THE COLD WAR IN EUROPE

Era of a Divided Continent

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during these difficult months is a useful contrast to the abstract model of a capitalist world system. The history of Poland in the War is laden with controversy: first, Poles have been condemned for a rife anti-Semitism that made many of them apparently indifferent onlookers to the Nazi extermination of almost 3 million Polish Jews; second, their political representatives in London have been condemned for stubborn refusals to cooperate for the sake of the Alliance. More recently, their champions have endeavored to refute the accusations of anti-semitism, or at least to remind us how much non-Jewish Poles also suffered in this cruelest of Nazi occupations. And as Soviet condemnations of the Stalinist period grow, the preoccupations of the London Poles appear increasingly justified. The issue recurs: what sacrifices of small peoples were the Big Three prepared to countenance to preserve their own harmony? What sacrifice was required to defeat Hitler? Was there any alternative to the alliance of expediency that Soviet policy seemed to demand as the price of its immense war effort? These are all painful and difficult issues, not easily resolved even in dispassionate debate, and often subject to demagogic exaggeration on both sides. But the student is now very well served by a joint study that examines both the international context and the internal politics of the Resistance and of postwar Poland: John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds, *Poland, 1939–1947* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1986).

Poland, the Touchstone

Again the Poles," Stalin growled. "Is that the most important question?" Those troublesome Poles, he complained to Harriman, kept him so busy that he had no time for military matters.

The date was March 3, 1944. Harriman, who had requested the Kremlin meeting on instructions from Roosevelt, replied that he too would prefer to discuss military questions, but Poland had become a pressing problem. He promised to be brief. It was not a question of time, Stalin said. The Russians had taken their position and would not recede from it: "Isn't it clear? We stand for the Curzon Line." The trouble was that the Polish government in London (he called it "the émigré government") took the Russians for fools. It was now demanding Wilno as well as Lwow. Happily, the people of Poland, who were not the same as the London émigrés, would take a different attitude. He was certain they would welcome the Red Army as liberators.

Harriman did not doubt that Stalin believed this would happen. Only later, when he learned that his troops were widely regarded as foreign invaders, did Stalin find it necessary—in Harriman's view—to impose rigid controls on Poland and Rumania. For the moment, Harriman's task was to persuade Stalin and Molotov that they should resume

discussions with the Poles in London and try to negotiate a settlement instead of imposing one by brute force. It was hard going.

Roosevelt feared, Harriman said, that if the problem was not soon resolved, there would be civil war in Poland. Stalin saw no such danger. "War with whom?" he asked. "Between whom? Where?" Mikolajczyk had no troops in Poland. What about the underground force known as the Home Army? Harriman inquired. Stalin grudgingly acknowledged that the London government might have "a few agents" in Poland, but the underground, he insisted, was not large.

Harriman asked what kind of solution Stalin could envisage. He replied, "While the Red Army is liberating Poland, Mikolajczyk will go on repeating his platitudes. By the time Poland is liberated, Mikolajczyk's Government will have changed, or another government will have emerged in Poland."

Roosevelt was concerned, Harriman said, lest a new regime, formed on the basis of the Soviet proposals, should turn out to be "a hand-picked government with no popular movement behind it." Denying any such intention, Stalin nevertheless proceeded to rule out the return from exile of Polish landlords—"Polish Tories," as he called them. "Poland," he said, "needs democrats who will look after the interests of the people, not Tory landlords." Stalin added that he did not believe Churchill (a British Tory, after all) could persuade the London Poles to reshape their government and modify its policies; he was sure that Roosevelt agreed with him on the need for a democratic government in Poland.

Stalin assured Harriman, however, that he would take no immediate action on the Polish matter. The time was not ripe, he said. When Harriman remarked that there were some good men in the London government, Stalin replied, "Good people can be found everywhere, even among the Bushmen."

Not for the first time, Harriman mentioned the President's worries over public opinion in the United States. Stalin responded that he had to be "concerned about public opinion in the Soviet Union." Harriman remarked, "You know how to handle your public opinion," to which Stalin replied, "There have been three revolutions in a generation." Molotov, who had been silent through most of the interview, added without smiling, "In Russia there is an *active* public opinion which overthrows governments." When they spoke of three revolutions, Stalin and Molotov meant the uprising of 1905, the Kerensky revolution of February 1917, and the Bolshevik Revolution the following autumn. Stalin, the revolutionist, was always alert to the possibility of a new revolution, which would have to be stamped out before it got started.

Harriman's bleak interview with Stalin on March 3 was the second in a long series on the intractable Polish problem. He had gone to Moscow

as ambassador in 1943 with another set of priorities in mind, military cooperation first among them. But in the months that followed Teheran, Poland was to use up much of his energy and patience. There was no end, he recalled, "of indignities and disagreeable incidents unrelated to political issues." The Russians, for example, had two broadcasting stations in the vicinity of Moscow whose location was important to American pilots in order to triangulate their approach to the Soviet capital. In spite of repeated requests, the Russians refused to disclose to the embassy more than the one well-known location. The issue disappeared when an American pilot flew over the second transmitter accidentally and marked the location.

