hoover Institution Archives.

countries.²⁰⁴ 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 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, namely Romania and Hungary.²⁰⁵ 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.²⁰⁶ 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.'²⁰⁷ Molotov, Averell Harriman, (now ambassador to Moscow), and Clark Kerr were to form a Three Power Commission to oversee the formation of the new government.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 169 and 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): 316-17.

²⁰⁵ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 135; Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 67, 238-9.

²⁰⁶ Churchill and Roosevelt had agreed at Malta that the Polish government should be entirely reconstituted. Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, doc. C-910.

²⁰⁷ *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.

²⁰⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/N1745/6/G55, Foreign Office to Moscow, February 18 1945.

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’,²⁰⁹ whereas Britain and the US considered the terms to constitute a genuine agreement.²¹⁰ From the first meeting, Molotov threw up a series of obstacles, including attempting to block Mikołajczyk from joining the new administration.²¹¹ Churchill proposed to Roosevelt that they each send messages to Stalin protesting Soviet obstructionism, which Churchill feared was a tactic to ‘drag the business out while the Lublin Committee consolidate their power.’²¹² Churchill complained that Molotov was ‘attempting to bar practically all our candidates for the consultations’. Churchill feared 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.’²¹³

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.²¹⁴ With these arrests, the Soviet Union eliminated in one swoop the leaders of the non-communist political parties

²⁰⁹ Polonsky, ‘Stalin and the Poles’, 472. Kimball puts forth a similar argument. Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, 585-7.

²¹⁰ 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 Communiqué 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.

²¹¹ *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, Europe*, vol. 5 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 123-124, 134, 142-144, 147-150.

²¹² 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.

²¹³ Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, vol. 3, docs. C-925, C-926; *FRUS, 1945*, vol. 5, 123-124, 134, 142-144, 147-150.

²¹⁴ The underground leaders went voluntarily to meet with NKVD representatives. According to Pra mowska, 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 Pułak. On 27 and 28 March, they went to Pruszków, from where they were immediately taken to Moscow. Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 115-16.

of the Polish underground. The British and the Americans had been seeking information about the whereabouts of the underground leaders from Molotov since their disappearance at the end of March. Only on 4 May did Molotov finally confirm their arrests. The following day Eden and the US secretary of state, Edward Stettinius announced that in light of Molotov's announcement, the Three Power Commission would not continue discussions on the Polish issue.²¹⁵

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 Sta czyk,²¹⁶ as well as five independent Poles from inside the country to Moscow for consultations with the Three Power Commission.²¹⁷ Mikołajczyk tentatively agreed to go to Moscow under these terms but the matter of the underground leaders remained an obstacle.²¹⁸ 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.²¹⁹

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.'²²⁰ 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.²²¹ Of these Mikołajczyk was the only politician of any standing.²²² 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.

²¹⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/47590/5247/6/55, Foreign Office Report, 7 May 1945; *DOPSR*, vol. 2, doc. 353.

²¹⁶ Sta czyk was the former minister of Labour and Social Welfare in the exile government.

²¹⁷ This list consisted of Adam Sapieha, archbishop of Kraków or Wincenty Witos, leader of the Peasant Party in Poland, Zygmunt uławski, 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 Krzy anowski, professor of economics at Jagellonian University.

²¹⁸ TNA: PRO 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.

²¹⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47592/N6293/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 1 June 1945 [second telegram]; N6369, Moscow to Foreign Office, 3 June 1945.

²²⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/47592/N6293/6/55, Churchill to Truman, 2 June 1945.

²²¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47592/N6535/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 6 June 1945.

²²² Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 114.

Mikołajczyk and Staczyk 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.'²²³

Just days before Mikołajczyk was due to leave for Moscow the trial of the underground leaders opened. When Mikołajczyk wavered 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.²²⁴ 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.²²⁵ 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.²²⁶ Officials began to refer to the need for a 'showdown' with the Soviet

²²³ TNA: PRO 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.

²²⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N658, Annex to 'British Policy Towards Poland – Mr Churchill's Conversation with M. Mikołajczyk, 15 June 1945'.

²²⁵ 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 Olla, ed. *Yalta: un mito che resiste*, 411-55.

²²⁶ 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.

Union; Churchill made highly critical comments about the Soviets in his messages to Roosevelt.²²⁷

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. 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.²²⁸ The British calculated that Soviet obstructionism over the composition of the Polish government could be overcome if Britain and the US took a firm line on the matter. Thus, there was a clear expectation on the part of the British government in June 1945 that Britain would remain involved in the process of determining Poland’s political future.

The second strand of British policy towards Poland concerned the future of the Polish troops fighting under British command. In the wake of protests from the Polish military authorities following the publication of the Yalta communiqué, Churchill had promised British citizenship and a ‘refuge . . . somewhere in the British empire’ for those soldiers who did not wish to return to Poland.²²⁹ Although this promise was made spontaneously

²²⁷ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 142-3, 158-9.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 148-50, 160-1, 166.

²²⁹ TNA: PRO 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,

– without prior Cabinet consultation – in response to Anders's report of unrest in the Polish Second Corps, it nevertheless reflected Britain's strong and ongoing sense of obligation to these servicemen.

Chapter 2: From the Three Power Commission to the Moscow Council of Foreign Ministers, June-December 1945

Introduction

After the end of hostilities in Europe, the British assumption that cooperation with the Soviet Union would continue remained essentially intact. It had become clear that relations were unlikely to run smoothly and easily but ongoing analysis of extensive Soviet reconstruction needs buttressed the long-standing assumption that Stalin could not afford to risk a breakdown in relations with his western alliance partners. The most notable shift in British policy was a move towards the ‘frankness school’ of diplomacy, in other words, a conviction that long-term cooperation with the Soviet Union could only be established by an unyielding quid pro quo approach to negotiations, rather than one of patient forbearance. This remained, broadly, the position of both the Foreign Office and the British political leadership throughout the spring and summer of 1945.²³⁰

British policy towards Poland in the immediate postwar period was shaped partly by this assumption that the Soviet Union would continue to pursue cooperation with its wartime alliance partners. Soviet agreement to the inclusion of Mikołajczyk and several of his supporters into the new Polish provisional government in June suggested to the British that the Soviet Union had accepted that the PSL²³¹ would have a prominent role in Poland’s new government. The officials of the Foreign Office Northern Department, who were not without serious reservations about the composition of the new government, nevertheless took Soviet acceptance of Mikołajczyk’s inclusion as a sign that the Soviet attitude towards Poland was beginning to change. British acceptance of the agreement was also influenced by Mikołajczyk, who was confident that strong popular support coupled with the weakness of the PPR would allow the PSL to become the leading Polish political party.

The British position towards the Soviet Union did not change substantially after the Labour party’s election victory at the end of July 1945. Both Attlee and Bevin had

²³⁰ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 140, 164-5.

²³¹ To differentiate the existing Peasant Party from the party of the same name which had been formed in September 1944 under the aegis of the PKWN as a rival to his party, Mikołajczyk changed the name of the wartime SL to Polish Peasant Alliance (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL). Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 137-8.

served in the wartime coalition government. As deputy prime minister and minister of labour respectively, both sat on the Armistice and Postwar Committee and were therefore intimately familiar with, and supportive of, the government's foreign policy and the plans for addressing postwar problems.²³² Both Attlee and Bevin had supported Churchill and Eden's line of policy towards the Soviet Union during the war, and when Labour came to power both operated on the basis that cooperation with the Soviet Union would continue. This expectation was bolstered by the enthusiasm within the wider Labour party for the adoption of a 'socialist foreign policy' in Britain, based on close Anglo-Soviet cooperation.²³³ Attlee was inclined towards an 'internationalist approach' to foreign affairs, with the United Nations organisation as the guarantor of international security in the postwar world. He was prepared to consider the Soviet point of view even on contentious issues involving important British interests.²³⁴ Bevin's approach to foreign policy was guided more by a traditional, bipartisan sense of the importance of defending British interests abroad. His attitude towards the Soviet Union was 'wary and suspicious, but not automatically hostile.'²³⁵

It has been asserted that Bevin was a committed cold warrior almost from the time he took up his position as foreign secretary.²³⁶ Certainly by early 1946 Bevin's distrust of the Soviets was rising – and later on it was largely his initiative that led to the establishment of a unified bloc in western Europe – but his views changed gradually over the second half of 1945, rather than in an abrupt mid-year reversal. Working on the assumption that Anglo-Soviet cooperation would continue, Bevin initially rejected the idea of a division of the continent into separate blocs. He was not willing to consign Poland to a Soviet sphere of interest. At Potsdam, Bevin took up exactly where Churchill and Eden had left off in pushing the Soviets to withdraw their troops from Poland and the PPR leaders to adhere to their commitment to hold early elections and guarantee full political freedom.²³⁷ On the whole, however, Attlee and Bevin did not

²³² For instance, Bevin told Molotov in October 1945 that he had supported all of Churchill's decisions at the Tehran and Yalta conferences. Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 14.

²³³ Bullock, *Bevin*, 116-7; Morgan, *Labour in Power*, 232-5; Burridge, *Clement Attlee*, 221; Hennessy, *Never Again*, 258; Pearce, *Attlee*, 161-2; Reynolds, *World War to Cold War*, 277.

²³⁴ Harris, *Attlee* (London, 1982), 293-4; Smith and Zametica, 'Clement Attlee Reconsidered', *International Affairs* 61, 2 (1985): 241-2; Hennessy, *Never Again*, 256.

²³⁵ Morgan, *Labour in Power*, 235.

²³⁶ Harris, *Attlee*, 292-3; Jones, *Russia Complex*, 115-16.

²³⁷ Bullock, *Bevin*, 28, 116-17; TNA: PRO 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.

take the same highly personal interest in the Polish settlement as Churchill and Eden. For the most part, Polish matters devolved back to the Foreign Office after the change of government. Further, as relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated later in the year, Bevin's initial willingness to confront the Soviets over conditions in Poland dissipated. Following the disastrous breakdown of the first meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London, he sought to extricate the Polish issue from the larger context of Anglo-Soviet relations as part of an effort to limit the sources of disagreement with the Soviets.

Bevin's move to compartmentalise the Polish issue was at odds with the view of the Foreign Office and the Warsaw embassy. 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 reestablished Warsaw embassy,²³⁸ 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.²³⁹ The Warsaw embassy staff, led by some very senior diplomats with prewar experience of Poland, including the ambassador, Cavendish-Bentinck,²⁴⁰ and Hankey, the chargé d'affaires,²⁴¹ were quick to perceive the ruthlessness with which the Soviet-backed PPR was suppressing its political opponents.²⁴² The diplomatic corps in Warsaw reported back to the Northern Department that political freedom in Poland was eroding rapidly. The Foreign Office Northern Department concurred with the Warsaw embassy about the direction of events in Poland. Although they initially believed that the PPR's slim proportion of popular

²³⁸ 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.

²³⁹ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 119-22.

²⁴⁰ 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.

²⁴¹ 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.

²⁴² 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'. *Strange Inheritance* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1983), 176-7.

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.

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 in to conflict with the Polish provisional government, which sought to muscle in on all the affairs of the former exile government. 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.

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.²⁴³ Churchill's spontaneous post-Yalta promise that no Polish servicemen would be forced to return to

²⁴³ Pra mowska, 'Polish Refugees', in Bramwell, ed., *Refugees in the Age of Total War*, 219.

Poland had not been accompanied by any detailed planning. The Foreign Office was left to devise a strategy to facilitate repatriation, or settlement in Britain or its empire, for the Polish 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.²⁴⁴ The problem of this 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, a 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. For instance, 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. Thus British policy was often incoherent and contradictory, frequently failing to satisfy the new Polish government and leaving British officials in the UK and abroad in a state of confusion. Inevitably, the absence of advance planning significantly increased the amount of time required for the Foreign Office to smooth out the complications.

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

²⁴⁴ 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 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 Kopa ski'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, 1996), 23-5.

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.²⁴⁵ 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 armed forces added to the importance of ensuring an improvement in conditions in Poland. For the most part, the Foreign Office actually treated repatriation and the internal Polish political situation as separate issues.

Three Power Commission

Prior to the formal recognition of the Polish provisional government, Britain was in a reasonably good position to exert influence on the outcome of the postwar settlement in Poland. During the brief window of time between mid-June and 5 July, Britain had a chance to insist that certain conditions be met before granting recognition to the new government, particularly regarding the composition of the Cabinet and the holding of elections. During the negotiations under the auspices of the Three Power Commission, for instance, Britain could reasonably have demanded the inclusion of a greater number of members of the democratic parties in more important positions in the new government, thereby increasing the chances that the PPR would not be able to secure complete control.

Britain did not press harder for these conditions for two main reasons. First, in the early summer of 1945, Churchill, Eden and the Northern Department officials believed that the PPR's support base was insufficient to allow it to rule without the cooperation of the democratic parties, particularly the PSL – a view shared by Mikołajczyk.²⁴⁶ They hoped that the inclusion of the democratic elements would, in turn, curb the excesses of the

²⁴⁵ Ostrowski, 'Return to Poland', 16, 190-2; Hope, *Abandoned Legion*, 13.

²⁴⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/47595/N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 475; Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 142, 148.

PPR and result in a more moderate government. Second, the British believed that it was no longer tenable for Britain to continue to support the London government. The exile administration had been regarded as a liability to the British government since Arciszewski had taken over at the end of November 1944 and the decision to transfer recognition had implicitly been taken when Churchill succeeded in persuading Mikołajczyk to go to Moscow. In the view of British leaders and policymakers, there was no alternative but to proceed with recognition of the new government once Mikołajczyk's inclusion had been secured.

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 six ministerial portfolios were assigned to Mikołajczyk and his supporters. 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.²⁴⁷

The British government accepted the settlement with some misgivings. Clark Kerr described the result as 'not quite so good as we and Mikołajczyk might have hoped.' He particularly regretted that Mikołajczyk had not obtained the premiership.²⁴⁸ Further, 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.²⁴⁹ The MBN controlled the newly established security police (Urzędu Bezpieczeństwa Państwowego – UB).²⁵⁰ Clark Kerr was encouraged, however, by Mikołajczyk's optimism that having been legalised, his party could now become the strongest in

²⁴⁷ TNA: PRO 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.

²⁴⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/47595/N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945.

²⁴⁹ The MBN's nominal head was the minister for public security, Stanisław Radkiewicz. He was considered ineffective, hence Serov's appointment as advisor. Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 121.

²⁵⁰ Micgiel, "Bandits and Reactionaries", 94.

Poland. Further, Clark Kerr also regarded as a positive indication the fact that the various Polish factions had been able to work out a settlement among themselves; the outcome had not been dictated by the Soviets.²⁵¹

The Northern Department, on the other hand, saw less reason for optimism. In particular, officials did not share Clark Kerr's assessment of the fairness of the distribution of power in the new government. The department was reluctant to accept the complete exclusion of the SN, which had commanded considerable strength in prewar Poland. Officials observed that the exactly equal distribution of government posts between the PPS, PPR and Mikołajczyk's Peasant Party was misleading since the PPS and the PPR could 'almost be counted as one'. Neither Mikołajczyk nor his supporters held any of the 'key' posts in the government and communist deputy ministers had been appointed in each case where the portfolio was held by a non-PPR supporter. Finally, the crucial Ministries of Information, Industry and Security were held by PPS or PPR members who had spent most of the war, if not longer, in the Soviet Union.²⁵²

Despite these reservations, the Foreign Office authorised Clark Kerr to accept the settlement, with several caveats. Britain reserved the right to withhold recognition from the new government until it had been 'properly formed' according to the stipulations of the Yalta agreement by committing itself 'to hold free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot, in which all democratic and anti-Nazi parties [would] have the right to take part and put forward candidates'. The Foreign Office also instructed Clark Kerr to pressure the Polish and Soviet governments to grant an amnesty to former members of the Polish underground, including the 16 underground leaders who had received long sentences in Moscow on 21 June. Clark Kerr raised this issue with Bierut, who replied that he had already asked the Soviets to transfer them to the custody of the new Polish government; the request had been refused because their crimes had been committed against the Red Army.

At a meeting of the Commission on 22 June, Clark Kerr formally accepted the settlement after having extracted a pledge from Bierut to abide by the Crimea decision

²⁵¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47595/N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; N7374/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945.

²⁵² TNA: PRO FO 371/47596/N7766/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 4 July 1945.

in its entirety.²⁵³ Four reasons explain Britain's acceptance of the Moscow settlement. First, was the conclusion of the Foreign Office 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 assumption was strengthened by an admission from Bierut and Edward Osóbka-Morawski²⁵⁴ that their position within Poland was not secure and that they needed Mikołajczyk and his party to strengthen the legitimacy of 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.²⁵⁵

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. 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.²⁵⁶ Finally, acceptance of the new government was the first step in the process of phasing

²⁵³ TNA: PRO FO 371/47595/N7369/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 23 June 1945.

²⁵⁴ Osóbka-Morawski belonged to the Workers' Party of the Polish Socialists (RPPS – Robotnicza Partia Polskich Socjalistów) – a splinter group of the PPS which had allied itself with the PPR.

²⁵⁵ Bierut and Osóbka-Morawski made this statement to Mikołajczyk. Osóbka-Morawski repeated it to Clark Kerr directly. TNA: PRO FO 371/47594/N7295/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; N7297/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945.

²⁵⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/47595/ N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; N7508/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 2 July 1945.

out the former 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.²⁵⁷

Sargent's 'Stocktaking' Memorandum

In his influential and much-scrutinised 'Stocktaking after VE Day' memorandum, Sargent set out a broad overview of the recent direction of Soviet policy, together with recommendations for the most effective British response. 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.'²⁵⁸ Sargent also adamantly rejected the idea of a compromise agreement involving 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

²⁵⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/47596/N7711/6/55, Churchill to Osóbka-Morawski, 5 July 1945.

²⁵⁸ 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: PRO FO 371/50912/U5471/5471/70, 'Memorandum by Sir O. Sargent', 11 July 1945.

Anglo-Soviet co-operation must apply fully in Central and South-Eastern Europe as in the rest of the world'. At the same time, Sargent emphasised that it must be made clear to the Soviets that the British government considered 'this plain-speaking' 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.²⁵⁹ 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.

Potsdam Conference

The overriding British concern at Potsdam was to see the revival of German industry and the resumption of trade between the eastern and western regions of the country. 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 and heavy industry. In order to restore 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.

²⁵⁹ 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: PRO FO 371/50912/U5471/5471/70, Minute by Cadogan, 11 July 1945.

Otherwise, the British occupation authorities would be faced with mass starvation in their zone.²⁶⁰

The difficulties in the British occupation zone were exacerbated by the Soviet transfer of German 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. The permanent transfer of this territory to Poland would withdraw it 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 and giving a proportionate advantage to Russia in excess of its fair share. Further, the local Polish authorities had already begun to expel the German population from the disputed territory, with a consequent influx of displaced persons into the western zones of Germany.²⁶¹

The British were also disturbed by the unilateral nature of the Soviet action, which established *de facto* control of this territory before the final delimitation of the Polish-German frontier at the peace conference, as had been agreed at Yalta. In keeping with the increasing sense that it was necessary to take a stiffer approach in their dealings with the Soviet Union, the British worried that acquiescence to the Oder-western Neisse boundary would be perceived by the Soviet Union as ‘a sign of weakness’ and ‘provoke other excessive demands elsewhere’.²⁶² When discussion of the Polish-German frontier opened at Potsdam, Truman and Churchill insisted that the final decision on the Polish-German frontier must await the peace conference and until then the demarcation lines for the zones of occupation in Germany must stand as previously agreed. Churchill argued strenuously against the cession of this territory. He objected to Poland becoming a *de facto* fifth occupying power in Germany. Churchill vehemently objected to having ‘a mass of population’ amounting to eight and a quarter million German citizens, ‘thrown’ into the British zone. He argued that the Soviet Union could not be allowed to siphon off food and supplies from its zone while at the same time demanding materials

²⁶⁰ Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 22.

²⁶¹ TNA: PRO 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.

²⁶² TNA: PRO FO 371/47600/N8810/6/G55, Foreign Office Brief: ‘Poland’s Western Frontier’, [n.d.]; Foreign Office to Washington, 12 July 1945; FO 371/47593/N6767/6/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 12 July 1945.

from the British and American zones. Britain would require payment in the form of food in exchange for supplies from the Ruhr.²⁶³

For the Northern Department and the Warsaw embassy, the Potsdam conference presented an opportunity for the British delegation to extract political concessions from the Polish provisional government. Foreign Office officials were alarmed by reports of oppression and abuses which had begun to reach London, including the exclusion of the Labour and National Democratic parties from the elections, a PPR attempt to force Mikołajczyk to fuse his party with the communist-sponsored Peasant Alliance (Stronnictwo Ludowe – SL) and increasing NKVD control over political activity. Allen, the Northern Department's Polish specialist who was in Potsdam as part of the Foreign Office contingent, had two private conversations with Mikołajczyk following the latter's arrival in Berlin, which confirmed the reports from Warsaw. Conditions had deteriorated even within the last few days, Bierut had reneged on many of the undertakings he had made during the negotiations in Moscow, and Mikołajczyk was now encountering difficulties in organising the PSL.²⁶⁴

Foreign Office officials saw Potsdam as a chance to extract concessions from the Soviet and Polish governments by linking British acceptance of the territorial desiderata to guarantees of political freedom inside Poland. Britain should capitalise on the Polish government's desire to secure the former German territories in the west in order to obtain guarantees regarding early and free elections. 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. The Foreign Office recognised that Britain had some leverage which it could apply at Potsdam to improve the internal situation in Poland. Sargent recommended that the British delegation press the PPR to allow the Labour and National Democratic parties to participate freely in the

²⁶³ *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers. The Conference of Berlin (Potsdam), 1945*, vol.2 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1960), 209-221.

²⁶⁴ TNA: PRO 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.

elections. He argued that Churchill and Eden would ‘much regret it’ if they failed to broach the matter.²⁶⁵

British leaders met with representatives of the provisional Polish government three times on 24 and 25 July.²⁶⁶ In the first two meetings with the Polish delegation, Churchill and Eden pressed the PPR leaders regarding the participation of all the political parties in the elections but in neither case did they link British acceptance of the frontier to the fulfilment of these conditions.²⁶⁷ The next morning, Churchill met with Bierut alone. Churchill warned that the Polish government must establish a free and open society with an independent judiciary and an end to ‘police government’. George Leggett,²⁶⁸ who served as the interpreter for the British meetings with the Polish government at the conference, noted in his diary that although Churchill delivered ‘quite a severe lecture’, he ‘did not adduce any specific instances to illustrate his remarks’, with the result that ‘the discussion was maintained on the level of broad generalities and high sounding phrases, so that it was not difficult for the dialectician Bierut, to give plausible answer in equally imprecise terms.’²⁶⁹ Bierut promised that Poland would ‘develop on the principles of Western democracy’. Bierut assured Churchill that the Red Army was in the process of withdrawing from Poland and that the NKVD played no role in the country.²⁷⁰

The Foreign Office was unconvinced by Bierut’s assurances. Allen expressed his hope that ‘some good’ might come out of Churchill and Eden having raised ‘most of the disturbing developments reported in recent telegrams from Warsaw’ but declared his suspicions that ‘in the case of Bierut at least a great gulf is fixed between his words [at Potsdam] and his actions in Poland.’ Upon receipt of the records of the Anglo-Polish talks at Potsdam, Warner expressed his dissatisfaction: ‘I am still very unhappy about the tussle between our friends in Poland and the Communists, which is, I fear, reaching a crucial stage at this moment.’ Warner considered it essential to secure an agreement before the delegations left the conference: ‘If we can get nothing at Potsdam I am afraid

²⁶⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/47601/N9024/6/G55, Sargent to Cadogan, 24 July 1945.

²⁶⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/47601/N9025/6/G55, Terminal to Foreign Office, 22 July 1945; *FRUS Potsdam*, Vol. II, 249, 335-6.

²⁶⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/47602/N9389/6/G55, Potsdam, 24 July 1945; N9536/6/G55, 24 July 1945.

²⁶⁸ Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), LEGT 1/1, Leggett diary, 22 June, 25 & 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).

²⁶⁹ CAC, LEGT 1/1, Leggett diary, 25 July 1945.

²⁷⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/47603/N9536/6/G55, 25 July 1945.

M. Mikołajczyk will have lost the game. What is obviously required is a sanction of some sort to use, if as is possible M. Bierut's airy words amount to nothing.' He proposed that the British delegation should link its 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.' Another possible sanction would be for Britain to withhold Polish state property: 'everything the Poles want our consent to'. His final suggestion was to raise the issue of the withdrawal of the Red Army from Polish territory directly with the Soviet Union. Sargent put Warner's suggestions to Cadogan at Potsdam, urging that the British delegation extract 'formal assurances of a satisfactory nature' from the Poles and the Soviets 'in full conference' backed by the threat of sanctions if these assurances were not fulfilled.²⁷¹

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 over at Potsdam. Bullock argues that the Labour leaders suffered the disadvantage of parachuting in at the end of the conference with little time to orient themselves and a reluctance to interrupt the course of negotiations which had already been in progress for 13 days. By the time Attlee and Bevin reached Berlin, writes Bullock, 'the general feeling among the Western delegations . . . was one of impatience to reach a settlement and get away. The last thing anyone wanted was for the late arrivals to make difficulties just when the negotiations were coming to the point of decision, and when the Americans had already made up their minds what they were prepared to settle for.'²⁷² This description to some extent reflects the circumstances in which the Polish-German border issue was settled. Truman and the secretary of state, James Byrnes met privately with Molotov on 29 July and declared that they were ready to accept the Soviet demarcation of the frontier if the Soviets would agree to the American proposals on reparations, as well as to the admission of neutral and ex-enemy states to the nascent UN organisation – an issue of central importance to the US government.²⁷³ It was not actually the case, however, that Attlee and Bevin 'parachuted in' to the conference. Attlee had accompanied Churchill and Eden to the conference and been party to the proceedings from the outset. Further, the Labour leaders were fully

²⁷¹ TNA: PRO 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.

²⁷² Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 25.

²⁷³ *FRUS Potsdam*, vol. 2, 382-90, 471-6, 484-92, 500-501, 518-20.

briefed on the issues. Leggett noted ‘the sound, well-informed and realistic way’ in which Bevin and Attlee tackled the issues, getting ‘down to the root of every question’ and refusing to be distracted ‘by any red-herring digression.’ Bevin and Attlee covered much of the same ground as Churchill and Eden but ‘in telling fashion, tying their verbal opponents down to definite, committing answers.’²⁷⁴ Bevin managed, for instance, to pin Bierut down to holding elections no later than early 1946; he also elicited a promise from Bierut to allow foreign press representatives to report on the elections.²⁷⁵

Bevin made his decision on the Polish-German border based primarily 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 importance of early elections, which could only be conducted freely once the Red Army and the NKVD had withdrawn from Polish territory. The Soviets, however, 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’.²⁷⁶ Initially, Bevin was disinclined to accept the border until he had received a ‘definite statement’ from the Polish delegation on the date of the elections and a guarantee that all political parties would be free to participate. Clark Kerr, who had covered the same points in great detail over the course of two private meetings with Mikołajczyk, reinforced the importance of meeting Polish territorial claims to avoid the PPR ‘using our hesitation as an instrument of propaganda to show that all good things in Poland came from Russia while we and the Americans are unsympathetic and

²⁷⁴ CAC, LEGT 1/1, Leggett diary, 29 & 30 July 1945.