"We were treated as potential enemies," Harriman recalled. "Our Russian staff—servants, office staff and chauffeurs—had their food-ration cards taken away because they worked for the American embassy. Kathleen had to feed them all after that, but our supplies ran short at times when a convoy was delayed or our shipments sunk. Then we would send someone out of Moscow to buy potatoes and cabbages from a collective farm."

It was the Soviet attitude toward Poland, however, that was to shake Harriman's hopes for Soviet-American cooperation more profoundly than the daily frustrations of Soviet secrecy, inefficiency and general high-handedness as they affected Lend-Lease negotiations, joint military planning, such as homely matters as potatoes, cabbages or the issuance of exit visas to Russian women who had been unpatriotic enough to marry American citizens. Yet Harriman continued to believe, long after George Kennan had given way to these frustrations, that each small victory at the expense of the Soviet bureaucracy was worth the fight; limited agreements were better than none. He accepted even minor concessions in the belief that small steps forward could lead to longer strides toward cooperation once the enveloping suspicion, as much traditional Russian as Communist, had been pierced.

But Poland was to become the touchstone of Soviet behavior in the postwar world, the first test of Stalin's attitude toward his less powerful neighbors. It was to raise troubling questions in Harriman's mind about differing war aims within the alliance and about the differing meanings attached to such simple words as "friendly" or "democratic." His role at this period surpassed the conventional bounds of ambassadorial duty. His personal convictions, which he did not hesitate to make clear in communications to the President and the State Department, were often at variance with his instructions from Washington. During his first days in Moscow, Harriman had come to believe that all the earnest talk about a free, independent Poland was likely to become academic once the Red Army occupied the country. Cordell Hull was not disposed to listen when Harriman urged upon him the supreme importance of pressing

the London Poles to come to terms with the Kremlin before it was too late. Roosevelt, looking ahead to the 1944 election and the predictable wrath of the Polish voters, had pleaded with Stalin to give the Poles "a break," and above all, not to jeopardize his own re-election prospects by unilateral action. Washington treated Poland as a British problem in the first instance, one that Churchill alone might be able to solve by pressing the London Poles to reorganize their government.

Churchill and Eden had talked sternly to Mikolajczyk after Teheran, pressing him to "accept the so-called Curzon Line (prolonged through eastern Galicia) as a basis for negotiations with the Soviet Government." The Prime Minister reported to Stalin and to Roosevelt:

> I said that although we had gone to war for the sake of Poland, we had not gone to war for any particular frontier line but for the existence of a strong, free, independent Poland, which Marshal Stalin had also declared himself supporting. Moreover, although Great Britain would have fought on in any case for years until something happened to Germany, the liberation of Poland from the German grip is being achieved mainly by the enormous sacrifices and achievements of the Russian armies. Therefore Russia and her Allies had a right to ask that Poland should be guided to a large extent about the frontiers of the territory she would have . . .
>
> I advised them to accept the Curzon Line as a basis for discussion. I spoke of the compensation which Poland would receive in the North and in the West. In the North there would be East Prussia; but here I did not mention the point about Koenigsberg. In the West they would be free and aided to occupy Germany up to the line of the Oder. I told them it was their duty to accept this task and guard the frontier against German aggression towards the East . . . in this task they would need a friendly Russia behind them and would, I presumed, be sustained by the guarantee of the Three Great Powers against further German attack.[1]

Churchill appeared to draw the line, however, at forcing the Poles to reconstruct their government by a purge of the so-called reactionaries. "Do you not agree," he wrote to Stalin, "that to advocate changes within a foreign government comes near to that interference with internal sovereignty to which you and I have expressed ourselves as opposed?" Stalin did not, of course, agree.

> I think you realized [he replied on February 4] that we cannot re-establish relations with the present Polish Government. Indeed, what would be the use of re-establishing relations with it when we are not at all certain that tomorrow we shall not be compelled to sever those relations again on

account of another fascist provocation on its part, such as the "Katyn Affair"?[2]

Nor had Stalin's offer of territorial compensation at Germany's expense reconciled the Polish government to the loss of territory in the east. The Poles had seen their country partitioned in 1939 between Germany and Russia, and they looked to the Western powers to restore it. For them, the Soviet effort to annex one third of Poland looked like another cynical repartition, the evil fruit of the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939. The Russians, understandably, had a different perspective. Poland was the foreign invader's route to Moscow (a point Stalin had made repeatedly to Harriman), not a country like any other. Both Napoleon and Hitler had marched into Russia across the Polish plain and Stalin, believing in defense in depth, was determined that it should not happen again. The Russian leadership had not forgotten or forgiven the prewar Polish government's refusal to let Soviet troops traverse Polish territory, even in the hypothetical event of their joining the British and French against the Germans. Nor had it forgotten the humiliations inflicted upon the young Red Army in 1920 by the Polish forces of Marshal Jozef Pilsudski. In taking back the strip of territory they had lost to Pilsudski after World War I and briefly reoccupied in 1939, they proposed to fix a new boundary close to the Curzon Line, itself the product of an unsuccessful earlier British effort to mediate between Poles and Russians in December 1919 and January 1920.

At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 the Allies had decided to reconstitute a Polish state out of the wreckage of the old Austro-Hungarian, German and Czarist empires—a decision that raised serious questions about the undefined eastern frontier. In December 1919 the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers suggested a line that roughly followed the ethnic divisions of Eastern Europe: Poles living to the west of the line, White Russians to the east. The proposed new boundary would run from the East Prussian frontier in the north to the edge of eastern Galicia in the south. No effort was made at the time to push the boundary line through eastern Galicia. That fragment of Austro-Hungary, with its major city Lwow, was supposed to become a League of Nations mandated territory under Polish administration.

Neither the Polish nor the Soviet governments, however, would accept the proposals of the Peace Conference. In the spring of 1920 the new Polish republic, encouraged by the French (who hoped to build up Poland as an ally against both the Germans to the west and the Bolshevik Russians to the east), struck against the Soviet Union. Despite early successes in the field, the Polish offensive collapsed and soon the Red Army was pushing deep into Poland. For a time, in the summer of 1920, it appeared that Poland might be bolshevized at the point of a

Russian bayonet. The Poles then appealed to the Allies and, as a condition of mediation, accepted a British proposal that they withdraw to the suggested boundary of December 1919. The British terms, though, were unclear about who would control Lwow. This proposed armistice line, bearing the signature of Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, was dispatched to the Soviets on July 11, 1920. But the Soviets rejected it, continuing their advance toward Warsaw and East Prussia until they outran their supply lines. At this point the Poles, with French assistance, counterattacked and by autumn they were advancing into Russian territory.

Lenin's new Bolshevik regime—increasingly aware that the Russian people had been totally exhausted by three years of intervention and civil war, famine and economic disruption—agreed to negotiate in the winter of 1921. The result was the Treaty of Riga, which ceded to Poland a large area east of the Curzon Line, including a 150-mile-wide belt of White Russian and Ukrainian territory. It was this belt of contested land—earlier administered by czarist Russia and Austria-Hungary—that the Soviets had reoccupied in 1939, part of Stalin's price for the nonaggression treaty with Hitler.

At Teheran, after Roosevelt had made clear to Stalin that he could take no public position on the Polish dispute, Churchill had tried to draw out Stalin on the details of a frontier settlement. There was no quarrel between them on the Curzon Line, only some debate about its application to Lwow. In fact, the Curzon note of 1920 had left the future of Lwow and Galicia in limbo. Stalin returned to Moscow having accepted the Curzon Line, but insisting that Lwow must be Russian. Churchill had agreed to the Curzon Line, with Polish territorial compensation in the west, but deferred the fate of Lwow for future negotiations. Beneš, meanwhile, assured Churchill (as he had earlier assured Harriman in Moscow) that Stalin would be willing to resume relations with the London Poles, but only if they purged the anti-Soviet elements from their government and accepted the Curzon Line.

On January 6, 1944, as the Red Army was about to crash into the disputed territory, the Polish government in London issued a declaration ignoring the whole issue of new boundaries. It promised military cooperation by the underground Home Army on condition that the Soviet Union resumed diplomatic relations with the London government. Five days later, Harriman and Clark Kerr were called to the Kremlin after midnight to be handed a reply by Molotov, who explained that "as everyone else is talking about Poland it would be wrong for us to remain silent." The Soviet response gave the London Poles no quarter. It accused them of "not infrequently" playing into the hands of the Nazis, while the Union of Polish Patriots and the Soviet-sponsored Polish Army Corps under Major General Zygmunt Berling were already

"operating hand in hand with the Red Army on the front against the Germans." The "emigrant Polish Government," by contrast, had shown itself "incapable of organizing the active struggle against the German invaders," the Soviet government contended.

Finding Molotov "most anxious and hopeful" for Washington's reaction, Harriman sent a message the same day pleading for a more active American role behind the scenes:

> I recognize that we should not become directly involved in attempting to negotiate this question between the two Governments. On the other hand, I cannot help but be impressed by the chaotic conditions adversely affecting our vital war interests that will probably result as Soviet troops penetrate Polish territory unless relations are re-established promptly between the two Governments.
>
> It would seem that the Poles can make a better deal now than if they wait, living as they appear to be in the hope that we and the British will eventually pull their chestnuts out of the fire.
>
> If it is clear, and I believe it is, that we will not be able to aid the Poles substantially more than we already have in the boundary dispute, are we not in fairness called upon to make plain the limitations of the help that we can give them and the fact that, in their own interest, the present moment is propitious for them to negotiate the re-establishment of relations with the Soviets?

Mikolajczyk, meanwhile, had approached Hull through his ambassador to Washington, apparently in the hope of strengthening his own hand against Churchill through a reaffirmation of the American policy of opposing territorial settlements before the end of the war. Hull's noncommittal response was that the Administration's policy against wartime settlements did not rule out negotiated agreements by mutual consent. Hull, in short, was neither as frank with the Poles as Harriman would have wished, nor as totally opposed to negotiations as Mikolajczyk may have hoped. Thus Roosevelt and Hull left the main responsibility to Churchill and Eden, even though the proposals they kept pressing on the London Poles would have raised a storm across the United States had they been made public.