²⁷⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/47603/N9922/6/G55, Record of a Meeting at the Foreign Secretary’s House, Potsdam, 31 July 1945.

²⁷⁶ TNA: PRO 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.

niggardly.²⁷⁷ On 31 July at the final meeting with the entire Polish delegation, after Bierut had committed to a date for the elections, Bevin agreed to accept the border.²⁷⁸ Ultimately, then, Bevin did not simply acquiesce to the territorial changes because an agreement had been reached by the US and the Soviet Union in his absence. Once the deadlock on the question of reparations had finally been broken in the US-Soviet talks, it would have been more difficult for Bevin to attach supplementary conditions concerning internal political freedom in Poland. The decisive factor in his decision, however, seems to have been the effect on Mikołajczyk's position. It was only after his talk with Mikołajczyk and subsequent discussion with Clark Kerr that Bevin actually acceded to the agreement reached by the American and Soviet delegation.

Bevin's instructions to Cavendish-Bentinck before his departure for Warsaw serve as another indication 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 they 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. Bevin emphasised that this was not a promise which had expired when Churchill left office; it was not a promise made by the Conservative party; it was a matter that went beyond 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 Staczyk's 'special position' in the regard of the British government.²⁷⁹ Thus, when Bevin first took office it is clear that he envisioned an active, interventionist approach to policy in Poland.

²⁷⁷ Mikołajczyk had also repeated the same points in a private meeting with Eden. CAC, LEGT 1/1, Leggett diary, 25 & 26 July 1945; TNA: PRO 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.

²⁷⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/47603/N9922/6/G55, Record of a meeting between the British and Polish delegations, 31 July 1945.

²⁷⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47706/10656/211/55, Bevin to Cavendish-Bentinck, 23 August 1945.

British Policy after the Transfer of Recognition

Once recognition had been extended to the new Polish government Britain had to face the considerable logistical and administrative difficulties of dissolving the government-in-exile in London. Not only did derecognition involve the liquidation of the exile government's administrative machinery in the UK and abroad, the British government bore ultimate responsibility for the fate of the members of the Polish armed forces under British command, as well as their families. After the Yalta conference Churchill had promised that any Polish servicemen who did not want to return to Poland would be granted British citizenship and allowed to settle in Britain or its empire. With the end of hostilities in Europe and the dissolution of the government-in-exile, the British government had to confront the implications of Churchill's promise and determine how it would be fulfilled in practice.

In a memorandum to Churchill written just days before the withdrawal of recognition, Sargent had outlined the problems that were likely to arise. He foresaw that the British government would have to perform a delicate balancing act in order to avoid 'the dislocation and hardship to the very large number of Poles here and abroad which would ensue from a complete breakdown of the administrative machinery of the London Polish Government', while at the same time safeguarding the British government against the accusation of 'preserving the hold of the London Polish Government upon the Poles outside Poland and the Polish Armed Forces.'²⁸⁰ Although the Foreign Office predicted precisely the difficulties with which it would have to contend, no clear policy had been formulated prior to the transfer of recognition. Officials were forced to address the competing claims of the former government-in-exile and the new government in Warsaw without an overarching policy to guide them. The scope of Britain's commitments and the tangle of rival, mutually hostile authorities quickly became overwhelming. Officials had to consider everything from the fate of Polish state property and Polish foreign legations to a solution for the resettlement of Polish servicemen and displaced persons.

British policy evolved on an *ad hoc* basis in response to questions as they arose, with new issues frequently leading to different, sometimes contradictory directions in policy. Officials instinctively sought to prevent the intrusion of a new set of Polish officials into

²⁸⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/47597/N7778/6/G55, Sargent to Churchill, 29 June 1945.

the administration of foreign legations and in particular to the refugee camps until a final decision had been reached on the question of Polish resettlement. Above all, British officials refused to countenance the interference of the Warsaw government with the Polish armed forces under British command. At the same time, officials were sensitive to accusations from Warsaw that Britain was surreptitiously continuing to support the government-in-exile as a rival authority. They therefore took steps to remove the responsibilities of the former government-in-exile, to diminish its character as an organised body, and to establish British supervision over all of its ongoing activities. British policy was thus characterised by a mixture of guarding against unwanted intrusion from Warsaw in the winding up of the affairs of the London Polish government and a desire to ward off accusations from the Warsaw government that Britain was sponsoring a rival administration.

Without a coherent policy, British consular and embassy staff lacked instructions as to how to contend with representatives of the new Polish government, who quickly appeared and demanded control of the administration of Polish refugee camps under British jurisdiction and of state property at Polish foreign legations. Consequently, the Foreign Office was inundated with requests for guidance from its legations abroad. The exchanges between Reader Bullard, the British ambassador in Tehran and the Foreign Office illustrate the confusion which reigned. Bullard was the first to alert the Foreign Office to the potential for disruption if the new Polish government became involved in the administration of the refugee camps. Bullard expressed alarm at the possibility of a Polpress representative, who claimed to have received authorisation from Warsaw, and whom Bullard described as ‘not the most desirable of men’ who had ‘been identified with a particularly fanatical pro-Lublin policy’, interfering with the Polish refugee population in Persia. Only upon receipt of Bullard’s telegram, it seems, did it occur to the Foreign Office that the difficulties encountered in Tehran were ‘likely to arise in connection with many of the Polish posts abroad.’ Officials agreed that the ‘continuance of an adequate organisation at all places where there are Polish refugee settlements’ was of ‘deep concern’. Acting with the approval of the Treasury, the Foreign Office began planning to instruct its representatives abroad that the British government would

continue to make the necessary financial provisions for Polish refugee settlements and that the existing administrations should be maintained as far as possible.²⁸¹

On 6 July, Bullard appealed to the Foreign Office for further guidance on a different issue. He assumed that property and funds employed for the benefit of Polish refugees should be excluded from the transfer of Polish government property to the new government. In response, the Foreign Office sent a circular telegram instructing its embassies that funds designated for the care of refugees should be withheld from the new Polish government and should ‘remain so far as possible under [the] administration of existing Polish officials.’ Since the British government provided the funds for these camps, the Foreign Office did not intend to hand control over to the new Polish government until satisfied of its ability to ‘assume responsibility and appoint suitable officials.’²⁸² Embassies were instructed to avoid dealing with the representatives or chargés d’affaires who were likely to be appointed by the provisional Polish government *ad interim*. These appointees were likely to be ‘totally inadequate . . . not only from the political point of view but for [the] administration of refugee settlements and affairs.’ At the same time, embassy and consular staff were also to avoid dealing with officials of the former exile government ‘over anything but practical issues.’²⁸³ While the British government did not want interference from the new Polish government, it was careful not to ‘strengthen or perpetuate [the] hold of [the] “London Poles”’.²⁸⁴

Only after receiving a flurry of queries from diplomatic staff on the most mundane issues did the Foreign Office begin to remove the diplomatic privileges previously enjoyed by the representatives of the government-in-exile at its foreign legations. On 17 July the Foreign Office warned Bullard not to allow the Polish chargé d’affaires in Tehran to abscond to Cairo with a radio transmitter at the request of a Polish army general. Similarly, on 24 July the Foreign Office instructed the British ambassador to Cairo, Lord Killearn to cease the practice of sending official packages on behalf of the Polish legation using British diplomatic facilities. Nor was he to provide official stamps allowing Polish couriers passage through Palestine with deliveries of documents and

²⁸¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47597/N7811/6/55, Tehran to Foreign Office, 30 June 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 6 July 1945.

²⁸² TNA: PRO FO 371/47598/N8121/6/55, Tehran to Foreign Office, 6 July 1945; Foreign Office to Tehran, 8 July 1945; FO 371/47599/N8498/6/55, Tehran to Foreign Office, 12 July 1945.

²⁸³ TNA: PRO FO 371/47599/N8513/6/55, Foreign Office to British embassies, 7 July 1945.

²⁸⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/47600/N8577/6/55, Foreign Office to Beirut, 26 July 1945.

parcels. On 28 July Rome was instructed to arrange for the ACC to deny use of cipher facilities to the former Polish legation. Evidence of an absence of clear policy emerges in the wording of the telegrams from Killearn and Bullard. Killearn noted that '[h]aving no instructions to the contrary' he was continuing authorisation for these services to the Polish legation. Bullard expresses sheer bewilderment: 'I do not know whether the Polish army abroad whose property the transmitter was is regarded as still having a legal existence.'²⁸⁵

Out of this confusion the broad lines of a policy began to emerge. The Foreign Office sent definitive instructions to its foreign legations on 28 July, nearly 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.²⁸⁶ 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 and a suitable officer appointed to supervise their activities and expenditure. 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.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/47600/N8686/6/55, Tehran to Foreign Office, 17 July 1945; FO 371/47601/N9043/6/55, Cairo to Foreign Office, 22 July 1945; Foreign Office to Cairo, 24 July 1945; FO 371/47602/N9155/6/55, Rome to Foreign Office, 23 July 1945.

²⁸⁶ TNA: PRO 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.

²⁸⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/47602/N9109/6/55, Secretary of State for Colonies to Kenya, Uganda, Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika Territory, Palestine, 28 July 1945.

Future of the Polish Armed Forces

Of urgent concern to the British government after the transfer of recognition was the need to reach a decision on the fate of the Polish servicemen who had fought under British command throughout the war. By mid-July no concrete policy had emerged. Churchill's post-Yalta pledge dictated that the ex-servicemen would not be repatriated against their will but beyond this commitment the British government had devised no practical means for their resettlement in Britain or its overseas territories. Nor was there a plan in place as to what should be done with the troops in the meantime. On 12 July Warner noted: 'There is not yet any decision of policy here as to whether we wish as many of the Poles in this country and in the forces to return home.'²⁸⁸ Until a clear policy was in place, Churchill reminded the Foreign Office:

It is essential and necessary to our honour that we should continue for the time being and until we can see how matters work out to remain responsible for the maintenance of the Polish Armed Forces and other Poles at home and abroad for whom we are at present responsible through the London Polish Government. We must not divest ourselves of this responsibility.²⁸⁹

For the most part, like Churchill, Foreign Office officials regarded Britain's promise not to forcibly repatriate any Polish citizens under its jurisdiction as a point of principle. On 27 June Hankey submitted a 'plea' to Allen requesting that the British government 'give the best possible deal to the Poles in London' when recognition was withdrawn. 'Inconvenient as their view on Russian-Polish relations may be, deeply as Lublin hate them', wrote Hankey, 'the fact remains that they are our friends and if and when many of them return to Poland . . . the view they take of us will be coloured by the sort of arrangement which we make for them.' Hankey expressed particular concern that no one should be forcibly repatriated. If the British government were to repatriate Polish citizens, it would have to 'accept a certain responsibility for their welfare in Poland and I have grave doubts whether any American or British Embassy is ever likely to have sufficient influence in Poland to give any sort of guarantee for their safety if the Russians change their mind about them at some future date.'²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/47600/N8896/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 12 July 1945.

²⁸⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47597/N7778/6/G55, Churchill to Eden, 1 July 1945.

²⁹⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/47597/N7836/6/G55, Hankey memorandum, 27 June 1945.

In the absence of a clear policy decision, however, and as the enormity of the task of resettling such a large number of people became clear, officials sought to avoid raising expectations within the Polish exile community. In particular, it was not clear whether Churchill's policy would extend only to combatants or to other categories of Polish displaced persons as well. Until these ambiguities had been resolved, the Foreign Office was anxious to avoid making any statement which might ultimately prove misleading. For instance, the Foreign Office instructed its legation in Lebanon not to encourage Poles 'to expect that they may be able to obtain British hospitality or nationality', cautioning that it was 'impossible to say how we shall apply [Churchill's promise] until we have [a] clearer idea of the scale of the problem.'²⁹¹

Until the policy regarding resettlement and repatriation had been finalised, the immediate concern of British officials was to limit the access of representatives from Warsaw to Polish troops. In mid-July representatives of the new Polish government in Paris requested authorisation from the British embassy to send a delegation to the British zone of occupied Germany in order to accelerate the return of Polish deportees. The British Control Commission in Germany replied that 'the Polish situation' was 'not entirely easy' in the occupation zone and requested that the Paris embassy instruct the Polish delegation to make an official application through the Foreign Office. This was clearly intended as a delay tactic.²⁹² On 28 July the British embassy in Paris reported to the Foreign Office that the Polish mission, which had requested permission three weeks earlier to visit the British zone in Germany had in fact been 'sitting in Paris ready to go all [the] time'. The Paris embassy protested that to ask the delegation to resubmit its request through London after so much time had elapsed would make the British appear 'ridiculous' and requested that the Foreign Office consider the application as a matter of urgency. But the Foreign Office refused to grant representatives of the Warsaw government access to the Poles in Germany. Warner explained that there had been warnings of a complete breakdown in discipline in the Polish displaced persons camps if the transfer from the existing liaison officers to emissaries from Warsaw were not conducted with the utmost care. 'We have', asserted Warner, 'therefore no intention of being rushed in this matter' particularly as the Polish mission had approached the Paris

²⁹¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47600/N8577/6/55, Foreign Office to Beirut, 26 July 1945; N8896/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 12 July 1945.

²⁹² TNA: PRO FO 371/47602/N9505/6/55, Delegation of the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity to British Embassy, Paris, 6 July 1945; Paris to Political Division, Control Commission for Germany, 20 July 1945; Control Commission for Germany to Paris, 20 July 1945.

embassy directly ‘without a word being said to His Majesty’s Government.’ Matters concerning the Poles in Germany were to be discussed in the first place between the two governments.²⁹³ Thus, in this interim period, before Britain had arrived at a firm policy on the repatriation issue, the Foreign Office approach was to do nothing to discourage as many Poles as possible from returning, but at the same time restricting access by the Warsaw authorities to the troops.²⁹⁴

Within the Polish exile community there was considerable pressure to reject repatriation. This was especially true for members of the Polish Second Corps in Italy, most of whom came from parts of eastern Poland which had been incorporated into the Soviet Union. Within the corps, opting for repatriation was equated with sympathy for the communist regime in Warsaw, and was therefore regarded as a ‘betrayal of the national cause’. The tone was very much set by Anders, who was implacably hostile to the Soviet Union. Part of the pressure on the servicemen to reject repatriation also came from the Polish authorities in London. The former exile government, which remained in existence, although no longer recognised by any of the major powers, ‘aimed to act as a thorn in the side of the Warsaw regime’, by calling international attention to its abuse of power. Keith Sword describes the attempt by the former exile government to hold on to its influence over the Polish community in Britain, in effect to create a ‘state-in-exile’. The exile government wanted ‘the émigré settlement to have a mass character’ in order to bolster its position. According to Sword, the underlying reason for the former exile government’s refusal to accept derecognition and dissolve itself was the conviction that it would soon return to Poland ‘in view of the presumed imminence of confrontation between Stalinist Russia and the West.’ Thus the former exile authorities sought to keep the Polish armed forces intact and ready for the expected return to Poland.²⁹⁵

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

²⁹³ TNA: PRO FO 371/47603/N9582/6/55, Paris to Foreign Office, 28 July 1945; Foreign Office to Paris, 4 August 1945.

²⁹⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/47600/N8896/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 12 July 1945.

²⁹⁵ Sword, *Identity in Flux*, 26-7; Keith Sword et al, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939-1950* (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1989), 188-90.

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 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 armed forces 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.²⁹⁶ 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.²⁹⁷ 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. All the ships of the Polish merchant marine were placed under charter to Britain.²⁹⁸

By early August the Foreign Office had settled on a policy which conformed to Churchill's pledge while still aiming at repatriating 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. Contrary to some accounts of British repatriation policy, however, the British government did not try to obscure the reality of the situation inside Poland in an attempt to trick more ex-servicemen to return.²⁹⁹ 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

²⁹⁶ Hope, *Abandoned Legion*, 81, 95.

²⁹⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/47598/N8209/6/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 10 July 1945.

²⁹⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/47600/N8854/6/G55, Foreign Office to Terminal, 19 July 1945; N8686/6/55, Foreign Office to Tehran, 20 July 1945.

²⁹⁹ Ostrowski, 'Return to Poland', 16.

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.³⁰⁰

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 Modelska 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 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

³⁰⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/47603/N10002/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 8 August 1945; FO 371/47604/N10153/6/G55, Warner Memorandum, 9 August 1945.

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 Modelska's mission.³⁰¹

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'.³⁰² 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 requested that the Warsaw embassy staff find out from Mikołajczyk how Britain could be of most help. 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 provisional government to fulfil the assurances given at Potsdam concerning political freedom in Poland.³⁰³

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

³⁰¹ TNA: PRO 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.

³⁰² TNA: PRO FO 371/47604/N10216/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 8 August 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 12 & 14 August 1945.

³⁰³ TNA: PRO 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.

at a reception at the Polish embassy in Moscow, where members of the Polish government were engaged in negotiations on reparations with the Soviet Union.

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.³⁰⁴ 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.³⁰⁵

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 carried out despite a series of warnings from Cavendish-Bentinck.³⁰⁶ 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

³⁰⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/47604/N10503/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 16 August 1945.

³⁰⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/47612/N15847/6/55, Warner memo, 15 November 1945.

³⁰⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/47606/N11434/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 1 September 1945; N11773/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 5 September 1945.

backbone of police terror,’ directing the arrests that were occurring daily.³⁰⁷ Hankey described the country as a ‘*polizeistaat*’ because the security police controlled ‘everything’ in ‘every district’.³⁰⁸ 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’.³⁰⁹

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. ‘I submit’, wrote the ambassador, ‘that the possibility, if not probability, of the verdict of the electorate being set aside should be taken into account.’ 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 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’. In light of this information, Warner ventured that the situation in Poland had reached a critical juncture, requiring the British government to set aside its

³⁰⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/47606/N11832/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 7 September 1945.

³⁰⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56446/N10739/96/55, Hankey to Warner, 17 August 1945.

³⁰⁹ The amnesty came into force on 21 August. TNA: PRO 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.

preoccupation with the repatriation of Polish citizens under its jurisdiction and apply heavier public pressure on Warsaw. ‘I rather doubt whether we should hold our hand any longer on this account. If the courts are communised a crucial phase in the struggle will have gone against us.’³¹⁰

Council of Foreign Ministers, London

In view of the deterioration of conditions inside Poland, Cavendish-Bentinck strongly urged that Bevin make clear to Byrnes and Molotov at the upcoming meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London that the British government was ‘far from satisfied’ that the promise of free and unfettered elections could possibly be carried out effectively in an atmosphere of police terror, persecution of political parties and a regimented press. Bevin should push the Americans and the Soviets to press the Polish government on these issues. Finally, he suggested that Bevin use the conference as a chance to insist on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Polish territory. Warner agreed with Cavendish-Bentinck’s approach; Foreign Office thinking was moving along the same lines; officials had already suggested to Bevin that he take advantage of the upcoming meeting to urge Byrnes to adopt a more active approach to the domestic political situation in Poland. Following Cavendish-Bentinck’s suggestion, Warner, in conjunction with Cadogan, 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.’³¹¹

Bevin accepted the proposal and the Foreign Office officials drew up the wording of the resolution and devised a careful strategy to counter Soviet negotiating tactics. The Foreign Office suspected that the Soviets might try to derail any discussion of the internal political situation in Poland with accusations that Britain was purposely obstructing the liquidation of the former Polish government-in-exile and the transfer of command of the Polish armed forces abroad. Shortly before the Council meeting, the Foreign Office had received a note from Osóbka-Morawski, which contained ‘a series

³¹⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/47607/N12148/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 12 September 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 19 September 1945.

³¹¹ TNA: PRO 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.

of vague, unsubstantiated and exaggerated accusations about the activities of the former Polish Government in London'. The Foreign Office concluded that the Polish government had undertaken this initiative in concert with the Soviet government and saw it as a signal that Molotov would attempt to obstruct British efforts to raise the issue of political oppression in Poland by insisting on a discussion of the liquidation of the former London government and the return of the Polish armed forces.³¹² If the Soviets were to repeat these charges, the British would rebuff them by insisting that these were bilateral Anglo-Polish issues, which were in any case beyond the competence of the Council. The British would then resolutely steer the discussion back to the issue of conditions inside Poland, which, they would insist 'was of considerably greater importance.' Bevin also intended to challenge the Soviet Union over the withdrawal of the Red Army and the NKVD from Polish territory.³¹³

This initial determination to take a strong line on the internal situation in Poland dissipated as the meeting, which opened in London on 11 September, progressed. The first task of the Council was to draw up peace treaties for the German "satellite" states of Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland.³¹⁴ The atmosphere at the conference quickly soured due to disagreement over the peace treaties for the Balkan states. On 20 September, the British delegation showed the resolution on Poland to the Americans, who were reluctant 'to add another to the causes of friction in the Council.' The prevailing tension and the lack of American support for the initiative prompted Bevin to shelve the resolution on Poland. Informing Cavendish-Bentinck that the British delegation had not tabled the resolution, Warner promised that they would still try to raise the issue but added that 'until the Council extricates itself from a very, very sticky Balkan morass', he could not 'prophesy success'. 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 some supervision by representatives of the three signatories to Yalta. Cavendish-Bentinck warned that if the resolution were not

³¹² TNA: PRO FO 371/47608/N12801/6/55, Osóbka-Morawski to Bevin, 8 September 1945.

³¹³ TNA: PRO 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.

³¹⁴ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 37.

tabled, Bierut and his followers would conclude that Britain had ‘lost interest in Poland’.³¹⁵

The Foreign Office agreed that the opportunity to raise the Polish issue in the formal context of the Council should not be missed. Warner assured Cavendish-Bentinck: ‘We are not letting the matter rest . . . and shall press it again in season and out of season. . . [F]rom Moley [Sargent] downwards have no doubt that it would really be disastrous if the present meeting breaks up without something being done on the lines we have suggested.’ At the end of September, as the conference drew to a tense and unsatisfactory close, Sargent proposed raising the question of Poland after all, noting that it was doubtful whether this could make the atmosphere any worse than it already was. Sargent suggested that Bevin and 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 tried again two days later: ‘[I]f Mikołajczyk, Staczyk, & 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.’³¹⁶

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. One source of serious discord at the conference was Soviet animosity over what it perceived as western intrusion on its sphere of interest in Eastern Europe by the Anglo-American refusal to recognise the Romanian and Bulgarian governments.³¹⁷ These circumstances help to explain Bevin’s comment that raising the

³¹⁵ TNA: PRO 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.

³¹⁶ TNA: PRO 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.

³¹⁷ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 37.

issue of the Polish political situation with Molotov would only undermine Mikołajczyk's cause. As Bevin's comments in the Foreign Office minutes imply, he might have feared that any British objection to the state of affairs in Poland would be regarded by the Soviets in the same light as British views on Romania and Bulgaria, and might ultimately have the opposite of the desired effect, potentially leading the Soviets to exert tighter control over Poland.

It seems more likely, however, that by this point Bevin was already moving towards the conclusion that Eastern Europe would be dominated by the Soviet Union, and for Britain to do more than issue mild protests about conditions there would be to risk a deterioration in relations which it could ill afford.³¹⁸ There is some evidence that Bevin's thinking was starting to move in this direction. In an aide-mémoire to the Americans ahead of the London meeting, referring to the 'Balkan and Danubian area',³¹⁹ 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'.³²⁰ He did not refer explicitly to Poland, but his message serves as an indication of the way his views towards the region were beginning to take shape. The message also suggests that he was seeking to limit potential sources of conflict in Britain's relationship with the Soviet Union. Even after the disastrous end to the London conference, Bevin had not yet given up hope of establishing cooperation with the Soviet Union. The outcome of the conference, however, was an unmistakable indication that relations with the Soviets would be far from easy, and it is very likely that it reinforced his sense of the importance of eliminating as many sources of conflict as possible. At this point, Britain also had very low expectations about long-term American involvement in Europe.³²¹ 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 added to Bevin's sense of the importance of keeping relations with the Soviets on an even keel.³²² Bevin's desire for an improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations was very much in evidence at the interim Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Moscow in December 1945, where 'all three participants . . .

³¹⁸ Ibid., 50-1.

³¹⁹ Austria, Czechoslovakia, the ex-German "satellite" states in the Balkans and Yugoslavia.

³²⁰ *FRUS Diplomatic Papers, 1945. General: Political and Economic Matters*, vol. 2. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 102.

³²¹ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 41.

³²² Burridge, *Attlee*, 221.

indulged in an orgy of inessential concessions' and Bevin sought to impress upon Stalin 'the peaceful . . . and progressive nature of British policy'.³²³ I would argue that this imperative to restore Anglo-Soviet relations, particularly in light of apparent American unreliability, explains Bevin's change of tactics on the Polish question at the London meeting. From this point on, it is evident that he sought to begin the process of disentangling Poland from Anglo-Soviet relations.

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 in London. 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.'³²⁴

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

³²³ Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, 246.

³²⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/47610/N13757/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 11 October 1945.

on the lines that he proposed. Clark Kerr was instructed to make the approach to the Soviets.³²⁵ Bevin's response to Cavendish Bentinck's proposals serves as an indication of his thinking 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 had 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 'repatriate Polish nationals at a considerably faster rate than the Polish authorities are prepared to receive them'. 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 Zryw Narodowy 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.³²⁶

The PPR also stepped up its attacks on the PSL in the autumn of 1945. Gomułka delivered a speech to PPR delegates in Warsaw in which he vilified Mikołajczyk while the latter was in Québec attending a UN conference. Gomułka claimed that the PSL received support from extremist elements and denounced Mikołajczyk as the 'trojan-

³²⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/47610/N13757/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 11 October 1945; Foreign Office Minutes, 14-30 October 1945.

³²⁶ TNA: PRO 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.

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.³²⁷ Offering his analysis of both his meeting with Bierut and 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. He concluded that the PPR would resist 'to the death' the establishment of 'democratic rights, as they are understood in western Europe'. He warned that the PSL would have to 'choose between co-operation with the P.P.R. on the latter's own terms or face implacable opposition'.³²⁸

In early December, the Polish government launched an anti-British propaganda campaign with a twofold purpose. It served both as a useful means for the Polish government to avoid questions regarding the internal political situation and it 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'.³²⁹ 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

³²⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/47611/N14731//6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 25 October 1945.

³²⁸ TNA: PRO 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.

³²⁹ 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: PRO 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.

Soviet Union because the ‘Poles had paid with their blood for arms supplied to them for the common struggle.’³³⁰

Similarly, when the first train-load of Polish troops arrived from Italy, Marshal Rola-ymierski issued an order condemning the return of the soldiers as individuals without arms or equipment. In fact, the soldiers had been sent back with their personal arms and equipment. In contrast, Rola-ymierski 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-ymierski, Gomułka contrasted the British approach unfavourably with that of the Soviet Union, which was assisting with the reconstruction of power plants and drainage systems.³³¹

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. Mikołajczyk confirmed that the PSL was coming under attack with increasing frequency. At the end of November, Mikołajczyk told Cavendish-Bentinck that he had a ‘ceaseless fight to keep any clubs or organisations formed under the auspices of his party 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.’³³²

³³⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/47613/N16634/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 4 December 1945.

³³¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/47614/N17048/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 6 December 1945; N16998/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 10 December 1945.

³³² TNA: PRO 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.