When Harriman saw Molotov again on January 18, the Soviet Foreign Minister for the first time gave some indication of the Cabinet changes the Russians wanted to see before they would deal with the Poles in London. The London government must be reconstructed, Molotov said, to include Poles now living in England, the United States and the Soviet Union. These must be "honest men" who were "not tainted with fascism; men with a friendly attitude toward the Soviet Union." As possible members of the new government he volunteered

the names of Dr. Oskar Lange, a Polish economist who was then teaching at the University of Chicago; Father Stanislaus Orlemanski, an obscure priest of an obscure Catholic parish in Springfield, Massachusetts; and Leo Krzcki, a trade-union leader who was then national chairman of the American Slav Congress. Mikolajczyk could remain, Molotov added, though he had doubts about the Polish Foreign Minister, Tadeusz Romer.

On January 21 Harriman sent another telegram to Washington suggesting that in his opinion, the Soviets would recognize a reconstituted London government under Mikolajczyk if it was ready to accept the Curzon Line as "a basis for the boundary negotiations." It was his impression that the Russians would not insist on a total purge; Mikolajczyk could pass muster "by eliminating the irreconcilably anti-Soviet members and bringing in at least one Polish leader from the United States, one now in Russia, and perhaps one from Poland." Harriman wounded a prophetic warning:

> Unless the Polish group in London proceeds along the above line, I believe the Soviets will foster and recognize some type of Committee of Liberation. Then one of two alternatives would face us:
>
> (1) Continued recognition of the Polish Government in London, the practical effect of which would be to give the Russians a free hand to do what they wish in Poland, at least until after the hostilities are terminated.
>
> (2) Insistence on our being given representation in setting up administrative machinery within Poland similar to what has been given to the Russians in Italy by us. Withdrawal of recognition from the Polish Government in London would be one consequence of this course.

That painful choice could only be averted, Harriman argued, by quickly persuading the London Poles to reconstruct their government and negotiate with the Russians before the Red Army crossed the Curzon Line. This would require "the strongest pressure" that Churchill and Eden could bring to bear. "I would not feel qualified," Harriman added, "to say how far the American Government should go." He asked Hull for his reaction and "any information as to the line of thinking you have in mind."

All the Ambassador got in return was a request from Hull that he should see Molotov and go back over the old ground, warning the Russians again that their unilateral actions in the case of Poland ran the risk of alienating American public opinion. Believing this approach to be fruitless, Harriman sent the Secretary of State his own capsule version of Molotov's predictable responses: that the Soviets "perceive no reason why Poland should be liberated through the efforts of the

Red Army so that there may be placed in power a group which has shown a basically antagonistic attitude toward the Soviet Union"; that the Curzon Line "has had the sanction of the British Government and no recorded objection from the United States Government"; and that the Soviets would allow the people of Poland to select a government of their own choosing. "I make no attempt to argue the Soviet case," Harriman wrote on January 24, "but I want to put before you as clearly as I can what I am satisfied is, and will be, the attitude of the Soviets." In order to be useful at the Moscow end, Harriman added, he needed clear answers to a number of policy questions:

- Was the United States prepared to accept as "reasonably warranted" the Soviet position that the present Polish government was so unalterably hostile as to justify Moscow's refusal to deal with it?
- If so, was Washington ready to say as much to the Russians, the British and the Poles, and to decide "how far are we ready to involve ourselves in negotiations" on reconstructing the London government?
- If not, would the United States be prepared to claim in Poland the same rights to participate in occupation policy-making as it had granted the Russians in Italy?

Until Washington defined its policy and was ready to present specific suggestions, Harriman concluded, it would not be in an effective position to argue against any unilateral Soviet action. But Hull and Roosevelt were not prepared to take hard, unpopular decisions.

When Harriman saw Stalin again on February 2, he took the occasion to express the President's hope that some way might be found to settle the Polish dispute. In reply, Stalin reached for a bulging briefcase on his table, pulled out a six-month-old copy of *Niepodlogloсс*, an underground paper printed in Wilno, and thrust it angrily in front of the Ambassador. The headline, in Polish, read: "HITLER AND STALIN—TWO FACES OF THE SAME EVIL." It was difficult to deal with people who could publish such a paper, Stalin said. The Poles in London might be able to fool Mr. Eden but now they had shown their true character.

When Harriman, nevertheless, stressed the high importance of reaching a Polish settlement, Stalin said he would be glad if relations with the Polish government could be improved. He was convinced, however, that it could not be done so long as people like General Sosnkowski and Stanislaw Kot, the former ambassador to the Soviet Union, remained in the government. "These people would have to be removed before the Soviet Government could deal with the Polish Government in London," Stalin said. The Poles liked to think, he added, that "Russians were good fighters but fools. They thought they

could let the Russians carry the burden of the fighting and then step in at the end to share the spoils. But the Poles would find out who were the fools."

Clark Kerr reported that Stalin sounded slightly less negative later the same evening, when he in turn called at the Kremlin. In response to a series of written questions, Stalin promised that Poles living east of the Curzon Line would be permitted to migrate westward and that democratic elections would be allowed in Poland after the liberation. It was Clark Kerr's impression, Harriman reported, that "although Stalin manifested a firm determination not to establish relations with a government he could not trust, he indicated no desire to 'hand-pick' a new Polish Government."

Churchill continued to press the London Poles for concessions to reality. In a meeting at Chequers on February 6 he warned Mikiolajczyk and Romer that "the Curzon Line was the best that the Poles could expect and all that he would ask the British people to demand on their behalf." If they persisted in their present course, Churchill added, they would lose everything "while the Russian steamroller moved over Poland, a Communist government was set up in Warsaw and the present Polish Government was left powerless to do anything but make its protests to the world at large."[3]

Mikolajczyk, however, rejected the Curzon Line in the name of the underground leaders inside Poland as well as his own government. He had gone a long way toward meeting the Russian demands, he said, by agreeing to negotiate all questions, including frontier changes. He had issued orders to the underground movement to enter into friendly contact with the Russians. But he could not announce, the Polish Premier said, "that he would accept the Curzon Line and give away Wilno and Lwow." To do so would only undermine his government's authority with the Polish people. On February 22 Churchill told the House of Commons: "I cannot feel that the Russian demand for a reassurance about her Western frontiers goes beyond the limits of what is reasonable or just." His statement failed to sway Mikolajczyk's government, nor did it satisfy Stalin. When Clark Kerr saw Stalin on the last day of February, trying once again to discover whether the Kremlin would yield an inch on its demands, he found that "no argument was of any avail." It was, the British ambassador reported, "not a pleasant talk."

Harriman's second talk with Stalin on March 3 went no better. "Again the Poles," Stalin had said, in a mood of aggravated annoyance with the exile government. Harriman had come away with no encouragement other than Stalin's promise to take no immediate action because, as he said, the time was not ripe.

In the days that followed, Harriman put his mind to various ways of breaking the deadlock. With Clark Kerr's advice and agreement, he

drafted a proposal that would get around the Soviet refusal to deal directly with the London Poles. The Western Allies could, on the one hand, take their cue from Stalin's statement that the time was not ripe for action on Poland and resign themselves to a period of "watchful waiting." The great disadvantage of this course, he pointed out in a draft never sent on to Washington, was that the Red Army, meanwhile, would move into Poland, leaving the Soviets free to do as they pleased. He felt that the Russians in time were likely to surface a new Polish regime of their own, led by Communists who had sat out the war in Moscow, and extend to it the recognition they had denied the London government. The cost of waiting, in short, would be high: "The solution to the Polish question would be a completely Soviet one."

The second course, which Harriman clearly preferred, was to try for agreement between the British, the Americans and the Russians on a set of ultimate objectives for Poland. The three powers would commit themselves to the restoration of a strong, independent Poland and to assuring the Polish people's right to freely select a broadly representative government of their own after the war. The Soviets would be authorized to administer the disputed territory east of the Curzon Line, leaving the final frontier settlement to be concluded after the war. As for the liberated areas west of the Curzon Line, an Advisory Council representing all three powers could be set up to consult with the Soviet military authorities on "questions of a political character," to make certain that the long-suffering population received relief assistance and to promote conditions which would permit the early transfer of governmental responsibility to Polish bodies.

The second course had its advantages, Harriman argued. It would restore faith in the agreements of Moscow and Teheran, demonstrating that the Big Three were searching together for an honest solution; moreover, the participation of Western representatives might "operate as an automatic restraint upon Soviet excesses." He conceded the disadvantages as well: the danger that by participating in the proposed commission, the United States and Britain would find themselves obliged to underwrite "at least tacitly" whatever the Soviets did on Polish territory—either that or contemplate a serious breach in the alliance. He also foresaw an undermining of the London government's authority, which could sharpen disunity among Poles overseas and damage morale among Polish servicemen fighting with the British.

"I knew that only the British government could bring about the changes that I believed to be essential in the composition and attitude of the Polish government-in-exile," Harriman recalled. "For that reason I kept urging Clark Kerr to send vigorous telegrams to his government. The reason I did not send some of the messages I dictated late at night to Meiklejohn was that when I read them again in the morning I felt they might do more harm than good. I knew I couldn't influence Hull. I

had to reach the President and Hopkins. And I kept coming back to the realization that the main effort would have to be made in London, not Washington."

Churchill was still pressing Mikolajczyk hard in the spring of 1944 and being reproached by Stalin for not pressing harder. Increasingly exasperated, Churchill notified Stalin on March 21 that he proposed to make a statement in the House of Commons suggesting that all territorial changes be postponed for the duration of the war. "Of course, you are free to make any speech in the House of Commons—this is your affair," Stalin wrote back. "But if you make such a speech I shall consider that you have committed an act of injustice and unfriendliness toward the Soviet Union."[4]

As Harriman in Moscow thought about these unhappy developments he became more convinced than ever that the territorial dispute would, in the end, prove less of an obstacle than the determined anti-Soviet character of the London government. Torn between his long-standing view that nothing would be gained by appeasement of Stalin and a desire to understand the Soviet position, he set down his thoughts in a memorandum on March 24:

> I realize that the Polish situation does not look the same to me as it does in Washington, but I do not consider that my view is entirely colored by the Moscow atmosphere. I knew Sikorski intimately, had a number of long talks with him and have seen a number of the Poles, both important and lower rank, in London and elsewhere. The majority of them, with the exception of Sikorski, are mainly committed to a policy of fear of and antagonism to the Soviet Government. There is no doubt in my mind that the policies of the [Polish] Government are dominated by the officer group who are convinced that a war with Soviet Russia is inevitable.
>
> Sikorski himself, shortly before he was killed, when I asked him why he could not consolidate his Government on a policy which he favored of working with the Soviet Union, said to me: "This is impossible for me to accomplish at the present time. The only constituents I have now are the Army."
>
> Stalin is convinced that there is no hope for a friendly neighbor in Poland under the leadership of the controlling group in London, and he is unwilling to have the Red Army re-establish them in power. I believe he is basically right. In spite of the conjectures to the contrary, there is no evidence that he is unwilling to allow an independent Poland to emerge.