Thus, it became clear by the end of 1945 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 a firm 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, however, Bevin's view of the likelihood of ongoing Anglo-Soviet cooperation had shifted. While at this point he believed he had no choice but to continue to pursue an improvement in relations, the difficulties he had encountered at the first Council of Foreign Ministers meeting quickly led him to conclude that this could only be achieved by removing all the points of friction except those which were essential to British interests. 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 3: The Electoral Bloc to the Referendum, January-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. Foreign Office officials responded to the deteriorating conditions with an affirmation of their strong sense of ongoing commitment to the democratic opposition in Poland. The Foreign Office was unequivocal about its responsibility towards Mikołajczyk. At the end of May, for instance, Hankey minuted that if Britain stopped supporting Mikołajczyk, he would be murdered or arrested. 'That would be our fault', he stated simply.³³³

At the same time, a far-reaching reevaluation of British policy towards the Soviet Union was taking place in the Foreign Office. Alarmed by apparent Soviet ambitions for expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean and the crisis over the Soviet refusal to withdraw from northern Iran,³³⁴ the Foreign Office reassessed its views of Soviet policy and intentions. The general conclusion across the British policymaking establishment was that the lines between Soviet security concerns and Soviet imperialism were becoming increasingly blurred. Such was the concern about Soviet expansionist ambitions that the Foreign Office established a Russia Committee in March 1946 to collate information on Soviet actions in different areas in order to coordinate a British counterstrategy.³³⁵ Bevin's own views about Soviet intentions were broadly in line with

³³³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56439/N6471/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 24 May 1946.

³³⁴ Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 236-7.

³³⁵ Raymond Smith, 'A Climate of Opinion: British Officials and the Development of British Soviet Policy, 1945-7', *International Affairs* 64, 4 (Autumn 1988): 635-6; Ray Merrick, 'The Russia Committee

those of his officials but he did not adopt an overtly confrontational approach. At this stage he even sought to avoid discussion of the direction of Foreign Office policy in Cabinet,³³⁶ partly because significant sections of both the Cabinet and the wider Labour party objected to a foreign policy which they perceived as anti-Soviet, and partly because Bevin himself still held out some hope that Anglo-Soviet relations could be restored to a better footing.³³⁷

This internal opposition was one factor which influenced Bevin's policy towards Poland. It served to reinforce the importance of limiting the number of areas of Anglo-Soviet disagreement, an approach which Bevin had already begun to adopt after the first Council of Foreign Ministers meeting. Open confrontation must be restricted to areas of key British interest. There must be no public set-to with the Soviet Union over Poland. Similarly, Bevin sought to limit open criticism of the Polish provisional government. In the same way that much of the Labour party favoured strong relations with the Soviet Union, there was an inclination to regard the new Polish government as progressive, a tendency which was strengthened by the visit of a parliamentary delegation to Poland early in 1946.³³⁸ Bevin appears to have been influenced by the Labour delegates, who reported favourably on the dynamism of the PPS and the PPR. In February, the Foreign Office and Cavendish-Bentinck were obliged to prevail upon Bevin not to withdraw British support for the PSL. This incident underscores the way in which Bevin's approach was beginning to diverge from that of his officials. In the view of the Northern Department, the reassessment of Soviet intentions strengthened the importance of resisting abuses by the Soviet Union or by the Soviet-supported Polish government. For Bevin, on the other hand, rising doubts about the prospect of long-term Anglo-Soviet cooperation pushed him further towards the conclusion that the country was "lost" to the Soviet sphere.

Another important constraint on British policy towards Poland was the position of the US. At this stage Bevin was essentially pursuing a dual strategy towards long-term

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.

³³⁶ For example, Bevin approved a paper by Warner on the Soviet 'campaign' against Britain and the appropriate British response. An abbreviated version of the paper was sent to Attlee and those ministers attending a Dominions conference but about half of the members of Cabinet did not receive a copy.

Smith, 'Climate of Opinion', 636.

³³⁷ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 64.

³³⁸ Victor Rothwell, 'Robin Hankey', in John Zametica, ed., *British Officials and British Foreign Policy* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 162.

cooperation with the Soviet Union: continuing to work towards an improvement in relations and outwardly maintaining the impression of unity, while at the same time beginning to prepare for a possible breach in relations, most importantly regarding a possible division of Germany.³³⁹ Keeping up the impression of cooperation with the Soviets was particularly important as long as American intentions remained unclear. In early 1946, Anglo-American relations were slightly chilly, and the US still appeared determined to achieve better relations with the Soviet Union. The importance of keeping British policy consistent with that of the US was reinforced by British financial dependence on the Americans, following the agreement of an American loan to Britain in December 1945. The immediate postwar period saw a resurgence of American isolationist sentiment, and widespread resentment both among the public and in Congress at having to extend further loans abroad.³⁴⁰

Consequently, Bevin was reluctant to intervene on behalf of the PSL except in conjunction with the Americans. Every proposal to protest the provisional government's abnegation of its obligations under the terms of the Yalta, Moscow and Potsdam agreements was vetted first with the State Department. On several occasions, when the US proved unwilling to act jointly with Britain in a demarche in Warsaw, or at least to proceed along similar lines, Bevin chose not to continue. This need to remain in lockstep with the State Department stands in contrast to the wartime and immediate postwar period, when Britain pursued its own policy towards Poland, largely independent of the US. Overall, British policy towards Poland in the first half of 1946 lacked resolute initiative. This approach was particularly evident in Britain's weak response to the PPR's pre-referendum campaign of intimidation and to the falsification of the referendum results. British equivocation occurred at a time when the Polish opposition badly needed robust international support.

³³⁹ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 35.

³⁴⁰ The loan agreement was divided into two parts: a financial agreement which consisted of a settlement of the Lend-Lease agreement and a loan of \$3,750 million to be repaid over 50 years; the second part was a commitment to the establishment of a multilateral system of international trade through ratification of the Bretton Woods agreement and to the elimination of preferential trade and the reduction of tariffs. Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 201-202, 205.

Electoral Bloc

In early 1946, the PPR pressed forward with the idea of a single electoral list of government parties at the elections. 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.³⁴¹ 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 was appointed secretary-general of the party in November 1945 and who favoured close cooperation with the PPR, prevailed in this power struggle to secure control of the leadership.³⁴²

On 4 November, the PPS Supreme Council resolved to join the electoral bloc,³⁴³ 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.³⁴⁴ Although dissenting elements remained in some branches of the party, from this point onward the leadership of the PPS was committed to cooperation with the PPR.³⁴⁵ 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.³⁴⁶ He made vague, general statements stressing the importance of democratic elections but stopped short of giving a definitive response.

³⁴¹ Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 237.

³⁴² A.J. Pra mowska, 'The Polish Socialist Party, 1945-1948', *East European Quarterly*, 34, no. 3 (September 2000): 339-41, 343.

³⁴³ Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 237.

³⁴⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56437/N4601/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 3 April 1946.

³⁴⁵ 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. Pra mowska, 'The Polish Socialist Party', 355.

³⁴⁶ Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 477.

The Foreign Office objected to the idea of the bloc, ‘both on principle and in [the] special case of Poland’, noting that a single electoral list ‘reduces elections to a plebiscite and is in complete conflict with the principle of representative government’. Further, in Poland, a single list of candidates would not ‘conform to the Polish Government’s pledge to hold free and unfettered elections in accordance with the Yalta Agreement’ and would ‘merely result in [a] continuation of the present administration in a reconstituted form’.³⁴⁷

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 approvingly 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.³⁴⁸

Negotiations regarding the single electoral list began between the PPR, the PPS and the PSL on 7 February.³⁴⁹ 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 Cavendish-Bentinck, a couple of possible replacements for Mikołajczyk had either been incarcerated or killed. Further, Mikołajczyk’s life was ‘what the insurance companies

³⁴⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/56432/N695/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 14 January 1946; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 21 January 1946; FO 371/56432/N754/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 14 January 1946; FO 371/56432/N1216/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 29 January 1946.

³⁴⁸ TNA: PRO 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.

³⁴⁹ Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland* , 243.

describe as a “poor risk”. The ambassador declared that he would be ‘pleasantly surprised’ if Mikołajczyk were ‘not bumped off before the elections’.³⁵⁰ Mikołajczyk himself ‘seemed . . . rather nervous and 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.³⁵¹

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 internal political developments in Poland. Following a meeting in early February with Zygmunt Modzelewski, the Polish vice-minister of foreign affairs, 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. Bevin’s concern extended beyond Poland to all of the Soviet “satellite” countries. He sought to avoid giving the impression that the British government was exclusively committed to supporting the political parties which were widely regarded as anti-Soviet.³⁵²

It is difficult to identify any particular aspect of Bevin’s discussion with Modzelewski that might have prompted him to request the policy review. The main issues covered were the Warsaw government’s objection to the continued presence of the Arciszewski government in London, the slow pace of troop repatriation and the negotiations for an Anglo-Polish financial agreement which were then in progress. Bevin’s only

³⁵⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/56433/N1655/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Allen, 23 January 1946.

³⁵¹ TNA: PRO 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.

³⁵² TNA: PRO FO 371/56434/N2093/34/55, Private letter from Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 12 February 1946.

instructions immediately after the meeting were to ask Allen to approach the War Office and the Treasury about the feasibility of Modzelewski's suggestion to make a payment of £10 to Polish servicemen upon their return to Poland. Sargent's letter to Cavendish-Bentinck does suggest a link between the meeting and the policy review request:

'Between you and me, the Secretary of State after his interview with Modzelewski . . . directed that we should not get ourselves into the position of committing ourselves too exclusively to 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'.³⁵³

Bevin's doubts appear to have 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.³⁵⁴ In the report which it issued upon returning to Britain, the delegation commented favourably on the progress already achieved by the Polish provisional government in rebuilding Polish 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.³⁵⁵ Cavendish-Bentinck reported that the Labour delegates, having spent most of their time with members of the PPS, had come away with a positive view of the government, coupled with the impression that Mikołajczyk's followers lacked the energy of the PPR and PPS supporters.³⁵⁶

The British delegates' impression of PSL weakness was partly due to the constant presence of minders from the security police who kept Mikołajczyk's supporters away from the members of the delegation. Cavendish-Bentinck noted that the presence of the

³⁵³ M.E. Pelly et al, eds., *DBFPO, Series I, vol. 6: Eastern Europe, August 1945– April 1946* (London: HMSO, 1991), 269–74; TNA: PRO FO 371/56434/N2093/34/55, Private letter from Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 12 February 1946.

³⁵⁴ The Labour members of the delegation were Harry Hynd, John Rankin, Bernard Taylor, Stephen Taylor and Harry Thorneycroft. The remaining members were Philip Piratin (Communist) and Tufton Beamish (Conservative). TNA: PRO FO 371/47826/N16424/16424/55, 14 December 1945; N17806/16424/55, 15 & 21 December 1945.

³⁵⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56459/N2810/47/55, 'Report of Parliamentary Delegation to Poland', January 1946. Beamish did not endorse the final report.

³⁵⁶ TNA: PRO 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.

security police deterred people from speaking frankly to members of the delegation. There was little or no opportunity for delegates to venture off by themselves or to arrange meetings with opposition supporters autonomously. Cavendish-Bentinck reported that the embassy had had a ‘good deal of trouble’ with the Polish government, which had attempted to determine the delegation’s entire itinerary. Only ‘after a great deal of weary work’ by Hankey had the Warsaw embassy been able to arrange for the delegation to visit places of its own choosing. Cavendish-Bentinck tried to preserve the independence of the delegation by assigning to it two Polish-speaking members of the embassy staff. It was not, however, possible to entirely avoid the undesirable scenario he had foreseen when the idea of the delegation was first conceived: the delegation was ‘bear-led by representatives of the Polish government and carefully sheltered by the Security Police’. It had proved impossible to prevent the Polish government from sending their own representatives on the delegation’s tour ‘without an unusually flaming row’ and so the embassy had acquiesced.³⁵⁷

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. The timing of Sargent’s private letter to Cavendish-Bentinck in mid-February informing the ambassador that Bevin had raised the possibility of withdrawing support for the PSL suggests that the report might have had some influence in this respect. Also of significance was the delegation’s impression of the role of the Soviet Union in Poland: ‘We had no evidence of direct Russian interference in Polish internal affairs’, stated the report. While the delegates acknowledged the ‘openly expressed dislike of the Russians’ among the Polish population, they downplayed its significance, attributing the animosity to ‘the facts of Polish history’, and the poor conduct of some of the Soviet troops in Poland.³⁵⁸

This conclusion was in keeping with the commonly held view in the Labour party, which acknowledged 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, according to this point

³⁵⁷ TNA: PRO 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.

³⁵⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56459/N2810/47/55, ‘Report of Parliamentary Delegation to Poland’, January 1946.

of view, should be to assuage Soviet fears by making a concerted effort to improve relations. Essentially, a considerable proportion of the Labour party, as well as the Cabinet, adhered to the wartime and immediate postwar view of the prospects for ongoing cooperation with the Soviet Union, whereas Bevin's experience of trying to reach accommodation with the Soviets in late 1945 and early 1946 had led him to conclude that this was an unlikely scenario. By this point rumblings of discontent were beginning to roll through the Labour party over Bevin's failure to achieve better relations with the Soviet Union. The first UN General Assembly meeting, held in London, had become mired in conflict, with Bevin and Andrei Vychinsky, the Soviet deputy foreign minister trading shots over Greece and Iran.³⁵⁹ On 21 February Bevin had to report the disappointing outcome of the meeting to the House of Commons in the context of a planned debate on Anglo-Soviet relations. The debate plainly showed that there was a widespread refusal on the part of the House 'to believe that the conflict with the Soviet Union had gone beyond the point where conciliation was still possible.' It was clear to Bevin that he had to tread carefully, providing reassurance to MPs about the prospects of Anglo-Soviet cooperation but without yielding on points that were essential to British interests.³⁶⁰ Thus, even as his own views were beginning to change, Bevin sought to maintain the façade of Anglo-Soviet cooperation.

In the course of the Commons debate, instead of making a formal objection to the single electoral list in Poland as Mikołajczyk and the Foreign Office had hoped, Bevin 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 at all to the single list was of significantly less use in helping Mikołajczyk to withstand PPR pressure to agree to join the electoral bloc.³⁶¹ Bevin's performance in the debate and his indication to Sargent that he was anxious to avoid the impression that Britain was exclusively supporting the anti-Soviet political parties in Eastern Europe, suggest that he was sensitive to internal criticism of his foreign policy and was seeking ways to counter the charges against him. The delegation's favourable view of the Polish government, and its conclusions about the benign quality of Soviet involvement in the country can only have served to reinforce Bevin's decision to consider a change in British policy in Poland as part of a broader attempt to assuage his critics.

³⁵⁹ Jones, *Russia Complex*, 121-2.

³⁶⁰ Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Minister*, 222-3.

³⁶¹ 419 HC Deb 5s, cols. 1125-1126.

Foreign Office counteroffensive

The Foreign Office sought to counter the effect of the delegation's report and thwart Bevin's attempt to change the course of British policy towards Poland. The Foreign Office 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 victory it considered 'the only hope of ejecting the present administration'.³⁶² From the Foreign Office point of view, Bevin's prevarication 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.³⁶³ It was now vitally important to shore up Mikołajczyk's position and reaffirm British support for the Polish opposition.³⁶⁴

In a memo to the secretary of state, Sargent sought to steer British policy towards Poland back to its previous course. He conceded that the British government should 'be careful not to become associated too closely with one particular party' in all the countries within the Soviet sphere of influence but warned that 'if we do not give a certain amount of support and encouragement to the non-totalitarians they will lose heart and abandon the dangerous game of opposing the Communist pressure to which they are being continually subjected.' Crucially, he added that 'it may well be said that it is only the knowledge that the British and American Governments are interested in their safety that preserves them from being liquidated out of hand by the local Communists.' Further, Sargent clearly indicated 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.'³⁶⁵

By mid-March, Sargent and Allen had managed to persuade Bevin that no revision of British policy towards Poland was necessary. Sargent reaffirmed the aim of British policy as continuing 'to work for the weakening of Communist predominance in Poland

³⁶² TNA: PRO FO 371/56433/N1551/34/12, Cavendish-Bentinck to Allen, 23 January 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 6 February 1946; PRO FO 371/56434/N2397/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20 February 1946.

³⁶³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56433/N1931/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 22 February 1946.

³⁶⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56434/N2093/34/55, Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 12 February 1946.

³⁶⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56434/N2624/34/55, Sargent Memo, 14 February 1946.

and for something approaching a representative regime. . . . In deciding upon the extent and manner of our support to Mikolajczyk, our criterion must be . . . whether our action will do the anti-Communist cause, represented by Mikolajczyk's party, good or harm.³⁶⁶ Nevertheless, although officials succeeded in restoring British policy, 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 much more forceful display of international support for the PSL's right to contest the elections independently. The Foreign Office itself regarded such a show of support as essential to the survival of the Polish opposition, as evidenced by Sargent's memo. Bevin's House of Commons statement, however, had suggested that Britain did not intend to interfere beyond perfunctory reminders and pro forma protests in internal Polish affairs. The British failure to show robust support for the PSL at this juncture weakened Mikołajczyk's position and helped to embolden the PPR, with a significant increase in the frequency and severity of attacks on the PSL between February and May 1946.³⁶⁷

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. The PSL rejected the terms offered by the PPR and the PPS, which stipulated that the PSL would have 20 per cent of the seats in a single list. The PPR and its satellites would have 70 per cent of the seats and Popiel's SP would have the remaining 10 per cent. 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 told Cavendish-Bentinck that he had 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.³⁶⁸

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

³⁶⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56435/N2912/34/55, Warner Minutes, 6 March 1946; Sargent to Cavendish-Bentinck, 13 March 1946.

³⁶⁷ Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 478.

³⁶⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56434/N2476/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 24 February 1946; PRO FO 371/56435/N3312/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 5 March 1946.

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.³⁶⁹ 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. Cavendish-Bentinck reported 'a marked increase in widespread arrests by the Security Police.' Finally, in 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.³⁷⁰ 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.³⁷¹

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 timing of the referendum would inevitably require a postponement of the elections. The British Foreign Office regarded the whole exercise as nothing more than a stalling tactic to further delay the elections. Cavendish-Bentinck warned that the PPR's intention might be to use the referendum to avoid holding elections at all. He insisted that the announcement of the referendum necessitated some

³⁶⁹ Polonsky, 'Stalin and the Poles', 478.

³⁷⁰ TNA: PRO 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.

³⁷¹ TNA: PRO 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.

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 1946.³⁷²

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 also ‘made it abundantly clear’ that 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 renegeing on the Yalta, Moscow and Potsdam agreements: they had postponed elections and had 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 both American and Soviet support in applying pressure to see the fulfilment of the undertakings made at Yalta, Moscow and Potsdam.³⁷³

The Foreign Office dismissed the idea of trying to enlist Soviet cooperation in applying pressure on the Polish administration on the grounds that it was ‘highly improbable that the Soviet Government would fall into line with any suggestions which we might put to them on this score’. 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’. The response to Cavendish-Bentinck’s message underscores how important it had become to Bevin to keep the Polish issue separate from Anglo-Soviet

³⁷² TNA: PRO 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.

³⁷³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56436/N4094/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 March 1946.

relations. There is a particularly telling comment in the Foreign Office minutes which indicates that officials were aware that changes in the Polish internal situation could only – or at least with the best chance of success – be brought about via British pressure on the Soviets: ‘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.’³⁷⁴

In addition to concerns about the Anglo-Soviet relationship, Bevin did not want to take any action on Poland until after elections had been held in Greece.³⁷⁵ Bevin faced strong opposition from within the Labour party to his Greek policy. A British occupation force, originally sent in by Churchill at the end of 1944, continued to support an 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. Bevin had managed to withstand calls for the withdrawal of British forces but nevertheless, an indefinite military occupation of Greece was unsustainable and a lasting solution depended on a resolution of the political conflict.³⁷⁶ Thus, Bevin’s priority was to see elections held in Greece as soon as possible.³⁷⁷

The ongoing presence of British troops in Greece and British support for one political faction over another undermined Britain’s moral authority in complaining about the conduct of affairs in the countries of Eastern Europe. Bullock points out that ‘Soviet propaganda agencies took full advantage of the awkward situation in which the British found themselves in Greece’ and ‘[w]henever Russian actions in Eastern Europe were questioned, Molotov’s stock retort was to demand the withdrawal of British troops from Greece’.³⁷⁸ Further, in January 1946, the Soviet Union had brought a formal complaint about the 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

³⁷⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56436/N4094/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 29 March 1946.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Burridge, *Attlee*, 174; Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Volume 2: Minister of Labour, 1940-1945* (London, 1967), 340-347; Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 40-42, 160-163; Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, 360.

³⁷⁷ Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 134-137; Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 162-163.

³⁷⁸ Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 163.

taking a vote, this incident highlights the sensitivity which surrounded the Greek issue and its potential to complicate British relations with the Soviet Union in particular.³⁷⁹ Given the Soviet tactic of obstructing any discussion of the situation in Eastern Europe with barbed ripostes about Britain's position in Greece, Bevin regarded as futile any attempt to intervene in the case of Poland until the Greek elections were safely out of the way. 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.

Anglo-American representations in Warsaw

Once the Greek elections had taken place on 31 March, the Foreign Office did try to initiate a joint Anglo-American approach to the Polish provisional government to insist that they fulfil the Yalta, Moscow and Potsdam undertakings. The Foreign Office also hoped to force the Polish government to ease its campaign of repression against the opposition. The Foreign Office viewed the matter with some urgency. The time had come to 'make a concerted effort to arrest the present unsatisfactory trend of developments', minuted Allen. 'It is certain that if we allow the situation to deteriorate much longer without taking any steps to place our views on record there will be no prospect of saving the cause of democracy in Poland.' After a discussion with Bevin, it was agreed that a joint protest should be coordinated with the US. The Foreign Office hoped that a united front would have more clout.³⁸⁰

In a memorandum to the State Department, the Foreign Office urged that Britain and the US take action 'to prevent the Polish Provisional Government gradually producing a situation in which any hope of moderately free elections will be frustrated for good and the dictatorship of a Communist minority is permanently established.' Specifically, 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

³⁷⁹ 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.

³⁸⁰ TNA: PRO 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.

balance of government. Britain also pressed the State Department to consider demanding the abolition of the Ministry of Public Security and the transfer of control of the security police to Kiernik as minister of the interior. 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. John Balfour, now chargé d'affaires in the British embassy in Washington, stressed to Dean Acheson, undersecretary of state, and C. Burke Elbrick, assistant chief of the Division of Eastern European Affairs, the importance the British government attached to the proposals in the memorandum. Balfour told the State Department officials that his government had concluded that 'drastic action on the part of the British and American Governments [was] necessary' to avoid the complete elimination of the democratic opposition.³⁸¹

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 'only . . . rather half-hearted informal representations as a first step'.³⁸² The State Department instructed 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.³⁸³

The Foreign Office had planned to 'make the strongest representations' possible to the Polish government.³⁸⁴ Instead, however, because of the great importance Bevin attached to keeping 'in step' with the Americans, the Foreign Office fell into line with the State Department and accordingly instructed Cavendish-Bentinck 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'.³⁸⁵

³⁸¹ *FRUS, 1946. Eastern Europe; the Soviet Union*, vol. 6 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 420-422 & 423-424.

³⁸² TNA: PRO FO 371/56437/N5184/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20 April 1946.

³⁸³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56437/N5184/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 18 April 1946; *FRUS 1946* vol. 6, 428-429.

³⁸⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56437/N4987/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 11 April 1946.

³⁸⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56437/N5068/34/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 19 April 1946.

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.³⁸⁶

Foreign Office officials were clearly disappointed with the soft, circumspect American approach, which fell far short of the initial British suggestions. This episode highlights the divergence that was becoming more pronounced between Bevin and his officials. The instinct of the Foreign Office was to respond to the political repression in Poland with the strongest possible protest, whereas Bevin's primary consideration was not to break ranks with the US. Bevin's unwillingness to deviate even slightly from the American line of policy meant that the British protest over the course of events in Poland was equally weak and ineffective, failing even to cover what the Foreign Office considered the minimum objections.

In April 1946, the British were planning their strategy for the Paris meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, which began at the end of the month. By this point, Bevin had moved towards an acceptance of the need for some form of division between the western and Soviet occupation zones of Germany. Because the Soviets were bound to object to any move of this kind, it was imperative for the British to first secure American cooperation. The British tactic was to gradually 'apprise the Americans of Soviet intentions' in order 'to show the Americans how hard it would be to work constructively with the Russians.' Britain must not be seen as the first power to abandon the Potsdam process. Rather the decision should come from the US in response to Soviet intransigence.³⁸⁷ The prevailing American view at this point was one of resentment that Britain seemed inclined to drag the US into a conflict with the Soviet Union. As Norman Graebner argues, to the US, it seemed that 'Britain, without legitimate cause, was making itself the Soviet Union's special antagonist and seeking to enlist the support of the United States.'³⁸⁸ It follows, therefore, that Bevin adopted the same approach in his policy towards Poland, seeking to avoid being more aggressive in his reproaches of the Polish government than the Americans were prepared to be.

³⁸⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5384/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 24 April 1946.

³⁸⁷ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 73, 81-2.

³⁸⁸ Graebner, 'Yalta, Potsdam, and Beyond', in Lane and Termperley, eds., *Rise and Fall of the Grand Alliance*, 234.

American credits to Poland

The force of the Anglo-American protests was 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 free and unfettered elections would be held in accordance with the Yalta agreement before the end of 1946.³⁸⁹ 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.³⁹⁰ 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, and the State Department had given Halifax a clear assurance that the US would not extend any credits or financial aid.³⁹¹ 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.³⁹²

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.³⁹³ 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

³⁸⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56437/N5350/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 April 1946.

³⁹⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/56505/N1000/287/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 January 1946.

³⁹¹ TNA: PRO 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.

³⁹² TNA: PRO FO 371/56437/ N5194/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 22 April 1946; FO 371/56437/N5273/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 24 April 1946.

³⁹³ 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: PRO 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.

government promised that the wagons would be used to transport coal to Western Europe and the Balkans.³⁹⁴ The Americans had also secured Polish commitments that the referendum would not serve as a substitute for elections and that elections would be held before the end of 1946. Crucially, the Polish government promised to provide compensation for requisitioned or nationalised American property. The Polish government also undertook to abide by the principles of trade set out in the Mutual Aid Agreement of 1942, to carry out the United States-Polish Commercial Treaty of 1931, and to participate in an international trade and employment conference, which the US was planning. Halifax reported that the State Department considered it a particular success to have secured Polish participation in this conference, which was part of the State Department's broader campaign to establish freer world trade. The Polish government also undertook not to adopt any 'measures which would prejudice the objectives of the conference'. Halifax pointed out, however, that this success was tempered by 'the vaguely worded Polish commitment'.³⁹⁵

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

³⁹⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5445/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 25 April 1946.

³⁹⁵ TNA: PRO 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.

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 Acheson and 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 the Soviet sphere. 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?' It was by no means clear, he continued, that the Soviet Union was prepared to use the Red Army openly to keep the Polish communists in power. 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'.³⁹⁶

Warner's frustration might have arisen from more than just the American about-face. In effect, Foreign Office policy towards Poland was beginning to fall apart. Instead of adopting a strongly interventionist approach with the new administration and lending substantial support to Mikołajczyk, 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.

Cavendish-Bentinck was equally scathing of the American decision on the credit deal, which he considered an indication of very poor judgement as well as having been executed with terrible timing. In his view, the intention of the Polish government was

³⁹⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5398/34/55, Warner to Balfour, 1 May 1946.

unequivocally to ‘remain in power by gradually liquidating or terrorising all opposition’ and only pressure could possibly dissuade them from following this course. Persuasion would not work. He also pointed out more specific weaknesses in the agreement, including the American failure to obtain an assurance from the Polish government that wagons would not be used to transport coal to the Soviet Union.³⁹⁷

The State Department blindsided not only the Foreign Office but also their own ambassador. The credit deal had been negotiated in Washington by Oskar Lange, now Polish ambassador to the US, Stefan Litauer, counsellor in the Polish embassy in Washington, and Ludwik Rajchman, chairman of the Polish Supply and Reconstruction Mission in North America. Lane had urged the State Department not to extend any credits to the Polish government. The ‘present Polish ruling clique’ had shown ‘[l]ack of good faith . . . on so many occasions’. Therefore to accept their assurances, he warned, ‘would . . . imply a lack of understanding on our part of [the] entire situation’ in Poland. He concluded by urging the cancellation of the credit deal: ‘With the greatest earnestness of which I am capable I beg the Department not to approve the extension of any credit facilities at this time.’³⁹⁸ In Lane’s view, the State Department’s decision to go ahead with the extension of credits rendered him irrelevant. He told Cavendish-Bentinck that the way in which the State Department had concluded the agreement would lead the Polish government to believe that the American embassy could be ignored while Lange, Litauer and Rajchman would be ‘able to persuade [the] United States Government to do anything that those in power here [in Warsaw] desire.’³⁹⁹ Mikołajczyk also regretted the American decision. The extension of credit served to strengthen the position of the provisional government, while weakening his own. He told Lane that the credit had ‘given the impression that the present Polish Government . . . is not viewed with disfavour by the United States Government.’⁴⁰⁰

It immediately became apparent that the extension of credit had in no way moderated the PPR’s repression of the opposition. Allen noted that ‘[t]he Americans have got nothing out of the Polish Provisional Government in the political sphere in return for their recent credits’ except a statement by Osóbka-Morawski that elections would take place in the autumn, an assurance which the Foreign Office deemed ‘quite worthless’.

³⁹⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5507/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 26 April 1946.

³⁹⁸ *FRUS*, 1946, vol. 6, 431-2; Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, 236-8.

³⁹⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5507/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 26 April 1946.

⁴⁰⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5700/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 30 April 1946.

Crucially, they had received no guarantee that the interval before the elections would not be used to ‘paralyse’ the opposition.⁴⁰¹

Anglo-American schism

In spite of its frustration with the State Department’s decision to proceed with the credit deal, the Foreign Office still made an attempt to secure American agreement to make a joint protest to the Polish government over the persecution of the PSL. In May, the Foreign Office proposed to take ‘concerted action’ to prevent the PPR from ‘crippling’ the opposition.⁴⁰² 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 arresting local party leaders.⁴⁰³ In mid-June, Mikołajczyk reported an increasing number of clashes between the PSL and the security police. He also detailed some of 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.⁴⁰⁴ Hankey summed up these reports, minuting that ‘there is a serious danger of a bust-up in Poland if elections are not held. It is obvious tension is increasing.’ He concluded that the referendum was ‘obviously a political weapon aimed at [Mikołajczyk]’ and that the PSL was ‘being increasingly discriminated against and liquidated piecemeal’.⁴⁰⁵ 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

⁴⁰¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5837/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 7 May 1946; FO 371/56439/N6206/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 15 May 1946.

⁴⁰² TNA: PRO FO 371/56439/N6206/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 15 May 1946.

⁴⁰³ TNA: PRO 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.

⁴⁰⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56441/N7641/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 12 June 1946.

⁴⁰⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56441/N7860/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 20 June 1946.

supporters across Poland. In the last three weeks, over 1,200 had been arrested, with 700 arrested in the Poznań region alone.⁴⁰⁶

The Americans, however, again proved unwilling to take a hard line. In early June, Clark Kerr,⁴⁰⁷ 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.⁴⁰⁸ 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.'⁴⁰⁹

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.⁴¹⁰ 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

⁴⁰⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56442/N8431/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 29 June 1946.

⁴⁰⁷ Clark Kerr's title was now Lord Inverchapel. For consistency I have continued to refer to him as Clark Kerr.

⁴⁰⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56440/N7397/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 6 June 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 14 June 1946.

⁴⁰⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56442/N8141/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 22 June 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 25 June 1946.

⁴¹⁰ *FRUS, 1946*, vol. 6, 467.

immediately prior to the referendum. ‘[T]he very worst moment the Americans could have chosen’, commented Hancock.⁴¹¹

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, to hamper their normal activities or to place any one or more of these parties in an unfavourable position by comparison with others as regards freedom of organisation or facilities for assembly and public expression.’⁴¹² Bevin had consulted Byrnes over the British decision to attach political conditions to the financial agreement and the secretary of state had agreed with the proposal.⁴¹³ Therefore the American cancellation of the suspension of its own credit deal was twice as infuriating. The Foreign Office pointed out to the State Department that the timing was bound to ‘weaken [the] effect of [the] British move and suggest divergence of view between the two Governments’. An attempt by Clark Kerr to persuade the State Department to reverse its decision proved fruitless.⁴¹⁴

The conclusion of the Anglo-Polish financial agreement brought to an end months of wrangling over a string of difficult outstanding issues. The British government agreed to make no claim for repayment of the £73 million spent on equipping and supplying the Polish armed forces in the West, and to leave in abeyance the question of the repayment of military credits in the amount of £47.5 million for the payment of salaries to members of the Polish armed forces, although Britain reserved the right to reopen discussion of this question. Crucially, Britain agreed to return the Polish gold that had been deposited with the Bank of England for safekeeping during the war, with the exception of £3 million which would go towards repayment of the £32 million advanced by Britain for the maintenance of the Polish civil administration in the UK, including

⁴¹¹ TNA: PRO 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.

⁴¹² TNA: PRO 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.

⁴¹³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56422/N8192/27/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 24 June 1946.

⁴¹⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56422/N8192/27/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 26 June 1946; FO 371/56423/N8363/27/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 27 June 1946.

welfare and educational services for Polish refugees. Another £10 million was to be repaid in 15 annual instalments, the first payment of which was to be made five years after the date of the entry into force of the agreement. Britain agreed to forgive the remaining balance of this debt. Britain also agreed to transfer to the Polish government all remaining assets of the former Polish government-in-exile, with the exception of properties and materials in use for services provided to Polish citizens in the UK. Finally, Britain agreed to transfer surplus goods to the value of £6 million to the Polish government.⁴¹⁵

These terms, which included a ‘greatly scaled down’ debt⁴¹⁶ and the return of a greater proportion of Poland’s gold, represented a considerable retreat from the British government’s initial negotiating position and a significant victory for the Polish provisional government.⁴¹⁷ Further, although the Anglo-Polish agreement had only been signed and not ratified, the Polish government was able to present the signing of the agreement, together with the American resumption of the transfer of surplus stocks to Poland, as an important success. The Polish government simply did not announce publically that British ratification of the agreement was conditional upon the fulfilment of political conditions. Cavendish-Bentinck reported that both agreements were ‘being well advertised in the press’, and that both ‘promise[d] great triumph for the government.’⁴¹⁸ Thus, contrary to British intentions, 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.

Overall, in the run-up to the referendum, British policy was characterised by a lack of consistency and increasingly, by a division between Bevin’s views and those of his officials as to the best course of policy. 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. On the other hand, Bevin was unwilling to adopt

⁴¹⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56423/N8303/27/55, Anglo-Polish Financial Agreement, 24 June 1946.

⁴¹⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56423/N8399/27/55, Hankey to Bevin, 18 June 1946.

⁴¹⁷ In December 1945, the Treasury gave Modzelewski its ‘final offer’ for a financial settlement. These terms included the insistence that Britain would accept a figure no lower than £5 million in gold towards repayment of the civil debt. TNA: PRO FO 371/56418/N1151/27/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 17-18 January 1946; Bevin to Modzelewski, 24 January 1946.

⁴¹⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56423/N8367/27/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 28 June 1946.

the Foreign Office's recommendation that ratification be delayed until elections had actually been held – the 'most effective condition', which Britain could impose.⁴¹⁹ Similarly, the State Department's unwillingness to issue a joint Anglo-American protest to the Polish government over the attacks on the PSL, and particularly its decision to reinstate the credit agreement, appears to have been a genuine source of frustration for Foreign Office officials. The Foreign Office urged that the British government go ahead and make representations to the Polish government without waiting for the US to do the same but Bevin was reluctant to act unilaterally and ultimately Britain made no protest over the attacks on the PSL.

Spain and the Security Council

Faced with the increasing likelihood that Mikołajczyk and the other representatives of the PSL would be thrown out of the Polish government, Cavendish-Bentinck proposed that in the event of their expulsion, the British and American governments should consider bringing the Polish government's non-fulfilment of the Yalta agreement and of the undertakings given at Moscow and Potsdam before the UN Security Council.⁴²⁰ Mikołajczyk 'strongly endorsed' Cavendish-Bentinck's proposal as the most effective way of averting widespread disorder and violence throughout Poland, which he believed would erupt if his party were ejected from the government.⁴²¹

The Foreign Office was initially receptive to this strategy. Officials drafted a telegram to Washington, setting out a proposed line of argument in detail. They constructed the case as follows: first, the composition of the Polish government was not 'solely a matter of domestic jurisdiction' because 'it formed the subject of international obligations'. Second, in return for diplomatic recognition by Britain and the US, the Polish provisional government had undertaken to maintain the balance of representation within the government until elections had taken place. Therefore Mikołajczyk's expulsion would constitute a breach of the Yalta agreement and of the commitment made in Moscow in June 1945. Third, following diplomatic recognition, the Polish provisional

⁴¹⁹ Hankey made this recommendation and Sargent agreed that it would be the most effective course of action. TNA: PRO FO 371/56423/N8399/27/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 18 June 1946.

⁴²⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5797/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 2 May 1946; FO 371/56438/N5798/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 2 May 1946.

⁴²¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56439/N6206/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 13 May 1946.

government had undertaken in writing to hold free elections as soon as possible and Bierut had repeated this assurance orally to Bevin at Potsdam. Britain could therefore make the case that the repeated postponement of the elections constituted a further breach of international obligations. Further, the Polish provisional government had used the delay to suppress political activity, thus violating the commitment to hold free elections in which all democratic parties could take part openly. Crucial to the case would be to show that the breach of these agreements created a situation which constituted a threat to international peace and security. The Foreign Office proposed to link the internal political situation in Poland with the large number of displaced Polish citizens who felt unable to return to the country:

the continued presence abroad of members of Polish Forces and of Polish civilian refugees, which according to the Polish Provisional Government constitutes a factor giving rise to international friction . . . is the direct result of the failure of the Polish Provisional Government to fulfil its international obligations, since it is precisely because these obligations appear not to have been fulfilled in letter or in spirit that so few Poles abroad have been prepared to return to Poland. It is therefore the Polish failure to fulfil obligations which has created international friction.⁴²²

The Foreign Office instructed Balfour in the Washington embassy to explore the proposal with the State Department as soon as possible after Cadogan, now British representative to the UN, had been consulted. At this point, however, the plan was abruptly terminated. Cadogan rejected the proposal outright on the grounds that it conflicted with the more pressing priority of Spain.⁴²³

In the spring of 1946, Britain was engaged in an attempt to foil the Soviet campaign to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions against Spain in order to bring down the fascist regime of General Francisco Franco. Britain objected to any measures which might weaken the Spanish government, believing that any destabilisation could spark another civil war, opening the way for the communists to seize power. The British government was far more anxious to avoid a communist regime and the concomitant extension of Soviet influence in western Europe than to see the removal of Franco. Britain also had strategic and trade interests in Spain, which would be jeopardised by any destabilisation or radicalisation of its government. The Soviet Union had first

⁴²² TNA: PRO FO 371/56439/N6206/34/55, draft telegram to Washington, May 1946.

⁴²³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5837/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 7-14 May 1946; Sargent to Cadogan, 18 May 1946; FO 371/56440/N7034/34/55, Cadogan to Sargent, 23 May 1946.

proposed an economic and diplomatic blockade against Spain at Potsdam. The British successfully thwarted this initiative by making the case that Spain did not pose a threat to international peace and security. Instead, a communiqué was issued condemning the Franco regime and denying Spain entry to the newly established United Nations Organisation. The French government then revived the issue in December 1945, proposing to take the Spanish case to the UN on the grounds that Franco's regime posed a threat to international peace. The Quai d'Orsay retracted its proposal under pressure from Britain and the US, only for Poland, at the behest of the Soviet Union, to take it up again, submitting a formal complaint to the Security Council in April 1946.⁴²⁴

The Security Council had referred the Spanish question to a five-member sub-committee at the end of April, which was due to report back to the Council at the end of June.⁴²⁵ Cadogan planned to argue against intervention on the grounds that 'the action of a regime in any country is, par excellence, a matter of domestic jurisdiction.' He insisted that he could not then immediately put forth the opposite argument in the case of Poland without undermining the British position on Spain. Besides, he continued, the internal affairs of a country could only become a matter for the Security Council if that country was deemed to pose a threat to international peace, which was not the case with Poland. 'I am sorry to be unhelpful, but one has to consider the position in relation to other questions', concluded Cadogan. The majority of Foreign Office officials disagreed with Cadogan's reasoning, stressing that an issue ceased to be purely domestic once it had been made the subject of an international agreement. If Mikołajczyk were ejected, the Polish government would be in breach of the Yalta agreement and of the undertakings given at Moscow and Potsdam. Nevertheless, Sargent acquiesced, conceding that it would be 'impolitic' to raise the matter with the Spanish question looming.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ Florentino Portero, 'Spain, Britain and the Cold War', in *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston (New York: Routledge, 1999), 212-220.

⁴²⁵ The sub-committee was originally instructed to report to the Security Council before the end of May. Ultimately, however, the Security Council debated the issue only on 26 June. The Council decided to 'keep the situation in Spain under continuous observation and maintain it upon the list of matters of which it is seized, in order that it will be at all times ready to take such measures as may become necessary to maintain international peace and security.' The Spanish question was dropped from the list on 4 November 1946. U.N. Security Council, 39th meeting. 'Resolution 4 [The Spanish Question]' (S/RES/4), 29 April 1946; U.N. Security Council, 49th meeting. 'Resolution 7' (S/RES/7), 26 June 1946; U.N. Security Council, 79th meeting. 'Resolution 10' (S/RES/10), 4 November 1946.

⁴²⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56440/N7034/34/55, Cadogan to Sargent, 23 May 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 1 June 1946; Sargent to Cadogan, 1 July 1946.

Bringing the Polish issue before the UN Security Council in the spring of 1946 would have served as a timely warning to both the Polish provisional government and the Soviet Union that Britain did not intend to overlook violations of the Yalta agreement and the Moscow and Potsdam commitments. The Foreign Office initially seized on Cavendish-Bentinck's proposal as a potentially effective means of bringing pressure to bear on the Polish government. Allen minuted that 'a little discreet "whispering" on these lines might have a healthy effect in Warsaw.' Officials went so far as to state that if Mikołajczyk were expelled from the government and the PSL dissolved, the British government 'might have no option' but to take the issue to the Security Council. The Foreign Office certainly gave every indication that it intended to proceed with the plan. Officials developed the exact lines of the argument they intended to put forward in some detail, devoting considerable time and attention to the issue. The draft telegram to Washington underwent a series of revisions and there was a considerable amount of discussion in the internal minutes about the importance of building a watertight case stressing the international dimension of the Polish issue. In his letter to Cadogan explaining Cavendish-Bentinck's proposal, Sargent had closed with a request for advice as to how to broach the subject with the Americans, indicating that he did not expect Cadogan to reject the idea outright. Even Cadogan himself acknowledged that 'one might be able to make out a fairly plausible case', and he agreed that there was 'certainly an international aspect of this question, owing to the undertakings given to us and other Powers by the Polish Government.'⁴²⁷ Thus it is clear that Cavendish-Bentinck's proposal was scrapped not because it lacked merit but because Cadogan judged that it would interfere with higher priorities.

⁴²⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/56438/N5837/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 7-14 May 1946; FO 371/56439/N6206/34/55, draft telegram to Washington; Sargent to Cadogan, 18 May 1946; FO 371/56440/N7034/34/55, Cadogan to Sargent, 23 May 1946.

Referendum

In the final weeks before the referendum, it became increasingly clear that the Foreign Office and the embassy in Warsaw were often at odds with the government in their view of the appropriate policy to pursue 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, given that the referendum presented ‘full opportunity for intimidation and faking of results,’ it had been ‘unwise’ for the PSL ‘to make it 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.⁴²⁸ 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’.⁴²⁹

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.⁴³⁰ 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

⁴²⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56441/N7963/34/55, Hankey to Cavendish-Bentinck, 19 June 1946.

⁴²⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56442/N8518/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 25 June 1946.

⁴³⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/56443/ N9147/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 12 July 1946.

to demonstrate their opposition to the present government. The embassy noted that a ‘surprisingly large proportion’ of the electorate also voted against agricultural reform and nationalisation.⁴³¹ 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’.⁴³²

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. Mikołajczyk also reported that 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. 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.’⁴³³

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

⁴³¹ TNA: PRO 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.

⁴³² Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 196.

⁴³³ TNA: PRO 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.

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.⁴³⁴ This pattern of 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.

⁴³⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56444/N9295/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 12 July 1946; Washington to Foreign Office, 12 July 1946.

Chapter 4: From the Referendum to the Elections, June 1946-January 1947

Introduction

In the summer of 1946, Mikołajczyk announced his intention to seek international supervision of the upcoming general elections. Mikołajczyk's announcement came shortly after the referendum, which the British and American governments judged to have been conducted in unfair conditions, and whose results had been falsified.

Although the British embassy in Warsaw agreed that international supervision was essential to ensure that the elections were conducted fairly, the Foreign Office did not support the request. The Foreign Office's refusal marked a retreat from its previous position, which up to this point had almost always been indistinguishable from that of the Warsaw embassy. The Foreign Office was increasingly torn between the line of policy advocated by the embassy on the one hand, and Bevin's increasing reluctance to actively support the Polish opposition on the other. Bevin's position was partly the result of increasing Labour party opposition to his foreign policy, which his opponents saw as insufficiently socialist and too anti-Soviet. This opposition, which culminated in an open revolt in the autumn of 1946, increased Bevin's reluctance to challenge Soviet conduct in Poland, lest he open himself up to further charges of anti-Soviet bias.

American disengagement also affected the British approach to events in Poland, as evidenced by the Foreign Office's decision to drop a plan to bring the issue before the UN General Assembly after Byrnes objected to the idea. The decline in British involvement in Polish political affairs was also evident in the failure to exploit a serious split within the PPS on the issue of long-term cooperation with the PPR. Cavendish-Bentinck urged his government to make the most of the split, throw its support behind the independent socialists, and encourage this faction to form an alliance with Mikołajczyk's PSL. Although the PPS split caught the interest of the Foreign Office, no decisive intervention was made; a compromise agreement between the PPS and the PPR was reached; and the chance passed. As the date of the elections approached, even Cavendish-Bentinck and the embassy staff, who had always been staunch advocates of strong British support for the PSL, began to see the elimination of the party as inevitable. Although British diplomatic staff carefully documented the abuses which occurred during campaigning, voting, and tabulating, Cavendish-Bentinck ultimately

advised against further attempts to try to alter the political situation in Poland in any significant way after the elections. Thus, the months between the referendum and the elections marked the period during which the remaining British resolve to influence the composition and system of the postwar Polish government ebbed away.

Mikołajczyk requests international supervision of 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 correspondents' 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.⁴³⁵

The initial response from Hankey suggests that the Foreign Office was beginning to distance itself from the Polish opposition: 'Mikołajczyk must feel colossally well entrenched and backed to speak publicly as recorded.'⁴³⁶ That this comment came from Hankey is of particular significance. Of all the officials in the Northern Department, Hankey's commitment to the Polish opposition was strongest. His reaction to Mikołajczyk's announcement therefore indicates that the direction of the line of policy was towards disengagement. Indeed, just over a week later, at the end of July, the British government formally rejected international supervision of the Polish elections as 'unlikely to prove feasible'. The Cabinet Office informed the Foreign, Defence and War Offices of this decision:

Apart from the difficulty . . . of securing [the] Polish Provisional Government's consent, British participation in any plan of supervision would have serious

⁴³⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56444/N9328/34/55, Russell to Bevin, 18 July 1946.

⁴³⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56444/N9328/34/55, Foreign Office minutes, 20 July 1946.

objections from our point of view as committing his Majesty's Government to an undesirable degree of responsibility for internal developments in Poland.⁴³⁷

Mikołajczyk insisted that international supervision was 'essential.' He rejected the Foreign Office claim that international supervision would be impracticable, repeating that 'it was the only possible course.' 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.' John Russell, first secretary in the Warsaw embassy asked what assistance, short of international electoral supervision, Britain could provide, suggesting that it could extract certain assurances from the Polish provisional government. Mikołajczyk replied that any assurance given by Bierut had no value unless Britain 'took measures to ensure its implementation.'⁴³⁸

Mikołajczyk also urged Britain not to let the suppression of Popiel's Labour party go by without protest. In a meeting with Russell, Mikołajczyk explained that the liquidation of the Labour party 'was a trial intended to test American and British reactions to the Polish Government's first direct and flagrant infringement of the Yalta Agreement. Silence from the Western democracies would be taken as signifying if not assent, then impotence.' The PPR would then move against the PSL confident that there would be no western intervention. Mikołajczyk urged direct diplomatic intervention on the part of the British government, preferably at the peace conference, which was then in progress in Paris, as well as in the House of Commons and in the press.⁴³⁹

Russell counselled strong support for Mikołajczyk. He concluded that '[t]o let the suppression of the work-party go by default would be tantamount to washing our hands of Poland.' He argued that Britain should '[p]rotest strongly' against the pre-election suppression of the opposition parties, and if international supervision were deemed feasible, 'go all out to secure it.' Russell considered it unlikely that Russia and Poland

⁴³⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/56444/N9711/34/55, Cabinet Offices to J.S.M. Washington, 22 July 1946.

⁴³⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56444/N10042/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 2 August 1946.

⁴³⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56444/N10034/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 2 August 1946.

would consent to supervision, but this ‘need not . . . prevent us from trying.’ Russell insisted that Britain could not ‘afford to follow a new Munich policy at this stage in Eastern Europe.’ If international supervision proved impracticable, the British government ‘should apply pressure now whilst there is a comparative political lull here’ and before the passage of the new electoral law on 20 August. 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.’⁴⁴⁰

The Foreign Office response to Russell’s request for international supervision highlights the way in which officials oscillated between intervention and detachment. The Northern Department agreed to reconsider the possibility of international supervision, and Hankey came around to supporting the idea. He commented that concerns raised about the number of observers who would be needed to carry out the supervision had been overblown. He noted that the Warsaw embassy had managed to produce extensive and accurate information about the referendum with only 15 observers scattered throughout the country. Hankey argued 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’.⁴⁴¹

Ultimately, however, Warner rejected the proposal on the grounds that it would be impossible to secure Polish and Soviet agreement. Further, Warner disagreed with Hankey about the feasibility of supplying sufficient British personnel to carry out the task. Finally, and crucially in Warner’s view, any internationally constituted supervision mission would have to include a Soviet contingent. The Soviets would inevitably ‘connive at falsification of local results wherever possible and refuse to endorse any

⁴⁴⁰ TNA: PRO 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.

⁴⁴¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56445/N10369/34/55, draft telegram by Hankey, 7 August 1946.

joint report on the elections which was not to their liking'. In short Britain would 'have responsibility without effective control' over the electoral process. The most Britain could offer would be to send a group of British citizens who would observe the elections on an unofficial basis. Warner's decision to override Hankey's assent to the request shows that Bevin's preference for a non-interventionist policy was becoming more entrenched. Bevin himself was not prepared to reconsider his initial refusal of international supervision.⁴⁴²

A lengthy argument ensued between London and Warsaw as the embassy tried to persuade the Foreign Office to agree to formal international supervision. The embassy argued that Soviet agreement was irrelevant, and that the 'risk of responsibility without effective control seems . . . to be one that we have got to take.' Warner commented that these views seemed 'naïve', and that the embassy's proposals 'minimise[d] the practical difficulties' of arranging international supervision. Cavendish-Bentinck made a final attempt to persuade Bevin of the necessity of international supervision. Bevin agreed that the provisions of the Yalta agreement must be executed. He instructed the ambassador to tell Mikołajczyk that Britain 'would back his efforts to secure free elections to the best of our ability.' Bevin added, however, that he 'could not promise what was impossible' and he was not prepared to consider international supervision.⁴⁴³

There were a number of reasons for Bevin's reluctance to consider international supervision of the Polish elections. First, rising dissatisfaction with the direction of Bevin's foreign policy within the parliamentary Labour party partly explains his resistance to the idea. Bevin's conduct of foreign policy was generally regarded as adhering too closely to that of his Conservative predecessor, and the Labour left was particularly disappointed by his failure to establish an amicable, cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union. Instead of the election of a Labour government in Britain giving rise to a dramatic improvement in relations with the Soviet Union, as many in the party – including Hugh Dalton, the chancellor of the exchequer, and Harold

⁴⁴² TNA: PRO FO 371/56445/N10369/34/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 10 August 1946; N10480/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 16 August 1946.

⁴⁴³ TNA: PRO 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.

Laski, the party chairman – had hoped, there had been a steady deterioration since the end of the war.⁴⁴⁴

Bevin's guarded, suspicious approach to the Soviet Union had become a contentious issue within the party by the spring of 1946. Critics of Bevin's foreign policy were composed of two main factions: the far-left of the PLP, and those closer to the centre who wanted Britain to lead the way in forging a 'Third Force' 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. Such significant and far-reaching changes could only be achieved through the application of 'firm political control' in order to counter the inevitable resistance from the 'capitalist classes'. 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.⁴⁴⁵

A larger faction of Bevin's critics comprised those who believed in the idea that Britain should function as a 'Third Force' in international affairs.⁴⁴⁶ The Third Force argument 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.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Jones, *Russia Complex*, 127-9; Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 276; Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus*, 105-6; Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 13.

⁴⁴⁵ This was the view put forward by, for example, Konni Zilliacus, who was regarded as the 'most prolific and probably the most influential' of the 'fellow-travellers' in the Labour party. Zilliacus had in fact broken with the communist line over the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939. Jones, *Russia Complex*, 132-3.

⁴⁴⁶ The 'Third Force' idea was first conceived by G.D.H. Cole and developed by Richard Crossman. *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 136-7.

Both factions subjected Bevin to a barrage of criticism at the party conference in Bournemouth in June 1946. Laski 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.⁴⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁴⁹ This opposition to Bevin from within the PLP was not negligible. As Bullock notes, 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 and . . . the principal target of this guerrilla warfare from first to last was Ernest Bevin.’ The Soviet Union was opposed to election supervision in Poland; therefore if Bevin pushed the issue, he risked bringing the simmering conflict over Eastern Europe to a head. Thus, for Bevin to insist on international supervision of the Polish elections would – by antagonising the Soviet Union – have risked further incensing the critics of his foreign policy within the party. Although Bullock also argues that ‘Bevin was never deterred from doing what he wanted to do by this opposition from his own back benches’, it is unlikely that he was able to entirely ignore this vocal corps of critics when he made foreign policy decisions.⁴⁵⁰ He must have been conscious of the need to carry his party with him on foreign policy matters. 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, thus creating an open breach with the Soviet Union.⁴⁵¹

The unrest came to 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*.⁴⁵² In November, a censure motion was introduced against the foreign secretary. Fifty-eight Labour MPs, led by Crossman, signed an amendment to the King’s Speech which criticised the

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 128.

⁴⁴⁹ Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 61, 78, 90, 93.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 61-2.