Harriman's disagreements with Churchill had been few during the London years. Now he felt that the Prime Minister was mistaken in threatening to withhold recognition of territorial changes until after the

war. Although Churchill, in fact, did not make the speech which in prospect had so greatly alarmed Stalin, Harriman found him filled with bitterness when he dined at 10 Downing Street on May 2 on his way to Washington for consultations with Roosevelt.

Churchill arrived late and visibly tired at the end of a long Cabinet meeting. He asked some perfunctory questions about life in Moscow and did not appear to be much interested in Harriman's answers. But the vigor and the passion came flooding back when Harriman raised the Polish question. The Prime Minister argued that he had done a great service for Stalin as well as the London Poles. With great effort he had persuaded the Poles to accept the Curzon Line as a temporary demarcation for administrative purposes, leaving the final determination to the peace conference. He had committed the British government to support the westward expansion of Poland's frontiers at the expense of Germany. And all he got in exchange, he said, was "insults from Stalin—a barbarian."

Harriman quietly took issue with Churchill, explaining his belief that the Soviet government worried less over the boundary issue than over the composition of the Polish government and its political attitudes. "I explained that Mikolajczyk was not unacceptable to the Soviets as an individual, nor were others coming from the Polish democratic parties, but that Stalin was convinced that the group in London were under the domination of Sosnkowski and the military, who saw in the future only war with the Soviet Union," Harriman noted in his memorandum on the dinner conversation with Churchill.

The Prime Minister made no promises to reconsider his position. But as Harriman was leaving he showed signs of a new mood. He asked Harriman to tell Stalin "how earnestly he had tried to find a solution, how much progress he had made and how hurt he was that Stalin had not believed in his good intentions."

Two days later, at a garden party for the visiting prime ministers of the British Dominions, Churchill sent for Harriman and reopened the subject. "He made me listen to a fifteen-minute fight talk," Harriman remembered, "on how badly the British had been treated by the Soviet government beginning with the Ribbentrop treaty, during the period when Britain stood alone, the insults that had been hurled at him by Stalin consistently, and his determination that the Soviets should not destroy freedom in Poland, for which country Britain had gone to war. He asked that I present this attitude to the President and asked for the President's support in this policy 'even if only after he is re-elected to office.' "

Harriman had encountered the same attitude of sour disenchantment in a talk with Eden on May 3. There was a serious question, Eden said, whether Britain could ever again work with the Soviets. Harriman argued the contrary proposition: that by patience, understanding and

readiness to be firm on matters of principle, the Western Allies could still develop "reasonably satisfactory relationships" with the Russians. "For example," he said, "we should have dealt with the political side of the Polish question at Moscow and Teheran. The fact that we did not register opposition to the Soviet Government's unwillingness to deal with the Poles in London had been accepted by the Soviets as acquiescence, even though [it was] understood to be reluctant. The Soviets' own policy was to react violently against any statement of ours, and they expected us to do the same. This technique of theirs is one that we should bear in mind at all times and not allow ourselves to drift into difficulties as a result of indecision. On the other hand, we should attempt to understand their basic objectives and not make issues where we are not on firm ground."

Harriman, in short, was thoroughly aware of the sharp swing in official British opinion when he looked up Lord Beaverbrook. He found his old friend in improved health and far less vehement than in his War Cabinet days, "fussing with civilian aviation and watching developments" from the sidelines. Beaverbrook announced with dramatic effect that everyone in the British government except himself was anti-Russian now. His own view was that the Soviets ought to have a free hand in Eastern Europe but should be excluded from Allied councils in Italy and Western Europe generally. "In other words," Harriman noted, "he believes in spheres of interest."

On his way back from Washington, Harriman stopped again in London to find that Churchill's rage against Stalin had blown itself out, "Due largely to Stalin's recent civil messages," he reported to Roosevelt on May 29, "the sun is shining again on the Soviet horizon." Something more substantial than a change in Stalin's tone had affected the Prime Minister, as he soon explained. During Harriman's absence in Washington he had tried his hand at a sphere-of-interest arrangement with the Russians, and it appeared to be working. The British had agreed to keep hands off Rumania while the fighting there continued, Churchill said, and the Russians in turn were willing to leave the British a free hand in Greece. Already the Greek Communists were being more cooperative, to the point of indicating that they would join rather than oppose a new coalition government of all the main resistance groups and political parties, then being organized in Cairo, with George Papandreou as Prime Minister. The Soviets were being so cooperative about Greece, Churchill added, that he was now hopeful of resolving even the Polish problem.*

*Churchill's enthusiasm was running ahead of events. The possibility of a temporary sphere-of-interest arrangement had been mentioned to the Soviet ambassador, Fedor T. Gusev, on May 5 by Eden. On May 18 Gusev informed

Back in Moscow, Harriman assured Molotov on June 3 that the President would urge Mikolajczyk, who was about to visit the United States, to drop Sosnkowski and his followers from the Polish Cabinet. The President, he said, considered it of paramount importance that permanent, friendly relations be established between the Soviet Union and Poland; for that reason Mikolajczyk would have to reconstruct his government. Roosevelt remembered Stalin's reassurance at Teheran that Poland's independence would be respected, Harriman added. With the election five months off, the President "thought it best to keep quiet on the Polish question," as he had explained to Stalin at Teheran, and he had insisted that Mikolajczyk make no public speeches during his American visit. "It was a time to keep barking dogs quiet," Harriman said. The Soviets could be helpful by not airing the question for a time.

Molotov inquired whether there had been any change in the President's views on the Polish question since he had discussed it with Stalin at Teheran. No, Harriman replied, adding that the President was confident that Stalin too would stand by his statements at Teheran. Molotov put several questions about American reactions to the Moscow visit of Father Orlemanski and Professor Lange, whom the Soviets had put forward as possible candidates for a reconstructed Polish government, at which Harriman remarked that neither had an "especially large" following in the United States.

When Harriman saw Stalin on June 10, there was more talk of the Normandy landing than of Poland. He raised the subject with the appearance of hesitation, saying that he knew Stalin did not like to talk about the Poles. "Why not?" Stalin responded in obvious good humor. Harriman had never seen Stalin in a more agreeable mood. The success of the Second Front doubtless affected his attitude, although he was cordial even in discussing Poland. Stalin expressed gratitude for the President's reaffirmation of his statements at Teheran, adding that he fully realized how difficult it was for the President to speak out during the election campaign. He also undertook to keep Roosevelt informed of any new development in Polish-Soviet relations. Harriman remarked that the President was puzzled about the status of Lwow but believed it was a matter to be worked out between Russians and Poles.

The unanswered question was "Which Poles?" While Mikolajczyk was in Washington seeing Roosevelt, Stalin had been meeting in

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the British Foreign Office that his government favored the idea but would like to know whether Washington had any objection. Hull objected strongly. Thus it was not until mid-July, following repeated appeals from Churchill to Roosevelt, that the United States gave its lukewarm assent to a three-month trial period. Stalin let the proposal drag and Churchill, sensing fresh Russian encouragement to the Communist resistance group in Greece, did not press the matter for several months.

Moscow with a delegation from the so-called Polish National Council, a body of uncertain origin recently formed inside Poland. Stalin urged Harriman to talk with them. These, he said, were "living people," not émigrés, and they would have a great deal to tell him regarding conditions in Poland. Harriman agreed to meet the delegation unofficially the following day. The principal spokesman for the group turned out to be Edward Boleslaw Osubka-Morawski, who described himself as a Catholic, an economist and a member of the Polish Socialist party. He had changed his name four times during the German occupation, he said, and was now Vice President of the Polish National Council. The others were a Colonel Turski, the only acknowledged Communist in the group; a former Lodz industrialist called Hanecki; and a young man who called himself Hardy. He had been a student in Warsaw before the war, he said, an active partisan and a member of the Peasant party, although his wing of the party had broken away from Mikolajczyk's leadership.

Osubka-Morawski, who did most of the talking, denounced Sosnkowski and his "reactionary Fascist clique" at length, insisting they had no real support in Poland except for an underground force of perhaps 30,000 men. He appealed for arms from the United States for what he described as the "People's Army." Questioned by Harriman about the Council's position on frontiers, he said that it hoped Poland would be able to keep Lwow and the Galician oil fields, but he personally saw little prospect of holding Wilno "because of its geographic position." The Council, he added, was trying to be practical. It recognized the great power of the Soviet Union and felt the chance of getting a reasonable settlement from the Russians was bound to increase if its own demands were reasonable. He acknowledged that the National Council was "in agreement on fundamentals" with the Union of Polish Patriots in Moscow but insisted there had been no contact between the two organizations before his visit to the Soviet Union.

Harriman found it curious that Osubka-Morawski and the London Poles appeared to feel much the same way about keeping Lwow and the Galician oil fields. "It seemed to me at the time," he recalled, "that if the best of the London Poles had gotten together with the National Council people, they could at least have saved Lwow and the oil fields."

When Harriman asked his visitors what the outcome of a present-day election in Poland might be, Osubka-Morawski replied that Mikolajczyk's Peasant party would run ahead of the others. It was axiomatic, however, that after the war the large estates would have to be broken up, the land distributed to the peasants and the principal industries placed under national control.

Mikolajczyk, meanwhile, had met four times with President Roosevelt in the week of June 7–14. The President told him, among other

things, that Lwow ought rightfully to belong to Poland and that he should avoid "any final or definite settlement of the frontiers now." Roosevelt added that "it might be desirable to find an opportunity to bring some changes in your cabinet in order to make an understanding with the Russians possible."[5] Roosevelt stressed, however, that the Poles would have to negotiate their own settlement with Stalin. He urged Mikolajczyk to fly to Moscow without delay for a "man to man" discussion with the Soviet leader. Mikolajczyk agreed to go if invited, as he was, after both Churchill and Roosevelt intervened with Stalin.