⁴⁵¹ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 105-9.

⁴⁵² Jackson, *Rebels and Whips*, 54-5; Berrington, *Backbench Opinion*, 56-8.

government's foreign policy. The amendment called on the government to 'provide a democratic and constructive socialist alternative to an otherwise inevitable conflict between American capitalism and Soviet communism in which all hope of World Government would be destroyed'.⁴⁵³ In the ensuing debate, Crossman charged that the Anglo-American bloc had 'destroyed' the centre-left parties in Europe; he pressed again for Britain to follow an independent 'third alternative' policy in cooperation with the European left, and to refuse to join 'any ideological bloc'.⁴⁵⁴ 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.⁴⁵⁵ At the time, the *Manchester Guardian* described the amendment as 'the most serious public act of dissent from the policy of the Government which has so far been committed by Labour members'.⁴⁵⁶

Bevin himself was attending a Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in New York City when the amendment was tabled. He was angry and frustrated that this serious party split had opened up while the Council was in session, and worried that the show of no-confidence at home would undermine his position in the negotiations with the Soviet Union.⁴⁵⁷ Bevin's private secretary, Dixon, noted that the 'case of the "Rebels" at home has been poisoning everything.' Upon hearing the result of the vote on the amendment, Molotov was quick to point out that 'an abstention equals a vote against'. Dixon observed that: 'This is upsetting [Bevin], though he maintains a brave face'.⁴⁵⁸

The Polish government was certainly aware of Bevin's difficult position vis-à-vis his own party. In a meeting with Cavendish-Bentinck a few days after the vote, Modzelewski commented obliquely about the lack of interest within the British government concerning the Polish elections. Modzelewski observed that Bevin had so many other things to do that he 'was certainly not preoccupied with the Polish elections'.⁴⁵⁹ The Polish government cannot have failed to note that the Labour party's displeasure with the direction of Bevin's foreign policy and their desire for improved

⁴⁵³ Quoted in Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 328.

⁴⁵⁴ Quoted in Berrington, *Backbench Opinion*, 58.

⁴⁵⁵ Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 329.

⁴⁵⁶ Quoted in Jones, *Russia Complex*, 139.

⁴⁵⁷ Jones, *Russia Complex*, 137-143.

⁴⁵⁸ Dixon, *Double Diploma*, 241.

⁴⁵⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56450/N14980/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 November 1946.

Anglo-Soviet relations meant that Bevin would be more reluctant to antagonise the Soviets; hence making the chance of any outside interference in the conduct of the elections more remote.

Beyond pressure from within the PLP for a closer, less antagonistic Anglo-Soviet relationship, a number of other factors influenced Bevin's response to the request for international supervision of the Polish elections. In the summer of 1946, the largest and most pressing problem occupying Bevin's attention was the question of the future of Germany. The situation in the British zone had become unsustainable and needed urgent attention. Even before the war, the urban, industrialised region which became the British zone had produced only slightly more than half its own food; the area could not survive on its own and badly needed to be reintegrated into a larger economic unit. Britain could no longer afford to provide the food supplies and subsidies required to sustain the population of its zone, as Dalton frequently reminded Bevin. Loath to take a step guaranteed to result in a serious breach with the Soviets, and uncertain about the reliability and longevity of the American commitment to western Europe, Bevin agonised over this problem.⁴⁶⁰

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 to Bevin 'thow[ing] down the gauntlet', 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.⁴⁶¹ 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 might have seemed too much like a provocation, with potentially explosive consequences. Bevin was certainly anxious about Soviet intentions. He was beginning to see Soviet expansionism as potentially threatening, not born of defensive security concerns, as had been the prevailing view

⁴⁶⁰ Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 265, 271, 268-9, 309.

⁴⁶¹ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 94-5

during and immediately after the war, and as his critics in the PLP continued to believe. In April 1946 Bevin had warned Attlee that Soviet expansionism ‘has engendered its own dynamic which may prove too strong for [Stalin] . . . I don’t think he’s planning for war but he may be unable to control the forces he’s started. We’ve always got to be prepared for that.’⁴⁶² 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’.⁴⁶³ Thus, Bevin chose to err on the side of caution. Profoundly suspicious of the Soviet Union and as yet uncertain of the US’s position, challenging the Soviets over Germany and Poland simultaneously was too risky, too likely to provoke an aggressive Soviet reaction, as well as a potential backlash at home, recrimination from the Americans, and the collapse of the nascent arrangements for a solution to the German problem. Therefore a choice was necessary, and given Germany’s greater importance to Britain, Bevin elected to stand aside in the case of Poland.

A series of other pressing foreign policy issues also absorbed Bevin’s attention in the summer of 1946. Jewish attacks on the British in Palestine resumed, including the blowing up of railways and bridges, the kidnapping of British officers, and in July, the bombing of the British secretariat and army headquarters in the King David hotel in Jerusalem, all of which created an urgent need for a solution to the Palestinian problem. Conflict continued to simmer in Greece. Further, immediately prior to the opening of the Paris peace conference, Bevin suffered a heart attack, and Attlee was obliged to take the foreign secretary’s place.⁴⁶⁴ All of these factors must have conspired to push the issue of the Polish elections even further down Bevin’s priority list.

Turning to the UN

In spite of its rejection of international electoral supervision, the Foreign Office did agree with Russell concerning the importance of submitting representations to the provisional Polish government before the passage of the new electoral law on 20 August, and accordingly sought to coordinate a joint approach with the US.⁴⁶⁵ Both the

⁴⁶² Bevin, quoted in Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 235.

⁴⁶³ Bevin, quoted in Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 105.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 281-2, 287, 292, 297.

⁴⁶⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56444/N10056/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 7 August 1946; Foreign Office to Washington, 9 August 1946.

British and American notes were submitted to the Polish government on 19 August.⁴⁶⁶ 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 parties; results should be published immediately in each voting district; and there should be a system for appeals in the event of electoral disputes.⁴⁶⁷

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.⁴⁶⁸ 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.' The idea

⁴⁶⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56445/N10646/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 August 1946.

⁴⁶⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/56445/N10367/34/55, Foreign Office to Paris, 13 August 1946.

⁴⁶⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56446/N10739/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 21 August 1946.

had Cavendish-Bentinck's support; he thought that the threat of UN involvement 'would have some effect in the case of Poland.'⁴⁶⁹

The Foreign Office proposal did not, however, win the support of Jebb, now assistant undersecretary of state and UN advisor, who objected that Britain would have 'considerable difficulty' in getting the matter on the assembly's agenda, and if Britain were to fail, 'it would be represented as a considerable blow.' Likewise, it was 'most improbable' that the assembly would pass any resolution or recommendation directed against the regimes in any of the three countries. 'Here again the failure to secure any such recommendation would be represented as an attack on these countries which had been repelled owing to the powerful support given to them by the Soviet Union.' Further, such a move might result in Soviet withdrawal from the UN. Jebb's opposition did little to deter his colleagues. Warner noted his disagreement with many of Jebb's arguments; Hancock pointed out that Cavendish-Bentinck, who believed that taking the case to the UN would give the Polish government 'a considerable jolt' and 'might influence their policy', was better placed than Jebb to judge the likely effect. Hancock added that an appeal to the UN was one of the few levers with which the British could hope to influence the provisional government and they might 'be obliged to use it.'⁴⁷⁰

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 with Byrnes 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

⁴⁶⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56446/N10814/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 14 August 1946; Warner to Jebb, 24 August 1946.

⁴⁷⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/56446/N10961/34/55, Jebb to Warner, 27 August 1946.

Yalta agreement.’ He maintained that the assembly was not the right forum for such an argument.⁴⁷¹

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 of the bizonal.⁴⁷² Just as worrying for Bevin’s strategy for Germany, uncertainty remained about the degree of US commitment. According to Deighton, ‘the Americans were still taking a short-term and hesitant view of the bizonal discussions’.⁴⁷³ Thus, while the bizonal negotiations were in progress, it was particularly important not to undertake any foreign policy initiative which might annoy the Americans and delay the process.

New electoral law

On 22 September, the National Council of the Homeland (Krajowa Rada Narodowa – KRN) passed the new electoral law. The law contained provisions which made it possible for the authorities to withhold the right to stand as a candidate, and even the right to vote. Cavendish-Bentinck predicted that these provisions would be used against the PSL ‘to the fullest extent possible’. There was no provision in the law to ensure equal facilities for all democratic and anti-Nazi parties, or to allow them to campaign without arrest or threat of arrest, and without restrictions on normal electoral activities.⁴⁷⁴ Cavendish-Bentinck pointed out that a clause in the law excluding from voting those who had any connection with the underground could be used

⁴⁷¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56450/N15174/34/55, Warner to Jebb, 27 November 1946.

⁴⁷² Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 110-15.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁷⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56446/N12169/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 23 September 1946.

‘indiscriminately’ to prevent large numbers of people from voting. Similarly, a provision in the law barring those who ‘hindered armed resistance to the enemy’ during the war could potentially be used against members of the Home Army and its leaders.⁴⁷⁵ Shortly after the passage of the electoral law, the provisional government offered the PSL 25 per cent of the seats in the Sejm if it agreed to join the other parties in the electoral bloc. Mikołajczyk told Cavendish-Bentinck that he intended to refuse.⁴⁷⁶

On 11 October, the Foreign Office noted that ‘a turning point in Polish affairs’ had been reached. The negotiations for an electoral bloc had broken down; the PSL planned to contest the election; the electoral law had been passed; the date of the elections would be announced shortly. ‘Everything now depends on whether or not the Polish Communists and their satellites will be able to fake the election as they did the referendum. It seems apparent that they will try to do so, because persecution of the parties not co-operating with the Communists continues and there is no freedom of electoral activity.’ The Foreign Office fully supported Mikołajczyk’s decision to turn down the PPR’s offer to join the electoral bloc and instead to contest the elections. In addition to destroying his credibility, to accept an offer of 25 per cent of seats would have been ‘ridiculous’ given that the PSL enjoyed the support of approximately 70 per cent of the electorate.⁴⁷⁷

Cavendish-Bentinck now recommended three steps, all of which were accepted by the Foreign Office. First, Britain should continue to withhold all financial assistance from the provisional government pending the elections. In particular, no loans or credits should be granted. This first recommendation came at Mikołajczyk’s request. He urged Britain and the US to apply economic pressure on the PPR to ensure fair elections. He asserted that ‘only . . . pressure from abroad’ would deter the PPR ‘from preventing all political activity’ by the PSL. In Mikołajczyk’s view, the Polish economy was very weak; he predicted that the situation would become ‘catastrophic’ by the spring of 1947. An announcement that no financial assistance would be forthcoming would therefore be a powerful lever with which Britain and the US could exert influence on the Polish government to ensure that elections were conducted fairly and freely. Second, Cavendish-Bentinck advised that Britain should formally warn Warsaw that only an

⁴⁷⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56447/N12408/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 25 September 1946.

⁴⁷⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56447/N12480/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 September 1946; FO 371/56447/N12482/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 September 1946.

⁴⁷⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/56447/N12480/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 September 1946.

election in which all parties were allowed to participate freely would be regarded as fulfilling the terms of the Yalta and Moscow agreements, and the Potsdam undertakings. Third, the Foreign Office should encourage and facilitate as much unfavourable commentary as possible in the British press on the lack of political freedom in Poland.⁴⁷⁸

To exert financial pressure on the Polish government, Britain had already begun the process of suspending ratification of the Anglo-Polish financial agreement in early October. For the negative publicity campaign, the Foreign Office commenced organising a parliamentary question regarding the electoral law which could serve as a timely starting point for press stories on the wider political situation in Poland. Before issuing a formal warning to the Polish government about the conduct of the elections, however, the Foreign Office sought to secure State Department agreement to a joint Anglo-American démarche. '[W]e should wish to keep in close step with the Americans', noted Hankey. Likewise, Warner was 'a little against another note . . . unless the Americans will send one too.'⁴⁷⁹

The State Department prevaricated over whether to issue a formal note addressed directly to the Polish government concerning the electoral law or a press statement instead. Both Cavendish-Bentinck and the Foreign Office took a dim view of the idea of a press statement. Cavendish-Bentinck noted that it 'would be regarded by the Polish government or public as of less importance, and it would be easier for the government to hide the issue of such a press statement in Washington from the Polish public.'⁴⁸⁰ Likewise, the Foreign Office regarded formal representations as the most effective way of highlighting the failure of the Polish government to adhere to its pledges regarding the elections.⁴⁸¹ Lane eventually did manage to persuade the State Department to agree to the presentation of a formal note to the government in Warsaw.⁴⁸² On 22 November, Cavendish-Bentinck and the US chargé d'affaires delivered the protest notes from their

⁴⁷⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56447/N12480/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 September 1946; N12482/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 September 1946; Foreign Office to Washington, 11 October 1946.

⁴⁷⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56447/N12484/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 5 October 1946; Foreign Office to Washington, 11 October 1946; FO 371/56448/N13588/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 28 & 29 October 1946.

⁴⁸⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/56448/N13881/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 29 October 1946.

⁴⁸¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56449/N14345/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 7 November 1946; Foreign Office minutes, 12 November 1946.

⁴⁸² TNA: PRO FO 371/56450/N14980/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 November 1946; Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, 272-3.

respective governments.⁴⁸³ 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.⁴⁸⁴

In light of the inadequacy of the new electoral law, Cavendish-Bentinck again pressed his government for international supervision of the Polish elections. This time the Foreign Office was not prepared to reconsider. First the logistical complications were raised: there were not enough suitably qualified, Polish-speaking observers; it would be too difficult to secure an adequate number of cars and sufficient quantities of petrol – although none of these were issues deemed insurmountable when Hankey had considered the possibility of sending observers a few months earlier in August. Further, the observers might be held responsible for results which they had not been able to check. The Foreign Office was also doubtful about the observers’ capacity to collect hard evidence of misconduct, since any manipulation of the results would be done in private. The Foreign Office concluded that ‘much as we dislike to disappoint Mr. Mikolajczyk, we are in the circumstances inclined to doubt whether the disadvantages of proposing official observers are not greater than the possible advantages.’ Although the Foreign Office professed a willingness to ‘get as many impartial British subjects as possible into Poland for the period of the elections’, officials now expressed scepticism about the efficacy of unofficial observers. Even if it did prove possible to collect evidence of fraud, it would be difficult to use that evidence in support of any kind of protest, because of the unofficial status of the observers.⁴⁸⁵ Essentially, the Foreign Office rendered the situation impossible – first refusing to send observers in an official capacity, and then concluding that unofficial observers would be of little use. The Foreign Office also sought to ascertain the State Department’s position before making a final decision. The State Department agreed to send observers in an unofficial capacity only. Lane asked that an expert in electoral procedure be attached to the staff of the American embassy during the electoral period but the State Department were reluctant

⁴⁸³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56450/N14980/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 November 1946.

⁴⁸⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56451/N15237/34/55, Foreign Office News Department, 29 November 1946.

⁴⁸⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56448/N13305/34/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 24 October 1946.

even to take this step.⁴⁸⁶ Having received the State Department's final decision, the British government confirmed that it too would send only unofficial observers.⁴⁸⁷

On 20 November, Cavendish-Bentinck informed Mikołajczyk that the British government would not be able to do more than send unofficial observers to the Polish election. Mikołajczyk replied that there would be little to see during the elections; the next six weeks would be the crucial period, during which the security police would begin a campaign of repression in order to ensure favourable results in the election for the government. It was for this period immediately preceding the election that foreign observers were needed. Already widespread arrests of PSL members were taking place in order to ensure that those who were likely to be selected as candidates would be imprisoned before the candidate lists were published. Mikołajczyk cited the example of the town of Wschowa, where five chairmen of the local committee had been arrested in six months. Cavendish-Bentinck confirmed Mikołajczyk's claim about the increased activity of the security police. '[A] campaign of repression appears to be in full swing' he reported. Hankey commented that it appeared that the election was going to be 'rigged before ever it takes place.' All the Foreign Office did by way of assistance, however, was to resolve to send British press representatives out to Poland to document these abuses as soon as possible.⁴⁸⁸ Increasingly restricted by Bevin's preference to allow the US to lead on policy towards Poland, the Foreign Office gradually came to regard a PPR takeover as inevitable. The dispatch of press representatives was a poor substitute for official inspectors to scrutinise the election process. It sent out an unmistakable signal of lack of interest, which the provisional government was quick to perceive.

PPS split

In the summer of 1946, the PPS 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

⁴⁸⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56448/N13751/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office 26 October 1946; FO 371/56449/N14290/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 6 November 1946.

⁴⁸⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/56449/N14290/34/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 14 November 1946.

⁴⁸⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56450/N14912/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 20 November 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 22 November 1946.

had relegated the socialists to the position of ‘junior partner’ in the preparation and running of the referendum.⁴⁸⁹ 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.⁴⁹⁰ 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.⁴⁹¹

Tension rose between the PPS and PPR throughout the summer of 1946, with leaders from both parties criticising each other publically 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.’⁴⁹² In August, three prominent PPS members, Henryk Wachowicz, Bolesław Drobner, and Ryszard Obrzeka 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.’⁴⁹³ 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.⁴⁹⁴ The pro-PPR group planned to take control of the party headquarters, arrest Osóbka-Morawski and Cyrankiewicz, and initiate a merger of

⁴⁸⁹ Pra mowska, ‘The Polish Socialist Party’, 349.

⁴⁹⁰ The group of leaders who favoured greater independence from the PPR were Cyrankiewicz, Drobner, Hochfeld, Obrzeka, Osóbka-Morawski, Szwabe, Henryk Wachowicz. Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland*, 295.

⁴⁹¹ Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 295.

⁴⁹² Quoted in Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 295-8.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁴⁹⁴ Pra mowska, ‘Polish Socialist Party’, 341.

the communist and socialist parties. The plotters had also apparently enlisted the support of a prewar PPS military unit, which was brought up 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. Pramowska argues that 'the pro-Communist faction, through its premature action had precipitated the internal consolidation of those advocating independence from the PPR.' By the beginning of September, this centrist group was firmly in control of the party leadership.⁴⁹⁵

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 unpopularity of the PPR 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.⁴⁹⁶ In mid-September, Julian Hochfeld, a prominent centrist member of the PPS,⁴⁹⁷ reported to Denis Healey,⁴⁹⁸ secretary of the Labour party's International

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 349-50.

⁴⁹⁶ 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: PRO 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.

⁴⁹⁷ 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*, 253-5.

⁴⁹⁸ 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

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.⁴⁹⁹ Two weeks later, Witold Kulerski, secretary of the Council of the PPS, acting as Mikołajczyk’s envoy in London,⁵⁰⁰ confirmed that Stalin had ‘agreed to less rigid control in Poland’, that he had consented to Matuszewski’s expulsion from the PPS, and 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.’⁵⁰¹

This contemporary analysis of the Soviet position is supported by the interpretations of several historians. Pra mowska 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.⁵⁰² Likewise, Coutouvidis and Reynolds argue that the evidence suggests that Stalin reined in the PPR after Cyrankiewicz and Osóbka-Morawski’s trip to Moscow. According to Coutouvidis and Reynolds, Berman, who was 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.⁵⁰³

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

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), 74-5.

⁴⁹⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56446/N12218/34/55, Healey to Hankey, 12 September 1946.

⁵⁰⁰ 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: PRO FO 371/56447/N12741/34/55, Hankey memo, 28 September 1946; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 11 October 1946.

⁵⁰¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56446/N12336/34/55, Hankey to Cavendish-Bentinck, 25 September 1946.

⁵⁰² Pra mowska, ‘Polish Socialist Party’, 350-51.

⁵⁰³ Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939-1947*, 263.

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's 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 Mikołajczyk, who for months had emphasised that the political situation in Poland could be 'saved' if the PPS broke with the PPR.⁵⁰⁴ 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, more concerned with extricating Britain from Polish affairs, noted that although it was 'right to keep up pressure', they must not 'carry this policy on a moment longer than absolutely necessary, it must not develop into a kind of amusing sport.'⁵⁰⁵

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. 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'.⁵⁰⁶ 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.⁵⁰⁷ 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

⁵⁰⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56451/N15295/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 November 1946.

⁵⁰⁵ TNA: PRO 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.

⁵⁰⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/56449/N14241/34/G55, Warner memo, 1 November 1946; Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 28 October 1946.

⁵⁰⁷ TNA: PRO FO/371/56449/N14042/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 28 October 1946; Foreign Office minutes, 5 November 1946.

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.⁵⁰⁸

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; Ludwik Grosfeld served as Polish representative instead and the meeting never came to pass.⁵⁰⁹ 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 SL would have 15 per cent; the [Lublin] Democrat party would have 10 per cent; the other parties allied to the PPR would have three per cent; and 15-20 per cent of seats would be allocated to the 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 that 'the party would gain by conclusion of this agreement.' Hankey commented that if the PPS continued to cooperate with the PPR, the two parties together 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 the votes. 'All things taken together', noted Hankey, 'this would be about as monstrous a ramp as it is possible to conceive.'⁵¹⁰

The Foreign Office was indignant at this blatant instance of manipulation but they had missed a crucial, albeit narrow, window of time during which they might have assisted in bringing about a different outcome. Officials continually expressed dismay at the tactics employed by the PPR to ensure that it wielded absolute control over the political process, in particular the increasingly brutal suppression of the PSL. Yet when a 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

⁵⁰⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56449/N14227/34/55, Warner memo, 1 November 1946.

⁵⁰⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56449/N14227/34/55, Warner memo, 1 November 1946.

⁵¹⁰ TNA: PRO 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.

quite prepared to break entirely with the PPR, believing that 'it was necessary that Poland should be governed by a coalition of Communists, Socialists and a Peasant group.'⁵¹¹ 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.⁵¹² 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.⁵¹³ Further, the embassy in Warsaw initially cautioned that the seriousness of the rift should not be exaggerated.⁵¹⁴ By the time the accuracy of the reports had been established, Bevin was in New York for the third Council of Foreign Ministers' meeting. 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 behaviour for a communist.' Bevin wondered if there had been a split in the Italian Communist Party.⁵¹⁵ It is a response which suggests deep indifference to the course of events in Poland (and indeed in Eastern Europe more broadly). While

⁵¹¹ TNA: PRO FO 731/56446/N10853/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 25 August 1946.

⁵¹² 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*, 263-4.

⁵¹³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56446/N12218/34/55, Healey to Hankey, 12 September 1946.

⁵¹⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/56446/N11146/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 3 September 1946.

⁵¹⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56449/N14042/34/55, Hankey to Cavendish-Bentinck, 23 November 1946.

reasonable for Bevin to be sceptical about Reale's motive for repeating this story,⁵¹⁶ the foreign secretary's complete lack of interest in (or failure to grasp the significance of) this change in Polish politics suggests that he regarded the issue as peripheral, and of low priority for the Foreign Office. 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.

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.⁵¹⁷ 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.⁵¹⁸ 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 absolutely accurate.

⁵¹⁶ 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.' Reale, *Raporty Polska*, 12.

⁵¹⁷ Pra mowska, 'Polish Socialist Party', 350-1; Eleonora i Bronisław Syzdkowie, *Cyrankiewicz. Zanim zostanie zapomniany* (Warsaw, 1996), 122-3.

⁵¹⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56451/N15295/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 November 1946.

As an outcome of the Moscow meeting, Cyrankiewicz, whom the Foreign Office had regarded as the staunchest of the socialists who opposed cooperation between the PPS and the PPR, was appointed minister without portfolio in the Polish government. The announcement came on the same day that the PPS-PPR agreement was published. ‘At first sight’, observed Cavendish-Bentinck, ‘it appears that the agreement is rather a capitulation’ by the PPS leaders.⁵¹⁹ Hankey concluded that the PPS had been ‘bought’ or ‘at least squared’ with assistance from Moscow. ‘The heat has been turned fully on’ the opposition parties, including both the PSL and dissident socialists. Five well-known members of the PPS who objected to cooperation with the PPR, and who might plausibly organise independent action of some kind at the time of the elections had been arrested. ‘[I]t is obvious’, Hankey remarked, ‘that the elections will be cooked.’⁵²⁰ According to Cyrankiewicz’s biographers, however, Stalin’s assurances in Sochi that the PPS would always ‘be needed by the Polish nation’, and his exhortation that the PPR leaders cooperate with their PPS counterparts had satisfied Cyrankiewicz that Stalin’s intention was not the destruction of the PPS. On the contrary, Stalin had provided ‘just the guarantees’ sought by Cyrankiewicz and the rest of the PPS leadership.⁵²¹

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. A member of the editorial staff of the party newspaper had been arrested, together with a typist, both of whom had had contact with the British embassy. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the PSL to maintain contact with the British embassy.⁵²² The PSL had been liquidated altogether in the region⁵²³ of Radomsko on the grounds that members of the party continued to belong to

⁵¹⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56451/ N15385/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 29 November 1946; FO 371/56451/N15793/34/55, Warsaw to Attlee, 3 December 1946.

⁵²⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/56451/N15295/34/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 2 December 1946; FO 371/56451/N15713/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 3 December 1946.

⁵²¹ Eleonora i Bronisław Syzdkowie, *Cyrankiewicz*, 122.

⁵²² Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939-1947*, 275-6, 297-99; TNA: PRO FO 371/56451/N15240/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 November 1946.

⁵²³ *Gmina* of Radomsko. Literal translation is ‘commune of Radomsko.’

the underground.⁵²⁴ In the first week of December, Cavendish-Bentinck travelled to Radom, Kielce, Kraków, Katowice and Cz stochowa. He reported that measures were being taken against prominent supporters of the PSL, particularly in the countryside. ‘It thus seems to be’, he concluded, ‘that the Polish Government are taking preliminary steps to prevent M. Mikolajczyk’s Polish Peasant Party from being able to bring about any widespread movement of protest amongst their supporters.’

The embassy also received very accurate reports from throughout the country concerning the pressure being applied to factory workers to support the present regime.⁵²⁵ In his study of the industrial working class in Łód and Wrocław in the immediate postwar years, Padraig Kenney explains how the PPR gradually established control of the factories by appointing personnel directors who reported directly to the Ministry of Industry. The personnel director (*personalny*) ‘was an embodiment of the PPR’s image and was a main conduit of party propaganda into the work force.’ Crucially, the *personalny* controlled administrative appointments, thus allowing him to ensure that the more important posts were held by the politically reliable. The *personalny*, argues Kenney, ‘could exert considerable pressure on workers in the name of his party and the state – could become indeed the unofficial ruler of the factory.’⁵²⁶ British diplomatic staff collected detailed local evidence of this type of pressure. Cavendish-Bentinck reported that the government-appointed communist supervisors in all factories and offices were taking steps to ‘ensure that the more important and better paid posts are held by individuals whom they believe to be reliable supporters of the present regime’, while ‘those who openly voice opinions hostile thereto are dismissed.’⁵²⁷ Similarly, in Łód, the consul reported that workers in government-run undertakings had been given notices of dismissal, with reemployment offered on condition that they joined the PPR.⁵²⁸

At the end of November, Mikołajczyk 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. Both the State Department and the

⁵²⁴ TNA: PRO 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.

⁵²⁵ TNA: PRO 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.

⁵²⁶ Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 32-33.

⁵²⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N15949/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 7 December 1946.

⁵²⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56449/N14649/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 12 November 1946.

Foreign Office initially understood that Mikołajczyk intended to make a direct appeal to the Yalta powers, and both objected strenuously to this step, although the Foreign Office rather reluctantly conceded that it could not object to Mikołajczyk simply informing the Yalta powers about conditions in Poland.⁵²⁹ 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. The Foreign Office asked Cavendish-Bentinck to quietly discourage Mikołajczyk from resorting to an economic boycott. It sought to avoid any action that carried the possibility of eliciting Russian armed intervention. Put simply, what mattered above all was that the British government should not appear to have in any way impeded free elections in Poland, while not actually doing anything concrete to assist the opposition: '[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.'⁵³⁰

On 27 November, Mikołajczyk told Cavendish-Bentinck that the possibility of an economic boycott was still under consideration. The PSL was also considering instructing its supporters to stop paying their taxes. Mikołajczyk dismissed Cavendish-Bentinck's concern that this action would result in armed Soviet intervention. Nor did he think that the Polish population would turn against the PSL for sabotaging the country's economy or disrupting the food supply. Cavendish-Bentinck remained doubtful about the potential consequences if the PSL carried out these threats. He worried that the Polish government would arrest Mikołajczyk and threaten to imprison all those who participated.⁵³¹

Mikołajczyk 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. He warned Cavendish-Bentinck that if the majority of PSL candidates were arrested, the

⁵²⁹ The State Department did not even want Mikołajczyk to inform the Yalta powers directly about the repression of the PSL, suggesting instead that he request Bierut to transmit the information. TNA: PRO FO 371/56450/N15057/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 22 November 1946.

⁵³⁰ TNA: PRO 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.

⁵³¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56451/N15238/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 November 1946.

party might be forced to boycott the election altogether. Cavendish-Bentinck tried to discourage Mikołajczyk from taking this step. Likewise, he urged Mikołajczyk not to implement his threats of an economic boycott, or a refusal to pay taxes. Cavendish-Bentinck asked whether ‘some other means’ could not be found for the Polish population to ‘prove to the world that these elections did not represent their will.’ Mikołajczyk replied simply that ‘this would be difficult.’⁵³² Cavendish-Bentinck was closely acquainted with the internal situation in Poland, and he knew that the PSL had limited room to manoeuvre. He was nowhere near as naïve as this hopelessly vague and rather pathetic plea suggests. Rather, his comment reflects the increasingly narrow policy options open to him. Essentially, Britain sought to discourage Mikołajczyk 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.

The American government showed even more limited willingness to offer further support to the PSL. The State Department did not want to make the election rigging public at all, fearing that any publicity would only encourage Mikołajczyk to boycott the election and make an appeal to the Yalta powers. If the PSL did decide to contest the election, the best moment for publicity in the view of the State Department, would be 24 hours before polling day.⁵³³ Mikołajczyk told Cavendish-Bentinck that he had been ‘much disturbed’ upon learning that not only did Washington seek to discourage him from making an appeal to the Yalta powers but Lane had been instructed not to even accept the submission of any statement regarding the repression of the PSL.⁵³⁴ In talks with Lane, Mikołajczyk confirmed Cavendish-Bentinck’s observation of a ‘rapid deterioration in the Polish internal situation’, and warned of possible civil war in the spring. Mikołajczyk also declared his intention to address a statement to the Yalta powers, although he would stop short of an appeal requiring action. The State Department conceded that Lane could accept Mikołajczyk’s communication, ‘but [was] not to give it any official cognisance by acknowledging it or replying to it or commenting on it.’ The Foreign Office instructed Cavendish-Bentinck to ‘keep in line

⁵³² TNA: PRO FO 371/56451/N15295/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 November 1946.

⁵³³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56451/N15703/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 7 December 1946; Foreign Office minutes, 9 December 1946; FO 371/56451/N15704/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 7 December 1946.

⁵³⁴ Cavendish-Bentinck reported in his communication with the Foreign Office that Lane had said this. Lane does not specify in his memoir that he had been ordered not to accept Mikołajczyk’s submission. TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16289/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 December 1946.

with Mr Lane'.⁵³⁵ Thus, the already limited support that Britain was prepared to offer was further reduced by the virtually complete American withdrawal from Polish affairs.

Polish reply to British note

At the end of December, the Polish government replied to the British protest note of 20 November. The Polish government rejected any claim by Britain to the right to involve itself under the terms of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements in the way in which the Polish elections were being conducted. As far as the Polish government was concerned, there were no grounds for further discussion of the subject. Instead, the Polish government accused Britain of its standard litany of misdeeds: continuing to support and provide funding to members of the former government-in-exile; British failure to relinquish supreme command of the Polish armed forces, and the further recruitment of 'a new semi-military formation under the name of a Polish Resettlement Corps';⁵³⁶ failure to safeguard the property of the Polish state in Britain, transferring it instead to members and officials of the former exile government; failure to return Polish gold; failure to return Polish naval vessels; failure to repatriate Polish citizens who wished to return home; failure to accept the agreed number of German refugees in the British zone of occupation in Germany. The letter concluded with the hope that 'the British Government in future will devote more attention to its own obligations.'⁵³⁷

The Foreign Office recognised that 'this recital of all [the] Polish Government's grievances' amounted to a diversionary tactic, designed to deflect attention away from the abuses in the run-up to the elections. The Foreign Office speculated that the Polish government was also acting with an eye to the eventual publication of the note, which would help to further its anti-British propaganda campaign.⁵³⁸ The British reply observed that all of the Polish government's accusations had 'previously formed the subject of official discussions and some of them have been revived without apparent

⁵³⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16189/34/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 18 December 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 20 December 1946; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 21 December 1946.

⁵³⁶ The Polish Resettlement Corps (PRC) was established in May 1946 as a means of facilitating the settlement in Britain of Polish servicemen who had decided against returning to Poland. Although officially a military unit under British military control, the PRC was an unarmed non-combatant formation. Keith Sword, 'Absorption of Poles into Civilian Employment in Britain, 1945-1950', in Bramwell, ed., *Refugees in the Age of Total War*, 236.

⁵³⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16283/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 20 December 1946.

⁵³⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16290/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 20 December 1946.

reason at this particular juncture.' Nevertheless, each allegation was addressed individually. Britain emphasised that it had withdrawn recognition from the former exile government and that the ex-members who had remained in Britain had been treated as private individuals. Britain rejected the contention that it had been obliged to hand over supreme command of the Polish armed forces under its control. There existed no such obligation. The Potsdam agreement went no further than committing the three signatories to 'assist the Polish Provisional Government in facilitating the return to Poland as soon as practicable of all Poles abroad who wish to go', including members of the armed forces. The note pointed out that the majority of the armed forces had been unwilling to return to Poland, and the British government was 'not prepared to bring compulsion to bear on those who are unwilling' to go back. Repatriation of all Polish citizens had also been delayed by the Polish government's insistence on screening each individual by consular staff before granting reentry. The speed of repatriation continued to be much slower than Britain would have wished. The British government denied the claim that the resettlement corps had any military purpose, having been formed solely for the purpose of facilitating the integration of its members into civilian life. With regard to the non-ratification of the Anglo-Polish financial agreement and the consequent retention of the gold covered by that agreement, the British government noted that ratification had been subject to a set of clearly stated conditions, the details of which had been explained to the Polish ambassador in London from the outset. The transfer of Germans from Poland had been delayed by the difficult conditions in the British zone of occupation that winter. The Polish government was well aware of these circumstances. The letter concluded with an expression of regret that the Polish government had found it necessary 'to make this series of accusations and allegations, and to publish them without awaiting an answer.'

The British reply also returned to the question of the conduct of the elections, reminding the Polish government that 'the manner of holding elections in Poland is the subject of international agreements and is more than a purely domestic concern. The Polish Provisional Government are bound by the undertakings they entered into in return for recognition as well as by the Potsdam Agreement . . . to hold free and unfettered elections.' It was therefore 'natural and proper' for the British government to express concern over breaches or near breaches by the Polish government of its undertakings under the terms of those agreements. The British government pressed the issue of the

restricted representation on the electoral commissions, the inadequate system of appealing in the event of an electoral dispute, and the failure to provide equal facilities to all political parties to conduct their election campaigns freely without ‘arrest or threat of arrest or discriminatory restrictions.’ The reports of widespread arrest were causing ‘very grave concern’ to the British government.⁵³⁹ Although the British reply served as a well-timed reminder to the Polish government immediately prior to the elections, the warning it contained was empty in that it repeated the same points as the November note, and carried no threat of sanctions if the Polish government failed to live up to the Yalta and Potsdam undertakings.

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, again pointing out that the conduct of the elections did not correspond to the Yalta and Moscow agreements. In the view of both the ambassadors, it was crucial that the notes be submitted before the elections.’ Cavendish-Bentinck submitted a draft statement for review by the Foreign Office, as well as by the British embassies in Moscow and Washington. Instead, 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. ‘You should express the hope’, continued the Foreign Office instructions, ‘that the Soviet Government will use their great influence with the authorities of the Polish Government block . . . to remedy the situation . . . [T]he present complete disregard of the Yalta and Potsdam pledges will seriously embarrass relations between our two Governments and will inevitably have a serious

⁵³⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16290/34/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 10 January 1947.

effect on the improved atmosphere that has resulted from the agreements reached in New York [at the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting].⁵⁴⁰

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. Bevin's reasoning is not explained in the Foreign Office files but it seems significant that these instructions were issued in the wake of the Labour rebellion. Bevin's decision to redirect the British protest to the Soviets and to soften its terms suggests that he sought to avoid a public confrontation with the Soviet Union which would inevitably antagonise his detractors in the PLP. Further, in the months immediately following the meeting in New York, 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 sought to limit the points of serious contention between Britain and the Soviet Union, choosing to prioritise Germany over Poland.⁵⁴¹

Peterson met Molotov on 11 January. Peterson began by enumerating 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 expressed 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.'

⁵⁴⁰ TNA: PRO 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.

⁵⁴¹ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 120-21.

Molotov promised that the Soviet government would think over what the British and American ambassadors had said.⁵⁴²

Peterson's meeting with Molotov was the final significant attempt on the part of the British government to influence the political settlement in Poland. In the crucial weeks leading up to the elections, Britain was already beginning the process of disengagement from Polish affairs. Mikołajczyk perceived this withdrawal. He warned that the public had noticed that recent BBC broadcasts in Polish had made few allusions to specific events or to the general situation in Poland, particularly with regard to the elections. According to Mikołajczyk, this change in the broadcasts was being 'construed by the public as an intimation that [Britain had] lost interest.' Cavendish-Bentinck warned that it was important to 'avoid the impression that we are disinteresting ourselves from events in Poland.'⁵⁴³

Essentially, Britain had written off the PSL before the elections had even taken place. The Foreign Office's diminishing support for Mikołajczyk and his party was reflected in the language of the minutes, reports and telegrams. For example, a report on 10 January, a week and a half before the elections, included the comment: 'If we are correct in assuming that Mikolajczyk's party can do nothing more effectively to secure their rights . . .'⁵⁴⁴ This statement suggests a marked diminishment in support for the PSL leader. There was a shift in focus towards ensuring that Britain not appear to have been negligent in meeting its commitment to see that free and fair elections were held in Poland: 'If this policy failed we should make it clear to the world that it was not because we lost interest or were pusillanimous in our support but because of Soviet (and Polish) intransigence.'⁵⁴⁵

With regard to the post-election period, Cavendish-Bentinck predicted that the PSL would be broken up and an attempt would be made to eliminate Mikołajczyk. Instead, the Foreign Office turned its attention to the PPS, speculating that once the party realised that 'if Poland is completely communised they also will be eliminated, they will begin to stand up to the latter. While hitherto rather lacking the courage of their real convictions and for the moment temporarily squared by the electoral agreement . . . they

⁵⁴² TNA: PRO FO 371/66089/N500/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 11 January 1947.

⁵⁴³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16562/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 31 December 1946.

⁵⁴⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N658/6/55, 'British Policy towards Poland', 10 January 1947.

⁵⁴⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N658/6/55, 'Future British Policy in Poland', 10 January 1947.

have been showing interesting signs of restiveness in recent months.' Cavendish-Bentinck agreed that the PPS would begin to stand up to the PPR after the elections, in which case they would be likely to receive strong support from the public since all hope for better conditions would rest with the PPS 'after the reduction of the Polish Peasant Party to impotence.'⁵⁴⁶

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 (*Wolno i Niezawistosc* – WiN). 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.⁵⁴⁷

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.'⁵⁴⁸ 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

⁵⁴⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N658/6/55, 'British Policy towards Poland', 10 January 1947.

⁵⁴⁷ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 200-201.

⁵⁴⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16236/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 20 December 1946.

conception is clever for the Army as a whole is the one body in the Polish State which has always maintained its popularity.⁵⁴⁹

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.⁵⁵⁰ 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, or those responsible for delivering the candidate lists or collecting supporting signatures were arrested.⁵⁵¹ By the end of December, 24 PSL offices had been closed.⁵⁵² 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.'⁵⁵³

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, which had been recounted in conversations 'with a large variety of persons' 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

⁵⁴⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16323/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Attlee, 12 December 1946.

⁵⁵⁰ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 202; Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939-1947*, 275.

⁵⁵¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16279/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 December 1946.

⁵⁵² TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16236/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 20 December 1946.

⁵⁵³ TNA: PRO FO 371/56452/N16413/34/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 24 December 1946; Foreign Office Minutes, 31 December 1946.

one's dwelling. 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.' Hankey noted that the Polish government intended to 'spare no efforts to persuade world opinion that the elections have not been faked.'⁵⁵⁴

The PPR used a combination of manufactured excuses and blatant intimidation to precipitate the collapse of electoral lists. Zygmunt Zuławski, the prewar vice-chairman of the Supreme Council of the PPS, and the leader of a small breakaway faction of the party which had withdrawn in protest over the PPS's agreement with the PPR,⁵⁵⁵ reported that the Chrzanow electoral list, which included his name, had been withdrawn. The representative of the list, who had been 'expecting chicanery', had collected over 200 signatures. The UB visited the signatories and in the face of their threats, persuaded all but 57 to withdraw. As 100 signatures were needed, these withdrawals precipitated the collapse of the list. Polish Radio then announced the rejection of the list, explaining that the PSL had no followers there and had only succeeded in gathering the necessary signatures by means of threats and force.⁵⁵⁶ The episode of Zuławski's electoral list indicates that the PPR assiduously pursued even their insignificant opponents. Zuławski's followers were not numerous, and their ranks had already been further diminished by threats and intimidation, leading all but two to withdraw as electoral candidates.

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

⁵⁵⁴ TNA: PRO 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.

⁵⁵⁵ Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 143.

⁵⁵⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/66089/N557/6/55, Report by M.B. Winch, 4 January 1947.

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.⁵⁵⁷

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 the way 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 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.⁵⁵⁸

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.⁵⁵⁹

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

⁵⁵⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/66089/N460/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 10 January 1947.

⁵⁵⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/66089/N558/6/55, Report by M.B. Winch, 7 January 1947.

⁵⁵⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N573/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 14 January 1947.

their own complete success . . . The strongest measures are being taken to fake the election.' 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 been 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.' This was due to several factors. First, Poland's Soviet-trained security forces had become very efficient. Second, 'despair of any improvement' among the population was giving way to apathy. Third, it was unlikely that a 'coordinated popular anti-government movement' would emerge.⁵⁶⁰

British policy planning for Poland after the elections

In a report of 10 January, the Foreign Office turned its attention to post-election policy. The central object of British policy should remain the same: 'to do what may be possible to prevent the establishment of a purely totalitarian régime.' When faced with flagrant violations of its pledges by the Polish government, the Foreign Office concluded that there could 'be no question of demanding fresh elections or withdrawing recognition' because '[t]he only practical result of any of these proposals would be to diminish our influence in Poland.' The first proposed action would be to make a 'strong protest', about the unrepresentative character of the government and the Sejm, coupled

⁵⁶⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N658/6/55, 'British Policy towards Poland', 10 January 1947.

with ‘an attitude of latent hostility’ to the Polish government and to try to block as far as possible the extension of credits and other facilities to Poland. The problem with this policy was that its primary consequence would be to ‘punish the Polish people rather than their Government’, impede the reconstruction of the country, and lose influence with those members of the government bloc, particularly the socialists, who hoped to prevent the country from being communised entirely. A second alternative, at the opposite extreme, would be to issue only a mild protest and then to disengage completely from the future course of events in Poland. ‘[W]e should then concentrate quite cynically on cultivating the new government for what little we can get out of it in the way of trade and consideration for British financial interests.’ Cavendish-Bentinck opposed this course of action, on the grounds that it would weaken the opposition and ultimately lead to Poland becoming ‘the 17th Republic of the Soviet Union.’ The Foreign Office acknowledged that this option would be

regarded as a betrayal of our friends in Poland and would be the more unfortunate in that we encouraged M. Mikolajczyk, M. Popiel and many other London Poles to return in the hope that we should succeed in getting the Yalta Agreement effectively executed. Indeed, Mr. Churchill, then Prime Minister, did undoubtedly commit H.M.G. to M. Mikolajczyk in June, 1945, when he persuaded him to go to Moscow and take part in the conference that resulted in the establishment of the [Polish provisional government of national unity] 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.⁵⁶¹

The wording of this section of the memorandum is significant. It explicitly acknowledged Churchill’s promise to Mikołajczyk in June 1945, as well as the gravity of the consequences for the individuals who chose to return to Poland on the strength of that promise. The memo makes explicit the sense of commitment which underpinned all the Foreign Office’s efforts to influence the postwar political settlement. It also shows that the commitment continued to weigh on the officials of the Northern department, even as they concluded that it would be impossible to fulfil.

The Foreign Office decided that the best course of action would be ‘to make a firm, though measured, protest’ over the conduct of the elections, and ‘thereafter to do our best to maintain our influence in Poland by doing anything we can to assist the Polish

⁵⁶¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N658/6/55, ‘Future British Policy in Poland’, 10 January 1947.

people to develop trade and cultural contacts.' Britain should maintain 'friendly contacts' with the PSL and 'very discreetly' encourage the PPS 'to build up Polish resistance to out-and-out communisation and to preserve some measure of national independence.' In other words, a 'scaled down' version of the existing British policy. Above all, appearances should be protected. The Foreign Office recommended that Britain should 'endeavour to make the transition from our recent policy to this new policy in such a way that it is perfectly clear that we have done our utmost to secure the execution of the undertakings given to us . . . and we should see that the public both here and in Poland know where the blame lies.'⁵⁶² In order to make the question of blame unmistakably clear, an approach to the Soviet government would be necessary. The Foreign Office proposed to recommend tripartite discussions with the US and the Soviet Union after the Polish elections to determine whether the elections had fulfilled the Yalta and Potsdam pledges and if not, what steps might be taken to remedy the situation. '[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 without fear of contradiction 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, the Foreign Office had no hope of influencing the conduct of elections in a way that might actually affect the outcome, but it was very concerned to preserve the impression that it had been loyal to the 'right side' in Poland, and had not been remiss in discharging its responsibilities.

A further indication that appearances were paramount was the Foreign Office's intention to ratify the Anglo-Polish financial agreement and return the balance of the Polish gold still held in the UK. This should be achieved 'without loss of face' by dealing with a PPS member of the government (preferably Cyrankiewicz). 'Such a formula might be that while we did not regard the conditions which we had laid down for the ratification of the Financial Agreement as having been fulfilled we no longer felt justified in withholding from the de facto Government of Poland property which undoubtedly belonged to the Polish people. We should thus ratify under protest.' In

⁵⁶² Ibid.

return for ratification of the financial agreement, Britain should request an assurance from the Polish government that opposition politicians would not be ‘penalised’.⁵⁶³

Elections

On election day, Cavendish-Bentinck, accompanied by the visiting British MP Aiden Crawley, 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.’⁵⁶⁴ 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.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Cavendish-Bentinck accurately described the methods by which the regime controlled voting by state employees. 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.’ *Rebuilding Poland*, 54.

Afterwards, however, the results in four of the six booths were changed, and one was reversed. Similar manipulation of results occurred in Pozna⁵⁶⁵.

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 ‘won’ 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; independent groups had four. ‘In my opinion’, wrote Cavendish-Bentinck, ‘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 in the case of the army. 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. What their feelings will be at seeing [the] extent to which results have been falsified remains to be seen.’⁵⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Cavendish-Bentinck advised that British policy should move swiftly on: ‘The elections are past and no amount of protests will alter their result. I submit that it is

⁵⁶⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N1159/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 24 January 1947.

⁵⁶⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N934/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 21 January 1947; N1159/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 24 January 1947.

more important to look to the future and to try to prevent an iron curtain descending on cultural connexions between Poland and the West, and on true information from the West, and also to fight against efforts of the Polish Government to poison the minds of people against us.⁵⁶⁷ These comments suggest that this was the moment at which Cavendish-Bentinck gave up on the possibility of altering the political situation in Poland. Instead, he downgraded his objective to preventing an irrevocable breach between Britain and Poland on a cultural level.

Conclusion

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 1946-7, 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. Not only did Britain refuse to make a forceful intervention with the Warsaw government as Mikołajczyk requested, it vetoed several PSL initiatives that could conceivably have had an effect: an appeal to the UN, an election boycott, a withholding of goods or a refusal to pay taxes. Similarly, the British failed to capitalise on the PPS-PPR split to exert influence on the socialist leaders.

Throughout the period, the Warsaw embassy obtained remarkably accurate information from a wide variety of sources, ranging from local officials, government and factory employees, as well as a number of sources from different political parties. Further, Cavendish-Bentinck enjoyed cordial relations with Reale, who afforded insight into conditions within the PPR and between the PPR and Moscow, to which the British would otherwise have had difficulty gaining access. Cavendish-Bentinck's analysis of the political situation was very often accurate: his reading of the falling out between the PPS and the PPR was prescient; likewise he foresaw exactly how the PPR would chip away at the PSL, until only remnants of the party remained, as well as the way in which the elections would be conducted. The withdrawal of support from Bevin and for the

⁵⁶⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/66090/N1077/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 January 1947.

first time the Foreign Office as well, however, left the embassy emasculated, unable to offer sufficient support on its own, until eventually even Cavendish-Bentinck and his staff also began to accept that the PSL would be eliminated.

Chapter 5: Mikołajczyk's Escape, January - November 1947

Introduction

After the Polish elections, a strong sense of resignation began to seep in to 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.⁵⁶⁸ The British response to the outcome of the Polish elections was partly conditioned by changes in the international system. A new international order dominated by rising tension, distrust and division between the Soviet Union and the western powers was beginning to take shape 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. The Foreign Office likened the situation in Poland to that in Romania, where a communist regime had been installed in November 1946 by means similar to those employed during the Polish elections: a hastily enacted electoral law which made registration difficult for opponents of the communist-dominated government coalition, intimidation of opposition politicians and their supporters, and manipulation at the polls.⁵⁶⁹ Another stretch of protracted, unproductive discussions with the Soviets over another East European state 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 urgent question of the future of Germany early in the year.⁵⁷⁰ By this point, Bevin's priority was to persuade the Americans to abandon any prolongation of the charade of four-power cooperation in Germany, consolidate the bizonal arrangements, and put in place an administrative and governance structure in the western zones which would be impermeable to Soviet influence. This

⁵⁶⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/66091/N1179/6/55, Foreign Office to Washington, 1 February 1947.

⁵⁶⁹ The government bloc in Romania was the National Democratic Front (NDF). The Romanian general elections were held on 19 November 1946. Liliana Saiu, *The Great Powers and Rumania, 1944-1946: A Study of the Early Cold War Era* (New York: East European Monographs, 1992), 196-7; Richard J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century and After* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 229-230.

⁵⁷⁰ 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.

objective was made urgent by a severe economic crisis in Britain, which rendered the burden of maintaining the British zone of Germany unsustainable. A corollary of this first step towards the formal division of Germany was a tacit acceptance that Britain must cease to interfere in the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe if the Soviets were to be kept out of the west. Ultimately, a consequence of the shifting international situation and the pressing need to achieve a settlement over Germany was a marked British withdrawal from Poland's internal affairs.

Changes in personnel at the Warsaw embassy also affected British policy. 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 supporting the Polish opposition wherever possible. 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 lingering on 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 displaced German refugees from Poland's western territories 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 – or was on the verge of failing – 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 – which did not always extend to the “post-Cavendish-Bentinck regime” in the Warsaw embassy – 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.’⁵⁷¹ 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: public administration, reconstruction, work and social welfare, treasury, justice, maritime affairs, and international trade.⁵⁷² On 5 February, Bierut – the only declared candidate – was elected president of the republic by the newly convened Sejm.⁵⁷³ In his report on the opening of the new Sejm, Cavendish-Bentinck commented that real control of the country remained in the hands of the original nucleus of the Committee of National Liberation formed in Lublin.⁵⁷⁴

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. The Polish authorities insisted that the new constitution closely resembled that of 1921. In reality, however, ‘while maintaining the appearance of retaining a parliamentary, cabinet

⁵⁷¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66092/N2811/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 28 February 1947.

⁵⁷² Pra mowska, ‘The Polish Socialist Party’, 352; Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 350.

⁵⁷³ Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 348.

⁵⁷⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/66092/N2811/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 28 February 1947.

system of government, it sanctioned a new structure in the form of the national councils and the Council of the State.' The establishment of the national councils, which had the task of supervising local authorities at all levels, was relatively inconsequential; the most notable feature of the new constitution was that it created the institution of the State Council, which consisted of the president of the republic, the marshal and the three vice-marshals of the Sejm, and the president of the Supreme Chamber of Control (Najwy sza Izba Kontroli – NIK). This new body straddled the dividing line between executive and legislative authority. It could initiate legislation, declare martial law, and sanction decrees passed by the government – and the government could rule by decree during the nine months of the year when the Sejm was not in session. Overall, the creation of the State Council 'allowed real power to be concentrated in the hands of a narrow group of people.'⁵⁷⁵

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.⁵⁷⁶ 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.⁵⁷⁷ The statement 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

⁵⁷⁵ Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 351-54.

⁵⁷⁶ 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: PRO FO 371/66091/N1179/6/55, Washington to Foreign Office, 28 January 1947.

⁵⁷⁷ 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: PRO FO 371/66091/N1535/6/55, 4 February 1947.

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 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.’⁵⁷⁸ 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 country now lay beyond the reach of British influence; there would be no further attempts to shape its political future.

An important reason for this attitude of pronounced detachment from the situation in Poland was a hardening of the British position towards the Soviet Union by early 1947. By this point, what Deighton defines as an ‘operational code, a cold-war mentality towards the Soviet Union’ had firmly taken hold in British foreign policy. This mentality was defined by an ever more firmly entrenched conviction that Moscow was pursuing ‘a blend of Soviet communism and Russian imperialism: coherent, well co-ordinated, denying co-existence with the West.’ British fears of a resurgent Germany had been replaced by a firm conviction that the Soviet Union posed the greater threat to British interests but ‘the worst scenario still remained that of Soviet communism fuelled by German economic might.’ If the postwar international order was to be defined by an adversarial relationship between the Soviet Union and the west, then it was essential

⁵⁷⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/66091/N1535/6/55, Statement for Foreign Affairs Debate [n.d.].

that Germany, or at least its industrialised western regions, should not be controlled or subject in any way to influence by the Soviets. As Deighton argues, the implications of Soviet expansionism for Europe became clear to the British before the Americans. The British concluded that 'if all Germany could not be secured for the West to sustain a favourable balance of power, then at least the western part of Germany had to be made safe for liberal democracy and free economy.' Bevin therefore sought to persuade the Americans of the futility of further negotiations with the Soviets over Germany in the run-up to the Moscow meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers.⁵⁷⁹ 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, I would argue that the decision was linked to this larger policy which was beginning to take shape more clearly by early 1947. Bevin hoped to persuade the US that it would be preferable to secure the western zones of Germany, even if it meant relinquishing a sizeable portion of the country to Soviet control. By extension, this 'hands off' approach applied to Poland – and indeed the rest of Eastern Europe – as well. 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, Nie ko, Wycech, and Banach, 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 the support of the majority of the party for Mikołajczyk. In March, the leaders of the dissenting faction were expelled from the party.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁹ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 136-7, 224-5.

⁵⁸⁰ After its defeat, the rebel group formed the PSL-Lewica (PSL-Left) faction, and began publishing its own newspaper, *Chłopi i Pa stwo*. 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 1947.⁵⁸¹ 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.⁵⁸²

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.⁵⁸³ 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 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!⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸¹ Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939-1947*, 300-1; Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 361-62.

⁵⁸² Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 337.

⁵⁸³ Coutouvidis and Reynolds, for example, argue that 'the West abandoned Mikołajczyk without ceremony.' Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939-1947*, 300.

⁵⁸⁴ TNA: PRO FO 371/66092/N2923/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 27 February 1947.

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.⁵⁸⁵ 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 meetings, 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. There is even a current of ridicule – or perhaps pity – in Cavendish-Bentinck's tone, a sense of disbelief at Mikołajczyk's failure to go gracefully, at his still entertaining hopes of overturning the new government.

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 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

⁵⁸⁵ 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 and spent the remainder of his career in the private sector. Howarth, *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary*, 221-3. 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.

events which had unfolded in Russia after the revolution.⁵⁸⁶ 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.’ Cyrankiewicz would be ‘as tough as he could with the Communists without openly breaking.’⁵⁸⁷

Cavendish-Bentinck believed that the PPR ‘intended to weaken the PPS, to infiltrate it, and in due course to make it an absolute satellite [of the Soviet Union].’ 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 Berman, ‘the Communist “eminence grise,” a remarkably able and intelligent man.’ 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.⁵⁸⁸ Further, Cyrankiewicz exercised no real autonomy from the PPR. He had gone to Moscow after the elections⁵⁸⁹ 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.⁵⁹⁰ 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 Modzelewski, now the minister. Finally, the PPS had also failed to secure any measure of control over the all-powerful security police.⁵⁹¹

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 the Bevin’s trip to

⁵⁸⁶ Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland, 1939-1947*, 303-4; Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 208; Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 364-65.

⁵⁸⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/66092/N2653/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 February 1947.

⁵⁸⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/66092/N2811/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 28 February 1947.

⁵⁸⁹ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 203.

⁵⁹⁰ Teresa Tora ska refers to Minc as ‘third in command in Poland, after Berman and Bierut.’ *Oni: Stalin’s Polish Puppets*, 15.

⁵⁹¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66092/N2811/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin, 28 February 1947.

Moscow, the Foreign Office observed that Cyrankiewicz had a reputation as 'a strong man who was thought to be opposed to complete subservience to the Communists.' As yet, however, neither he nor the party had 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.'⁵⁹² The risk, speculated 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.'⁵⁹³ 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 Lane and Cavendish-Bentinck at the end of February. Lane resigned in protest over the conduct of the elections. In a letter to secretary of state George Marshall requesting to be relieved of his duties Lane wrote that, as expected, the elections had been 'a mere formality in implementing the decision which ha[d] been previously reached between the government bloc parties and the Soviet Government: to retain in power the Communist-controlled minority.' Lane contended that his mission to Poland had come to an end and that his 'continued presence would be regarded as tacit acquiescence in the recent fraudulent elections.'⁵⁹⁴

Cavendish-Bentinck's transfer had been agreed prior to the elections, although the reason for the decision remains unclear. According to Cavendish-Bentinck's biographer,

⁵⁹² TNA: PRO FO 371/66092/N2537/6/55, 'Brief [on Poland] for Secretary of State to take to Moscow,' February 1947.

⁵⁹³ TNA: PRO FO 371/N2653/6/55, Hancock Minute, 4 March 1947.

⁵⁹⁴ *FRUS, 1947. Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union* vol. 4 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1972), 413-14; Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, 289-90; TNA: PRO FO 371/66091/N1282/6/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Warner, 24 January 1947.

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 Protocol Department 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'.⁵⁹⁵ 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.⁵⁹⁶ 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.⁵⁹⁷ 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 Cavendish-Bentinck had presented his credentials to Bierut. Recognition of the new government was already implicit in the British decision taken two weeks earlier at the

⁵⁹⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/56448/N13701/34/55, Cavendish-Bentinck to Hankey, 24 October 1946.

⁵⁹⁶ According to Howarth, Cavendish-Bentinck also interpreted the arrest of his friend, Count Ksawery Grocholski (see below, footnote 34), as part of a campaign by the Polish government to 'get rid' of him. Howarth, *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary*, 218-21. Colville also recalls that the Polish government wanted both Cavendish-Bentinck and Lane out of the country. Colville, *Strange Inheritance*, 188.

⁵⁹⁷ 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, 1939-44, and ambassador in Brazil, 1944-47. Warsaw was Gainer's last posting abroad before his retirement in 1951. The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Yearbook, 1952 (London, 1952), 286-7.

end of February to drop the word ‘provisional’ from the title of the Polish government but the presentation of Gainer’s credentials marked a formalisation of recognition.⁵⁹⁸

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.’⁵⁹⁹ Similarly, Howarth recalled that ‘[t]he departure of Bentinck was a cause of satisfaction to the Polish Government’.⁶⁰⁰ 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 definite. The Anglo-Polish financial agreement, which had been signed in London in 1946 but never ratified, also continued to give rise to ‘ill-will and hostile propaganda.’ Britain had refused ratification on the grounds that the Polish government had not fulfilled its obligations under the Yalta and Potsdam agreements. Now that the elections had been held, however, it seemed unwise to perpetuate the situation. Also on the economic front, Bevin should try to facilitate the conclusion of an Anglo-Polish trade agreement, which could prove mutually advantageous. He also needed to seek compensation for British interests affected by the Polish government’s decision to nationalise all foreign enterprises employing over 50 people.

Polish émigrés and the former members of the Polish government-in-exile who had remained in London continued to be a source of friction between London and Warsaw. The Foreign Office remained adamantly opposed to turning out any former member of the exile government. Similarly, Bevin should brook no criticism of the Polish

⁵⁹⁸ TNA: PRO 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; PRO FO 371/66092/N2586/6/55, Hankey minute, 12 March 1947; Foreign Office to Washington, 14 March 1947.

⁵⁹⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66093/N6707/6/55, Memo by John Russell, 28 May 1947.

⁶⁰⁰ Howarth, *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary*, 221.

Resettlement Corps, which was an essential but temporary means of helping Polish soldiers who had not opted for repatriation to settle in Britain or abroad. Along the same lines, Poland continued to accuse Britain of blocking Polish repatriation, which was untrue: the British government was simply ‘not . . . prepared to bring compulsion to bear to force those Poles to go back who do not want to.’⁶⁰¹

A troubling new development was a series of arrests of Polish employees of the British embassy in Warsaw and of acquaintances of British diplomats there, which were designed both to discourage Poles from contact with the western embassies and to discredit the British diplomatic corps. The first case to come to trial was that of Count Ksawery Grocholski, who was accused of acting as a liaison between the underground organisation WIN, which was hostile to the Polish government, and Cavendish-Bentinck.⁶⁰² The subsequent arrest of the chief translator employed in the British embassy in Warsaw, Maria Marinowska,⁶⁰³ suggested that the practice of extracting ‘confessions’ with the aim of establishing ‘proof’ of contact between the British embassy and local subversive organisations was likely to continue.⁶⁰⁴

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.

⁶⁰¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66092/N2537/6/55, ‘Brief [on Poland] for Secretary of State to take to Moscow’, February 1947.

⁶⁰² Grocholski was an old friend of the Cavendish-Bentinck family. Grocholski was arrested at his mother’s home while Cavendish-Bentinck was paying a visit. Grocholski was sentenced to death and shot. Colville, *Strange Inheritance*, 187.

⁶⁰³ Marinowska was accused of espionage for a foreign power. She was tried in December 1947 along with five members of the underground movement: Wincenty Kwieciński and Stanisław S. Dziak (two young officers, both of whom had distinguished themselves in the September 1939 campaign as well as in the underground movement during the war), and three other political activists, Włodzimierz Marszewski, of the Democratic Party, Adam Obarski, of the PPS-WRN, and Wacław Lipski, of the National Independence Party (Stronnictwo Niezawisłości Narodowej – SNN). Halina Sosnowska was also tried. Marszewski and Lipski were sentenced to death; Kwieciński, S. Dziak, and Sosnowska were sentenced to life imprisonment; Obarski was sentenced to 15 years; and Marinowska to 12. Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 420-21.

⁶⁰⁴ TNA: PRO 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 isolating the Soviet Union and consolidating Anglo-American cooperation in the newly established bizonal administration was the most pressing priority of British foreign policy in Europe. Bevin set off to the Moscow meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers not in the hope of salvaging four-power cooperation in Germany but with the intention of persuading the Americans to drop the pretence of joint administration once and for all, and accelerate the process of division. A Foreign Office briefing paper for the Moscow meeting stipulated that the priority was 'to keep the iron curtain down (unless we get satisfaction on all our conditions) and build up Western Germany behind it'.⁶⁰⁵ American thinking was quite clearly moving in the same direction. In March, Truman made his famous speech setting out the American strategy for the containment of communism, and announcing an aid package for Greece and Turkey. Bevin now needed to persuade the Americans that the containment doctrine should be applied to Germany, and that this could only be achieved by the division of the country. The Foreign Secretary went to Moscow armed with the 'Bevin Plan',⁶⁰⁶ which proposed conditions for an economically unified, politically decentralised Germany that would completely neutralise Soviet influence in the country and which the Soviets would therefore never accept. Putting forward a solution to the deadlock over Germany – even one intentionally designed to be totally unacceptable to the Soviet Union – had the advantage of forcing the Soviets to be the ones to reject the plan, thus placing the blame for the collapse of four-power cooperation squarely on their shoulders.⁶⁰⁷

The Moscow Foreign Ministers meeting is widely regarded as the point at which the wartime Grand Alliance broke down irrevocably.⁶⁰⁸ After weeks of discussion, the conference ended in acrimony, with Molotov accusing the British and the Americans of reneging on the Potsdam agreements.⁶⁰⁹ The British team succeeded in persuading the Americans that the arrangements for the bizonal administration were preferable to any plan which

⁶⁰⁵ Quoted in Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 123.

⁶⁰⁶ This was a paper on the future of Germany accepted by Cabinet on 27 February 1947. Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 120.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 120-25; 224-26.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁰⁹ TNA: PRO FO 800/447, Bevin to Attlee, 16 April 1947.

would allow the Soviets to extend their influence into the western zones.⁶¹⁰ The British also persuaded the Americans that the rebuilding of Germany could no longer be postponed while the Soviets prevaricated: the recovery of all of western Europe depended on the German economy sputtering back to life. The question of economic recovery explains Bevin's bulldozing approach to the problem: Britain simply could not wait any longer to be relieved of the burden of expenditure on its German occupation zone. Britain was in the midst of a full-blown economic crisis: bad winter weather had interrupted coal deliveries to power stations and factories, making it necessary to implement power cuts from the beginning of February; 2 million people were unemployed; the trade deficit had risen to 1.8 billion USD; the funds from the American loan were quickly drying up; and convertibility of the pound was due to be introduced in four months' time. Bevin was under acute pressure to wind down expenditure in Germany. These urgent economic problems account for Bevin's remorseless insistence on achieving a breakthrough in the negotiations at Moscow.⁶¹¹

These developments in British policy towards Germany had important implications for Poland. First, the Moscow meeting marked the point at which British policy became openly adversarial towards the Soviet Union. Bevin went to Moscow seeking to break the stalemate over Germany, rip away the façade of four-power cooperation, and force the issue, 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. Further, as the 'cold-war mentality' seeped into British policymaking, it was accompanied by the sense that Poland was now beyond Britain's reach, thus making any substantial initiatives seem 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.⁶¹²

To further complicate matters, Bevin still faced criticism from the Parliamentary Labour Party, as well as from his Cabinet colleagues, over the anti-Soviet thrust of his foreign

⁶¹⁰ It was also at the Moscow conference that France ended its policy of obstructionism on the ACC and began to move towards greater cooperation with the US and Britain.

⁶¹¹ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 125, 135-39, 145.

⁶¹² TNA: PRO FO 800/447, 'Record of a Conversation at the Kremlin on Monday, 24th March, 1947'.

policy. The censure motion of November 1946 was only a few months behind him as he prepared for Moscow.⁶¹³ The criticism from within his own party was an important reason why the ‘Bevin plan’ was crafted to force the Soviets to be the ones to reject his proposals. As Deighton explains, in order to gain support for his policies from his colleagues, Bevin ‘had to persuade them of the inevitability of standing up to the Soviets after one last public effort to secure quadripartite agreement over Germany.’⁶¹⁴ After the acrimonious conclusion of the Moscow conference, and mindful of the views of his party and Cabinet colleagues, I would argue that Bevin exercised extra caution in his dealings with the Poles, limiting the talks to fairly uncontroversial bilateral issues, which would not provoke public criticism and reinforce the perception at home that Bevin was completely intransigent vis-à-vis the Soviets and their satellite states.

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.⁶¹⁵ Bevin stayed for less than a day. He met with Modzelewski and Cyrankiewicz, 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.⁶¹⁶ 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 entirely. Instead, the talks centred mainly on the issues of frontiers and the Anglo-Polish financial and trade agreements. Modzelewski opened the talks with his concerns about the reconstruction of Germany; he expressed his hope that those countries which had been the victims of German aggression would be restored first. Modzelewski then moved to the question of the Polish-German frontier. He argued that Germany’s borders had been agreed at Potsdam, and the British and Americans were now seeking a revision of that agreement. Bevin reminded

⁶¹³ For a full discussion of this conflict, please see chapter 4.

⁶¹⁴ Deighton, *Impossible Peace*, 127-8.

⁶¹⁵ Bevin finally accepted the invitation on 19 April. TNA: PRO 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.

⁶¹⁶ 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 Pra mowska, *Władysław Gomułka: A Biography* (forthcoming), chapter 6.

Modzelewski that he had never regarded the provisional frontier set at Potsdam as final but rather as a temporary solution until a peace treaty had been drawn up. He considered it essential that an impartial four-power commission should investigate Germany's frontiers with all its neighbours. The commission would also report on the situation in the Polish reclaimed territories. Modzelewski flatly rejected the idea, stating that the Polish government 'could not accept this kind of committee.'

When the discussion turned to Britain's failure to ratify the Anglo-Polish financial agreement, Bevin simply 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. Modzelewski noted that negotiations for a trade agreement between Poland and Britain had recently been concluded in London. He hoped that the arrangement reached would be ratified.⁶¹⁷

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 much 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

⁶¹⁷ TNA: PRO 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.

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 control.⁶¹⁸ The financial agreement was duly ratified shortly after Bevin returned to London.⁶¹⁹ The Resettlement Corps was already being wound down by this point, although it did not entirely cease to operate until the autumn of 1949.⁶²⁰

Agreement proved more elusive on the issue of population transfers. Bevin asked Cyrankiewicz to halt the transfer of Germans from Poland to the western zones of Germany. The population density in the west was 'becoming explosive.' Cyrankiewicz promised nothing, retorting that the majority of Germans transferred from Polish territory were absorbed in the Soviet zone. This was untrue: in February 1946, an Anglo-Polish agreement had been concluded providing for the transfer and resettlement of Germans from Poland to the British zone. Britain sent liaison teams to Poland to oversee 'Operation Swallow' – the codename for the population transfer. The liaison teams were stationed at transit camps in Szczecin [Stettin], in the north, and W gliniec [Kohlfurt], in the south. The conditions in the camps were so dire – with inadequate shelter; and a shortage of food and medical supplies – that the liaison workers felt compelled to continue the transfers, in spite of desperate overcrowding in the British zone of Germany. By this point, there was a full-blown refugee crisis in the British occupation zone. In 1946 alone, the British zone received more than 1.5 million German refugees from Poland. The Polish authorities, meanwhile, were in a great hurry to clear the western territories of Germans to allow the area to be resettled by Poles, thereby strengthening the Polish claim to the region while the final demarcation of the frontier remained unresolved. The problem was compounded by the weak condition of many of the transferees: fit, adult males were allowed to remain in Poland, while the very young, the elderly, and the infirm were shipped out. This endless stream of economically unproductive refugees, who lacked even the bare necessities for survival, seriously

⁶¹⁸ TNA: PRO 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.

⁶¹⁹ The instruments of ratification were exchanged in London on 19 June 1947. TNA: PRO FO 371/66126/N7329/26/55, Foreign Office communiqué, 19 June 1947.

⁶²⁰ Hope, *The Abandoned Legion*, 219.

exacerbated the food, housing, and public health crisis with which the British authorities were struggling to cope in their zone of Germany. Bevin's discussions with Modzelewski and Cyrankiewicz did not lead to a resolution of the problem of expulsions. Instead, the British called a halt to Operation Swallow in the summer of 1947.⁶²¹

With regard to the Polish western frontier, Bevin repeated that the Potsdam agreement had been provisional; he reiterated his idea of an independent commission to study the matter. The frontier question was linked to the problem of administering Germany: the Soviet Union had failed to supply food to the western zone and Britain could not be expected to continue indefinitely to import food into Germany paid for in dollars. Sidestepping Bevin's comment, Cyrankiewicz commented that turning the port of Szczecin into a 'second Danzig' would be even more explosive than the high population density in British zone of Germany.⁶²² In the end, the frontier question remained open until 1970, when the West German government of Willy Brandt extended *de facto* recognition of the Oder-Neisse line under the terms of the Treaty of Warsaw.⁶²³

Thus, with the exception of Bevin's 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 on Bevin's part, a process of going through the motions rather than trying to broach any issues of substantial importance. I would argue that Bevin sought to limit the number of conflicts with the Soviet Union and its

⁶²¹ Under the terms of the agreement, 1,000 Germans would be sent by sea, and 1,500 by rail from Szczecin per day; from Węgliniec, 3,000 per day in two trainloads, or up to 5,500 per day if capacity allowed. The agreement stipulated that only those in good health were to be transferred; heavily pregnant women were not to be transferred; and families were not to be split up. Matthew Frank, *Expelling the Germans: British Opinion and Post-1945 Population Transfer in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12, 245-61.

⁶²² TNA: PRO 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, on 27th April, 1947'.

⁶²³ *Encyclopedia of the Cold War*, ed. Ruud van Dijk (New York, 2008), s.v. 'Poland' (by Douglas Selvage), 701.

satellite states at this point. He had to face his Cabinet colleagues on his return to London, and make his final pitch to convince them that Soviet intransigence made ongoing cooperation in Germany a futile prospect. He would not have wanted a flare-up of tensions with the Polish government to complicate the situation, and add fuel to his critics' accusations that he was simply blindly anti-Soviet.

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 Mikołajczyk since the elections.'⁶²⁴ 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 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

⁶²⁴ 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.

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.'⁶²⁵ 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, Cyrankiewicz announced that the PPS's objective was organisational unity with the PPR, although, mindful of the strong dissenting faction within the party, he softened this statement by adding that this aim would be achieved only in the long term.⁶²⁶

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 loss 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

⁶²⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, 'Memorandum of a Conversation with Monsieur Mikolajczyk on May 7th', Broad to Bevin, 16 May 1947.

⁶²⁶ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 207.

had given copies of the protests to the security police who had promptly arrested all the PSL members who had signed them.⁶²⁷

The Foreign Office was not pleased that Broad had allowed contact with Mikołajczyk to lapse entirely. Hankey noted that the Foreign Office did not ‘envise 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.’⁶²⁸ 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. Broad seems to have been operating in a void after Cavendish-Bentinck’s departure. In the absence of specific instructions from the Foreign Office, Broad pursued his own line of policy. 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’.⁶²⁹

Certainly, British priorities had shifted after the elections but it appears that Broad went further than the Foreign Office intended or wanted by cutting 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

⁶²⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, ‘Memorandum of a Conversation with Monsieur Mikolajczyk on May 7th’, Broad to Bevin, 16 May 1947.

⁶²⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, Hankey minute, 29 May 1947.

⁶²⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, Hankey to Broad, 16 June 1947; Broad to Bevin, 16 May 1947.

non-political agreements.⁶³⁰ 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.’⁶³¹ 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 officials 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 is also difficult to understand. 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.⁶³² 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 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

⁶³⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/66093/N6707/6/55, Broad to Bevin, 3 June 1947.

⁶³¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66093/N5787/6/55, Hancock minute, 23 May 1947.

⁶³² TNA: PRO FO 371/66093/N7659/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 13 June 1947.

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 1936-39, and again as chargé d'affaires from 1945-46 before returning to the Foreign Office, but also to 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 Osóbka-Morawski, objected to this course, and 'relations between the two had become very strained.' In particular, many socialists resented the underrepresentation of the PPS in the government and believed that the communists were acting in bad faith.⁶³³ 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.⁶³⁴

⁶³³ Pra mowska, 'The Polish Socialist Party', 353.

⁶³⁴ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 206-7; Kersten, *Communist Rule in Poland*, 377.

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. According to Gainer, 'most of the Socialist leaders are now prepared to go to almost any length, though with the utmost unwillingness of heart, in acquiescing in changes which run contrary to their principles.'⁶³⁵

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 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

⁶³⁵ TNA: PRO 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.

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'.⁶³⁶ 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.'⁶³⁷

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 – bizarrely – of responsibility for Sikorski's death. The attack led to speculation that this charge would serve as grounds for the PSL leader's arrest.⁶³⁸ 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.⁶³⁹

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

⁶³⁶ TNA: PRO 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.

⁶³⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/66094/N8539/6/55, Hancock minute, 22 July 1947.

⁶³⁸ TNA: PRO FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Gainer to Warner, 24 July 1947;

⁶³⁹ Pra mowska, *Civil War in Poland*, 205; TNA: PRO FO 371/66095/N10793/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 16 September 1947.

to prevent any action being taken against the PSL leader. The text of Bevin's message (which Broad was to deliver orally⁶⁴⁰) 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.'⁶⁴¹ 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 Staczyk 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.'⁶⁴² The fact that Warner took such pains to explain in detail the terms of Churchill's pledge to Broad, who, as chargé d'affaires in Warsaw, must have been familiar with the background, gives further weight to the argument that Broad was not always in step with his colleagues in the Foreign Office.

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 Poland had it not been for British pressure:

As you will see by consulting the records, I put the utmost pressure on him to return there and had, at the time, every reason to believe that this was agreeable to Stalin. If now he is going to be victimised in the Soviet manner, I shall certainly feel it necessary to speak in good time about the matter and also to refer particularly to Stalin's agreeable relations with Mikolajczyk at the time Eden and I were in Moscow in October 1944. I consider that the execution, or even the persecution, of Mikolajczyk is a matter of the very first magnitude. I have no

⁶⁴⁰ 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: PRO FO 371/66095/N10917/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 19 September 1947.

⁶⁴¹ TNA: PRO 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.'

⁶⁴² TNA: PRO FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Warner to Broad, 11 August 1947.

doubt you share my views, but I feel it my duty to write you this letter in order that everything possible may be done to stop this increasing villainy.⁶⁴³

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 1947:⁶⁴⁴

[A]ll our representations about Petkov have not prevented his trial and execution, and the elimination of his Party. This confirms my view that if we raise the case of a man like Petkov or Mikolajczyk here publicly, as an issue between ourselves and those in power in the country concerned, the latter’s reaction is to accept it as a challenge, to represent the man in question as a tool of the western powers, and to take steps to eliminate him. So I think it would be a mistake and dangerous for Mikolajczyk that there would be publicity at the present time about his possible danger.

Bevin concluded by reassuring Churchill that ‘If action is taken against Mikolajczyk . . . you may be sure that I shall take any steps likely to help.’⁶⁴⁵

Also in the summer of 1947 the Foreign Office began to plan for the possibility that Mikołajczyk might seek asylum in the British embassy. On 31 July, Gainer and Bevin agreed that if Mikołajczyk sought refuge, ‘the normal procedure should be followed.’⁶⁴⁶ The Foreign Office struggled, however, to determine just what constituted ‘normal procedure.’ The closest case to a precedent that officials could find was that of General Nicolae Rdescu, the leader of the last, short-lived, non-communist-dominated coalition government in Romania who was given sanctuary in the British legation in Bucharest in March 1945 and subsequently left Romania for Cyprus.⁶⁴⁷ The Rdescu case did not provide an exact precedent, however, because Romania had been treated as a defeated Axis satellite power and had an Allied Control Commission in place, which gave Britain

⁶⁴³ TNA: PRO FO 371/66095/N11254/6/55, Churchill to Bevin, 19 September 1947.

⁶⁴⁴ Vesselin Dimitrov, *Stalin’s Cold War: Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria, 1941-48* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2008), 171.

⁶⁴⁵ TNA: PRO FO 371/66095/N11254/6/55, Bevin to Churchill, 30 September 1947.

⁶⁴⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Warner to Broad, 18 September 1947.

⁶⁴⁷ Rdescu’s government was in power from 6 December 1944 to 28 February 1945.

a *locus standi* that it did not have in Poland.⁶⁴⁸ Hancock concluded that ‘the case of Mikołajczyk must be considered in isolation. I can find no precedent to help us.’ The greatest difficulty in granting asylum was that the process depended on whether a particular country recognised the concept at all. In countries where asylum was not recognised, the authorities would be entitled to take coercive measures in order to secure the surrender of the person seeking asylum. Unable to find any information specifically on Polish policy, the Foreign Office took Russian diplomatic practice, which stipulated that no right of asylum existed, as a guide. Hankey insisted that Mikołajczyk must be fully informed in advance about the level of protection that the Warsaw embassy could provide: ‘It would be the last straw, if, relying on our help, he sought asylum in H.M. Embassy and we ultimately had to give him up.’⁶⁴⁹ Warner instructed Broad along these lines, asking him to be careful to explain to Mikołajczyk the limits of what the British embassy would be able to do to help.⁶⁵⁰

On 30 September, Mikołajczyk told D.P. Aiers, the 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.⁶⁵¹

Broad responded with greater scepticism to Mikołajczyk. Again, this put him at odds with his colleagues in London. In his covering letter to Aiers’s telegram, Broad described Mikołajczyk’s assessment as ‘unduly pessimistic.’ Instead, Broad claimed that the general consensus was that the communists intended to pursue a double policy of ‘the outstretched hand coupled with a threat.’ For example, they might try to arrange

⁶⁴⁸ On 23 August 1944, the pro-Nazi government of Marshal Ion Antonescu was overthrown. The new Romanian government immediately announced an end to hostilities with the Soviet Union and joined the Allied war effort. Nonetheless, an Allied Control Commission was set up in Romania to supervise implementation of the terms of the armistice. Sbai, *Great Powers and Rumania*, 1-3; Dennis Deletant, review of *Romania’s Communist Takeover: The Rădescu Government*, by Dinu C. Giurescu, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 74 (2): 349.

⁶⁴⁹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Hancock minute, 5 August 1947; Hankey minute, 14 August 1947.

⁶⁵⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Warner to Broad, 18 September 1947.

⁶⁵¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66095/N11649/6/55, Aiers memo, 30 September 1947.

for Mikołajczyk and other leaders to be voted out of the party executive, and be replaced either by people willing to cooperate with the PPR or by mere stooges. Broad predicted that only '[i]n the event of a peaceful pruning of the Polish Peasant Party proving impossible' would the Polish government 'proceed with the total liquidation of the Party on the lines forecast by Monsieur Mikolajczyk.'⁶⁵²

It is clear from the files that this idea originated from within the Foreign Office Northern Department. The origin of the plan does not come across altogether clearly in a recent essay published by the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS; cover name: MI6).⁶⁵³ Hankey was the first to propose asking William Hayter, head of the Services Liaison Department in the Foreign Office for assistance to help Mikołajczyk escape. In the Foreign Office minutes, Hankey noted that it would be necessary to consult Broad on the matter, which indicates that the plan did not originate in the Warsaw embassy. The same day, Warner reminded his colleagues that the idea of assisting in a clandestine escape had been rejected at Bevin's meeting with Gainer at the end of July, thus underlining that the initiative lay with the Foreign Office.⁶⁵⁴

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 SIS to devise several different possible means of escape.⁶⁵⁵ 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

⁶⁵² TNA: PRO FO 371/66095/N11649/6/55, Broad to Bevin, 3 October 1947.

⁶⁵³ Gill Bennett, 'Escape from Eastern Europe', <https://www.sis.gov.uk/our-history/pusd-records/escape-from-eastern-europe.html> [accessed 21 February 2014].

⁶⁵⁴ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Minutes by Hankey, Warner, and Sargent, 15 August 1947.

⁶⁵⁵ Throughout the discussions relating to the plans for Mikołajczyk's escape, the SIS is referred to obliquely as 'Mr Hayter's friends'.

countries of the emerging communist bloc. In 1947, therefore, the SIS had not yet gained a firm foothold in Eastern Europe. In his history of the service, 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 – 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.⁶⁵⁶

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.⁶⁵⁷ 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.⁶⁵⁸ The SIS would be prepared to organise the operation, even at the expense of losing their 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.’⁶⁵⁹

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;

⁶⁵⁶ Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service, 1909-1949* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 567-8, 655-6, 667.

⁶⁵⁷ Jeffery, *History of the Secret Intelligence Service*, 667.

⁶⁵⁸ 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. Jeffery, *History of the Secret Intelligence Service*, 621.

⁶⁵⁹ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Garvey minute, 23 September 1947.

exposure of ourselves) if it failed.⁶⁶⁰ 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.⁶⁶¹ 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 United States, 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.'⁶⁶² 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 on how to approach the matter.⁶⁶³ But while Warner did believe 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

⁶⁶⁰ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Garvey minute, 13 September 1947; Hankey minute, 18 September 1947.

⁶⁶¹ Gainer was away on leave during this period. He returned to Warsaw on 4 November 1947. TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Hankey minute, 31 October 1947.

⁶⁶² TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Hankey to Broad, 29 September 1947; Broad to Hankey, 8 October 1947.

⁶⁶³ TNA: PRO FO 371/66094/N8997/6/55, Warner to Broad, 18 September 1947.

felt desire to help and possibly a degree of desperation, after learning that the chances of an SIS rescue succeeding were not very promising.⁶⁶⁴ Hankey might also have simply been braver and more daring by nature than Broad. Hankey had twice narrowly extricated himself and others from dangerous situations, fleeing Warsaw in his Austin 7 with the embassy translator, his dog, and the ciphers after the German invasion in 1939, and again from Bucharest where he remained in his post until the day the Iron Guard took over in September 1940. In light of these experiences, his expectation of what could be done to assist Mikołajczyk might well have been rather higher.⁶⁶⁵

Ultimately, the course of events overtook British planning. On 10 October, Mikołajczyk was warned that he and three of his closest colleagues⁶⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁶⁷ 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. 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 102 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

⁶⁶⁴ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Hankey to Broad, 29 September 1947.

⁶⁶⁵ Obituary of Lord Hankey, *The Times*, 5 November 1996.

⁶⁶⁶ 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.

⁶⁶⁷ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Record of Hankey's debrief with Mikołajczyk, 27 October 1947.

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 money⁶⁶⁸ in one hand and a monkey wrench in the other, 'prepared to use either if necessary.'⁶⁶⁹ 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.⁶⁷⁰ The ship sailed without incident three hours later at nine o'clock in the morning. 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.⁶⁷¹

Over the course of planning the escape, the Americans in Poland showed greater willingness to take risks in order to get Mikołajczyk out by any means necessary than their British counterparts. Broad reported that the US ambassador was 'prepared to offer all possible assistance, short of . . . smuggling our friend across the frontier in his own car.'⁶⁷² In contrast, although he assisted in planning the operation virtually from the outset, Broad always had an eye on limiting British involvement. For example, he initially hoped that Mikołajczyk would be able to escape on his own. Broad reported that he had 'offered any necessary financial assistance in the hope that our friend would

⁶⁶⁸ In Andrews's account, the amount was 500,000 zlotys. Griffis recalls giving the driver 100,000 zlotys. *FRUS*, 1947, vol. 4, 463; Griffis, *Lying in State*, 173.

⁶⁶⁹ *FRUS*, 1947, vol. 4, 460-64.

⁶⁷⁰ 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: PRO FO 1093/445, Danzig [Gdańsk] to Foreign Office, 26 October 1947.

⁶⁷¹ The captain was put forward for an OBE in recognition for his help in facilitating Mikołajczyk's escape. TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Foreign Office Minute, 30 December 1948.

⁶⁷² In his own account of the incident in his memoirs, Stanton Griffis recalled that the first plan had been for him to carry Mikołajczyk across the Czech border in the trunk of his large Chrysler. Griffis, *Lying in State*, 171-2.

be able to make his own arrangements.' Broad's preference was to 'confine our help to getting him to the coast or a point near the frontier and then leaving him, with our finances, to do the rest.' Mikołajczyk was, however, 'unexpectedly helpless' and was 'relying more or less completely on [the US and Britain].' Broad warned that both the American and British embassies would be compromised by helping with the escape operation, and requested guidance from the Foreign Office as to how deeply he should get involved.⁶⁷³

The Foreign Office files also 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. Similarly, Hankey was prepared to authorise the use of Broad's luggage to hide Mikołajczyk but Sargent crossed out the paragraph and inserted a stipulation that the American official's luggage be used instead.⁶⁷⁴

The S.S. *Baltavia* arrived safely at London Bridge on 24 October.⁶⁷⁵ 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.⁶⁷⁶ 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; James Chuter Ede, the Home Secretary; and Eden verbally on 27 October; Dixon informed Churchill the following day. Bevin sent

⁶⁷³ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Broad to Hankey, 19 October 1947.

⁶⁷⁴ Broad's luggage was used in spite of Sargent's instructions. TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Hankey to Broad, draft telegram, 21 October 1947; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 20 October 1947.

⁶⁷⁵ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Danzig [Gdańsk] to Warsaw, 21 October 1947; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 25 October 1947.

⁶⁷⁶ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 22 October 1947.

instructions to the British embassy in Washington never to refer to the Mikołajczyk affair, ‘even in conversation between staff’.⁶⁷⁷

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.⁶⁷⁸ The Foreign Office arranged for MI5 to take Mikołajczyk in complete secrecy straight to a secure place in the countryside immediately after the ship’s arrival in London.⁶⁷⁹ 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.⁶⁸⁰

Even internally, the Foreign Office kept two sets of records concerning Mikołajczyk’s escape: one set – only released publically 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.⁶⁸¹ There followed a series

⁶⁷⁷ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Dixon minute, 28 October 1947.

⁶⁷⁸ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 22 October 1947; Warsaw to Foreign Office, 22 October 1947.

⁶⁷⁹ Mikołajczyk agreed willingly to remain hidden in England. Bagi ski 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 Bagi ski was entirely an American affair about which Broad had not been consulted. Bagi ski 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: PRO 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), 40-2.

⁶⁸⁰ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Foreign Office to Berlin, 31 October 1947.

⁶⁸¹ TNA: PRO FO 371/66095/N12250/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 26 October 1947.

of bland telegrams recounting press reports and official reaction, as well as repeating speculation as to how the escape might have been effected.⁶⁸²

When questioned by the press upon arrival in Britain, Mikołajczyk gave a partial account of his escape, and then refused further comment on the grounds that it might compromise the route for others. The story of Mikołajczyk's escape featured prominently in the press, and at first no journalist cast any doubt on the official Anglo-American version of events. *The Manchester Guardian*'s headline on 4 November announced Mikołajczyk's safe arrival in Britain after fleeing through the Soviet zone of Germany. The paper reported Mikołajczyk's arrival at his wife's home in Kenton, Middlesex, a suburb northwest of central London.⁶⁸³ According to the paper, the street was so crowded with press cars, reporters, and photographers that Mikołajczyk had to alight 30 yards from the house, and was escorted through the crowd by RAF officers. Mikołajczyk told the assembled reporters that he had left Warsaw by train on 20 October and had arrived in the British zone of Germany on 1 November. He stated that he had not met with any British government officials since his arrival the previous day, and declined further comment, saying: “All I want do now is get to sleep.”⁶⁸⁴ The coverage of the story in *The Times* recounted the same details.⁶⁸⁵ Similarly, the American press did not at first question the official line. Drew Middleton, the *New York Times* correspondent in London, claimed to have ‘learned authoritatively’ that Mikołajczyk had crossed the Soviet zone of Germany with the help of an underground organisation.⁶⁸⁶ The Associated Press carried a similar version of this story, adding that, according to a US military source, Mikołajczyk's escape had been organised by a special detailment whose function was to convey important individuals from behind the iron curtain to the west at an average rate of two per day.⁶⁸⁷

The press did soon pick up on Polish government accusations that the British and American embassies in Warsaw had facilitated Mikołajczyk's escape. The *New York*

⁶⁸² TNA: PRO FO 371/66095/N12337/6/55, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 October 1947.

⁶⁸³ The street name was Vista Way.

⁶⁸⁴ [Diplomatic Correspondent], ‘Mr. Mikolajczyk Safe. Escape Through Soviet Zone to England. Thought his Life in Danger; ‘Did Not Want to Be Killed Like a Sheep’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 November 1947: 5.

⁶⁸⁵ ‘M. Mikolajczyk in Britain’, *The Times* [London, England], 4 November 1947: 4, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed 10 March 2014).

⁶⁸⁶ Drew Middleton, ‘Mikolajczyk Is in Britain; Feared Dying “Like a Sheep”’, *The New York Times*, 4 November 1947: 1.

⁶⁸⁷ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Washington to Foreign Office, 4 November 1947.

Times printed a flat denial by Broad of any British involvement.⁶⁸⁸ Further suggestions about Anglo-American involvement leaked out after PSL treasurer, Wincenty Bryja; Mikołajczyk's private secretary, Maria Hulewiczowa; and his former secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Mieczysław Dabrowski, were captured on the Czech border and handed over to the Polish police. The evidence suggests, however, that the newspapers simply reported the accusations of the Polish government. The *New York Times* reported that the Polish government had issued a series of communiqés alleging a link between Mikołajczyk's escape and 'an unidentified embassy in Warsaw.'⁶⁸⁹ The papers reported the volley of accusations and denials which were lobbed back and forth between the Polish government on the one hand, and Mikołajczyk and the embassies on the other over the following weeks, but the actual circumstances of Mikołajczyk's flight did not emerge publically at the time.⁶⁹⁰

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 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.⁶⁹¹ The Americans published details of the escape in the *Foreign Relations of*

⁶⁸⁸ 'British Envoy Denies Aid', *The New York Times*, 4 November 1947: 4.

⁶⁸⁹ Sydney Gruson, '3 Fleeing Poland Seized at Border: Embassy in Warsaw Accused of Aiding Peasant Aides who Left with Mikołajczyk', *The New York Times*, 6 November 1947: 8.

⁶⁹⁰ 'Foreign Aid Denied by Mikołajczyk: He Calls Warsaw Claims on Escape "Pack of Lies" – Says 4 Others who Fled are Safe', *The New York Times*, 7 November 1947: 12; 'Mr. Mikołajczyk: British and U.S. Ambassadors Deny Giving Help', *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 November 1947: 8; 'Mikołajczyk Held Aided: Warsaw Says Group in Berlin Played Part in Escape', *The New York Times*, 8 November 1947: 6; 'Poles Demand Recall of U.S. Official: "Helped Mr. Mikołajczyk"', *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 November 1947: 5; 'U.S. Envoy Denies Aid in Escape of Poles', *The New York Times*, 22 November 1947: 7.

⁶⁹¹ Mikołajczyk, *Pattern of Soviet Domination*, 267-78.

the United States series in 1972. The involvement of the SIS appears to explain the delay in the release of the British files.

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).⁶⁹² 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.⁶⁹³ 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.⁶⁹⁴ 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 who were for the most part 'lukewarm' in their support.⁶⁹⁵ This exchange further supports my view 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.⁶⁹⁶

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

⁶⁹² 443 H.C. Deb 5s, column 493.

⁶⁹³ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 27 October 1947.

⁶⁹⁴ Charles Whitehead had been arrested; it was feared that the arrest of Mary Buyno was imminent; and Marinowska's trial was due to begin soon. TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Hankey minute, 28 October 1947.

⁶⁹⁵ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Record of Hankey's debrief with Mikołajczyk, 27 October 1947.

⁶⁹⁶ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Warner minute, 31 October 1947.

gotten rid of him.⁶⁹⁷ 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.⁶⁹⁸ 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.'⁶⁹⁹

Mary Buyno⁷⁰⁰

Just days after Mikołajczyk's arrival in London came another request for assistance in evacuating a Polish citizen, Mary Buyno, a translator employed by the British embassy in Warsaw. After the arrest of Marinowska and Charles Whitehead,⁷⁰¹ both Polish nationals working in the embassy, it seemed inevitable that Buyno's arrest would follow, and her British colleagues sought to help her flee. On 5 November, Gainer advised the Foreign Office that Buyno's removal from Poland was 'essential and urgent.' He requested assistance to arrange her escape.⁷⁰² The embassy had already considered several different plans, none of which seemed particularly likely to succeed. First, they had considered drawing up fake papers so that Buyno could leave the country

⁶⁹⁷ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 31 October 1947, No. 1559.

⁶⁹⁸ On the other hand, the Polish government did demand the removal of George Andrews and Monroe Blake, the First and Second Secretaries in the American embassy, based on evidence obtained during the questioning of Bryja and Hulewiczowa. It appears that the Polish government only knew that Andrews and Blake had been involved in helping Mikołajczyk to escape but not by what means. *FRUS, 1947*, vol. 4, 464-67.

⁶⁹⁹ TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 6 November 1947, No. 1556.

⁷⁰⁰ In the Foreign Office files, Mary Buyno is only ever referred to as 'Mrs. Buyno' or 'Mrs. B'. In his memoirs, John Waterfield, who was Third Secretary in the Foreign Office Northern department at the time gives her first name as Mary. This is possibly an anglicisation of Maria. Similarly, her surname was probably Buj o. I did not find any other references to her in the secondary literature. John Percival Waterfield, 'Memories of 1945-50: Christ Church, Northern Department in the Foreign Office, Poland and Moscow', <http://www.tamburlane.co.uk/> [accessed 25 February 2014].

⁷⁰¹ Charles Whitehead was a Polish national of British origin who had been employed since January 1946 in the commercial section of the British embassy in Warsaw. He was arrested on 17 October 1947. Whitehead was accused of collaborating with the Germans during the war. In fact, he had been called up and fought with his unit in the Polish army during the six week campaign in 1939. During the war he belonged to a Polish underground press agency which collected and circulated the news put out by the British and other anti-Nazi broadcasts; he also fought in the Warsaw uprising. Further, he and his father provided assistance to Allied prisoners of war. 443 H.C. Deb. 5s, columns 1818-20.

⁷⁰² TNA: PRO FO 1093/445, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 5 November 1947.

posing either as a British member of staff or as the wife of the commercial attaché, Gilbert Holliday. In the second case, the plan was for Holliday to drive her personally in an embassy car to Prague. If they were caught, the couple could pretend that the reason for the falsification of documents was ‘an illicit weekend’, which would protect the embassy itself. Even with this cover story, however, Buyno would still be arrested and Holliday ‘would be hopelessly compromised.’ Holliday was nevertheless prepared to make the attempt. The risks already inherent in the road route had been accentuated by Mikołajczyk’s escape, which had resulted in extremely close scrutiny of embassy vehicles and their occupants. A third option would be to issue Buyno with a British passport in her own name with a counterfeit Polish exit visa affixed. Buyno was, however, too well known to the authorities to risk leaving Warsaw by train or plane with false papers, leaving the Czech road route as the only viable option.⁷⁰³ Notwithstanding their success in evacuating Mikołajczyk, Gainer acknowledged his staff’s lack of expertise in coordinating this type of clandestine operation, and he turned to the Foreign Office for assistance.

Garvey conducted a fairly clinical weighing up of the risks and benefits of Buyno’s clandestine removal from Warsaw: ‘The most obvious, though not necessarily most compelling, purpose is to save her liberty and possibly her life. Secondly, and more important, the Polish Government seem to be trying to make it impossible for us to continue to employ Polish staff without whose assistance the work of the Embassy would be seriously impaired.’ Garvey calculated that the Polish government was ‘already two up’ following the arrests of Marinowska and Whitehead, and Britain ‘clearly [had] an interest in halting the process.’ Garvey sought advice from the SIS, who judged that of the three options proposed by the Warsaw embassy, the ‘illicit weekend’ had the best chance of success, provided that Holliday was not the object of surveillance by the UB.⁷⁰⁴ Gainer, however, reported that the frontiers were being watched extremely closely following Mikołajczyk’s disappearance, and ‘it would be really running an unreasonable risk’ for the embassy staff ‘to stage an illicit departure.’⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰³ TNA: PRO FO 1093/421, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 26 October 1947.

⁷⁰⁴ TNA: PRO FO 1093/421, Garvey minute, 27 October 1947.

⁷⁰⁵ TNA: PRO FO 1093/421, Hankey minute, 29 October 1947.

At this point, the Foreign Office requested SIS assistance with the escape.⁷⁰⁶ Garvey initially objected to the use of the SIS ‘for the purpose of pulling minor Foreign Office chestnuts out of the fire.’ He pointed out that the chief had been willing to accept the risk of compromising the service’s intelligence network in Poland in order to evacuate Mikołajczyk because of his particular importance to the British government. Garvey doubted that the service would consider that Buyno’s evacuation justified the same risk. He doubted that he would succeed in persuading the SIS to take on the operation, and asked the Northern Department to reconsider putting the request to the chief. Hayter agreed with Garvey, commenting that ‘C’s organisation exists to provide intelligence. Its use for other purposes can only be justified in very exceptional cases of major importance.’ Both Garvey and Hayter feared that the rescue of Buyno might precipitate a barrage of similar demands from British diplomatic missions behind the iron curtain. Hankey commented drily that the SIS chief should set up a ‘frontier-crossing organisation . . . because we shall shortly be living in times where it may on occasion be essential.’⁷⁰⁷

Hankey did not let the matter rest, insisting that Garvey put the matter to the secret service chief. He emphasised Gainer’s warning that Buyno had enough information to compromise the British embassy should she be arrested and interrogated. Garvey therefore made contact with an SIS officer stationed in Germany who was aware of a ‘commercial’ escape line run by ‘entrepreneurs’ with no political or underground affiliation out of Poland into Germany which handled ‘a not inconsiderable amount of persons who wish for one reason or another to leave Poland.’ The officer told Garvey that the operation could be carried out within three weeks. Ultimately, the SIS were ‘quite glad’ to undertake the operation because it afforded a chance to test the feasibility of this commercial line. The route required Buyno to make her own way to Szczecin with her twelve year old son, where she would be met by guides who would take her to a farm situated near the German border, draw up German documents, drive her across the frontier of the Soviet zone of Germany, after which she would complete the journey to Berlin by train. It was understood that the organisers paid a retaining fee to the guards on both sides of Polish/Soviet zone frontier. Hankey noted, ‘We must make it clear that

⁷⁰⁶ TNA: PRO FO 1093/421, Garvey minute, 11 November 1947.

⁷⁰⁷ TNA: PRO FO 1093/421, Garvey, Hayter, and Hankey minutes, 7-12 November 1947.

we have no direct knowledge or experience of this route of escape, but it is the best we can offer.⁷⁰⁸

It took two attempts before Buyno was evacuated successfully. Twice she made her way to Szczecin – with her son – and found that the guides had not arrived. Further, the woman at the address where she had been instructed to wait was very reluctant to have her stay and agreed to let her remain for only one night. For four nights she stayed at a boarding house, which meant that she was registered – as required – with the police in her real name, before finally returning to Warsaw. Gainer sent an angry telegram to the Foreign Office warning that the failure of the plan had increased the ‘risk of Mrs. B’s arrest and render[ed] the consequences of such arrest more serious than before.’ He asked for immediate assistance in getting her rapidly out of the country and demanded an ‘explanation as to why we have been so badly let down from the other end after incurring such risks.’ The Foreign Office explained that the guides had been arrested by German police for black marketeering, which delayed their arrival in Szczecin. The Foreign Office acknowledged the heightened risk of repeating the plan but could suggest no alternative.⁷⁰⁹ After the failure of the first attempt, Holliday wrote directly to Hankey, and offered to travel with Buyno and her son from Warsaw to London via Prague by train. Holliday proposed simply to ask for a week’s leave, and to make the arrangements without informing his Warsaw colleagues, which would protect the embassy if anything went wrong.⁷¹⁰ This offer was superseded by plans for a second attempt via the Szczecin route. On the second occasion, after some delay, which led to a panicky telegram from the Warsaw embassy asking the Foreign Office what had happened, the guides did eventually turn up and Buyno and her son arrived in Berlin on 24 December 1947. The telegram informing Warsaw that Buyno was safe was signed off: ‘Happy Christmas.’⁷¹¹

The amateurish, haphazard way in which Buyno was evacuated, which very nearly ended in catastrophe, marked the beginning of a shift in British secret intelligence operations abroad in late 1947. The lack of coordination and absence of clear

⁷⁰⁸ TNA: PRO FO 1093/421 Garvey to Aubrey, 31 December 1947; Garvey minute, 14 November 1947; Hankey minute, 14 November 1947.

⁷⁰⁹ TNA: PRO FO 1093/421, Warsaw to Foreign Office, 9 December 1947; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 11 December 1947.

⁷¹⁰ TNA: PRO FO 1093/421, Holliday to Hankey, 10 December 1947.

⁷¹¹ TNA: PRO FO 1093/421, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 21 November 1947; Warsaw to Foreign Office, 24 December 1947; Foreign Office to Warsaw, 24 December 1947.

communication between the embassy, the Foreign Office, and the SIS shows the extent to which everyone concerned was forced to improvise. Hankey's jocular comment that the SIS should set up a people-smuggling organisation held a certain prescience. The requests for assistance which came in quick succession from Poland helped to alert the SIS to the need for just such an operation. As the shape of the postwar international system became clearer, and the status of the Soviet Union metamorphosed from ally to foe, the SIS had to confront both the paucity of its information and contacts in Central and Eastern Europe, and the difficulties involved in establishing a strong and reliable network in 'highly alert and paranoid Communist state[s] at anything more than the most pedestrian level.'⁷¹² The SIS would not be able to continue to rely on some unknown 'commercial' people smugglers but would have to establish a much more carefully controlled and coordinated system.

Buyno's escape again highlights the way that the Foreign Office Northern Department, together with some of the diplomats in the Warsaw embassy seized chances where they could to push ahead with their own initiatives. It is not clear from the files whether Bevin was even aware of the efforts to help Buyno and her son leave Poland. What is obvious, however, is that Hankey and his colleagues used their authority to override other branches of the establishment, most notably the SIS liaison staff. Buyno's colleagues in Warsaw displayed a similar determination to prevent her arrest and help her to flee the country. In addition to a fundamental sense of loyalty, the efforts of the Northern Department and the Warsaw embassy suggest that, as with the escape of Mikołajczyk, assisting Buyno was regarded as a kind of substitute for the British failure to influence the postwar political settlement in Poland in a more significant way.

Conclusion

By early 1947, Bevin had abandoned the attempt to pursue cooperation with the Soviet Union. The prospect of economic collapse in Britain made the consolidation of the bizonal arrangements an urgent necessity. Bevin sought to persuade the Americans to abandon four-power administration of Germany; instead, the priority should be to secure the western zones against Soviet influence. Underpinning Bevin's desire to hive

⁷¹² Jeffery, *History of the Secret Intelligence Service*, 668-9.

off the western zones of Germany and shut the Soviets out was an implicit bargain, which precluded American and British involvement in the Soviet sphere of influence. In order to secure western Germany against Soviet interference, 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. The drift and disjunction in British policy was exacerbated by the long period without an ambassador present in Warsaw after Cavendish-Bentinck's departure. It is not a coincidence that the officials who could not quite bring themselves to withdraw from all involvement in Poland's political future were those whose association with the Polish opposition extended back to the wartime period. In the end, the degrees of commitment varied from person to person, as was evident in the different approaches to Mikołajczyk's rescue, with Bevin hoping the Americans would take over, Broad carrying out his duties scrupulously but under duress, and Hankey enlisting the help of MI6 and pushing hard until the very end.

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 Poland. There were some grounds for British optimism: a deal was very nearly reached in early 1944,⁷¹³ and again during the talks with the Soviet ambassador, Lebedev in the spring.⁷¹⁴ After a rocky spell in the post-Yalta period, British officials detected signs of a more cooperative Soviet approach in its relations with Britain,⁷¹⁵ 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

⁷¹³ TNA: PRO 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.

⁷¹⁴ TNA: PRO 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.

⁷¹⁵ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 171.

Three Power Commission.⁷¹⁶ 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.⁷¹⁷

This work has established that 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 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.⁷¹⁸ By early 1946, however,

⁷¹⁶ TNA: PRO FO 371/47595/ N7312/6/55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 June 1945; N7508/6/55, Foreign Office Minutes, 2 July 1945.

⁷¹⁷ TNA: PRO FO 371/47594/N7295/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945; N7297/6/G55, Moscow to Foreign Office, 21 June 1945.

⁷¹⁸ TNA: PRO 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.

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, including, initially, Bevin 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.⁷¹⁹ 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. The inevitable consequence of this step would be an open breach with the Soviet Union, for which the US was not yet prepared in 1946. While Bevin pursued his dual policy – continuing to seek improved Anglo-Soviet relations while simultaneously beginning to plan on the basis that cooperation would end – he was anxious to avoid any policy initiative that would create the impression that the failure of the Potsdam process was Britain's fault, rather than the result of Soviet intransigence. 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 its 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.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁹ Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, 276-7.

⁷²⁰ TNA: PRO FO 371/56437/N5068/34/55, Foreign Office to Warsaw, 19 April 1946.

Bevin's policy was also circumscribed to some extent by the pressure from within his own party to establish closer Anglo-Soviet relations. By the spring of 1946, the critics on the left of the Labour party had begun to coalesce and Bevin's policy was strongly criticised at the party conference in June. The internal opposition gathered momentum as the year wore on, culminating in the November censure motion.⁷²¹ Thus, with the German problem already simmering, Bevin sought to avoid giving his critics greater ammunition by further antagonising the Soviet Union with a confrontation over Eastern Europe. The exact effect of the internal criticism on Bevin's policy is difficult to determine with absolute certainty, and it was not as significant as the American position or indeed Bevin's own concerns about the possible consequences of excessive provocation of the Soviet Union, but the party's opposition did exert some pressure on the direction of Bevin's policy.

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.⁷²² 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, 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

⁷²¹ Jones, *Russia Complex*, 128, 136-7; Bullock, *Bevin: Foreign Secretary*, 328.

⁷²² TNA: PRO 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 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.

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