A four-day visit to Soviet Central Asia with Vice President Henry Wallace offered Harriman a welcome break from his Polish preoccupations in mid-June. Wallace had undertaken a brief, enthusiastic study of Russian in preparation for his trip. But Roosevelt did not want Wallace to talk with Stalin. At the President's direction, Wallace flew from Alaska across Siberia to Tashkent and Alma Ata, then on to China. The president was perfectly willing for Wallace to see Chiang Kai-shek," Harriman recalled. "Indeed, he thought that the Vice President's liberal influence might do some good with Chiang. But he was taking no chances of confusing Stalin about American policy."

On June 14 Harriman flew to Tashkent, accompanied by Tommy Thompson; the Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union, Foo Pingsheung; and the Mexican ambassador, Luis Quintanilla, a personal friend of Wallace's. He met Wallace there and together they visited several agricultural experiment stations, where Soviet scientists were trying to develop improved strains of cotton, potatoes and melons. Wallace, who had made a considerable fortune as a developer of hybrid corn, was in his element. "All his life, Wallace had been trying to get American farmers to accept science," Harriman reported on his return to Moscow. "In the Soviet Union he saw scientific methods being forced on the farmers, and it was heaven for him. Here he found capable agricultural scientists with the authority to compel farmers to follow their orders."

Throughout the trip Wallace was totally absorbed in matters agricultural. Harriman and Thompson took more interest in the social and political attitudes of a region normally closed to foreign diplomats. They found the people refreshingly hospitable, the fruits displayed in local markets both succulent and abundant, and the evidence of economic uplift in what had been an isolated, backward region compelling. They discovered, among other things, that few of the Uzbek population (whose devotion to Moscow was not being taken for granted in the Kremlin) had seen service in the Red Army at the beginning of the war. As the fighting raged on, however, and the casualties multiplied, the Uzbeks were called to combat like other Soviet citizens and suffered heavy losses in the Battle of Stalingrad.

Wallace got to deliver a short speech in Russian, Harriman noting that the crowd in the Tashkent theater "managed to understand" him. The American guests also were treated to the first performance of Bizet's *Carmen* in the Uzbek language. Thompson dryly observed in his report to Washington that "fortunately for the guests, only one act of the opera was given."

Harriman returned to Moscow on June 19 and was soon again absorbed in Polish problems. Two days later he warned the State Department that the London Poles were about to be outflanked. The Ambassador's "best guess" was that with the Red Army now rolling into Poland proper, the Russians "in consultation, no doubt, with the Polish National Council" would install local administrations in the liberated areas. "Mikolajczyk and certain other representatives of the democratic parties of the London Government will then be asked by the Polish National Council to return to Poland and associate themselves in the formation of a government," he predicted. "Individuals of the Union of Polish Patriots in Moscow, and perhaps Dr. Lange and one or two other Poles in the United States, will be similarly invited. A government will be formed, based on the 1921 constitution and repudiating the constitution of 1935, regardless of who accepts these invitations."*

Moscow would promptly recognize the new government, having made certain that "real influence in Polish affairs will be exercised by the Soviet Government," and would then call upon London and Washington to follow suit. "We will [then] be faced with a *fait accompli*," Harriman wrote, "and with the difficult decision as to what will be our relations with the Polish Government in London and our attitude toward the new government in Poland."

That forecast was confirmed the following evening, July 22. Radio Moscow announced, from liberated territory, the formation of a Polish Committee for National Liberation, which was to serve as the executive authority of the Polish National Council (four of whose members had so recently and so modestly called upon Harriman to plead for American arms). The Committee's mission was anything but modest: "to direct the fight of the people for liberation, to achieve independence, and to rebuild the Polish state." The announcement had been issued from Chelm, the first large town liberated by the Red Army on territory that

*The Polish Constitution of 1921 established the new state as a parliamentary democracy. By the late twenties, however, power reverted to the military, General Pilsudski and his colonels. In 1935 the Pilsudski regime instituted a frankly authoritarian constitution more nearly in step with the rise of Fascist regimes elsewhere in Europe. Overwhelming power was now concentrated in the President, and Parliament lost effective control. Civil liberties were restricted, and the rights of political organizations curtailed.

was Polish beyond dispute. The Committee moved on to Lublin after a few days and came to be known as the Lublin Committee. The Russians, moreover, had already signed an agreement with the Chelm-Lublin Committee, assigning to it "full responsibility in matters of civil government" behind the Red Army's lines.

The Polish government-in-exile in short, was suddenly confronted with a rival Polish regime, bearing out Harriman's early warnings to Roosevelt and Hull; a rival already established on Polish soil and enjoying full support from the Russians. Exactly six weeks earlier Stalin had assured Roosevelt, through Harriman, that he would keep him informed of any new Polish developments. As he explained to Harriman on another occasion, he never broke a promise but sometimes he changed his mind.

When Mikolajczyk at last reached Moscow and asked for a meeting with Stalin, Molotov replied that he had better see the Lublin representatives. They were, Molotov said, better informed than Stalin about conditions in Poland. The Polish Premier insisted. He had, after all, been invited to Moscow by Stalin, however grudgingly. Molotov told him on July 31 that he would try to arrange a meeting with Stalin in three days. He added that the Red Army was only ten kilometers from Warsaw. The next day Warsaw rose up in arms against the Germans.

"Warsaw will be free any day," Mikolajczyk said to Stalin, when they finally met on August 3. "God grant that it be so," Stalin replied. But he went on to sneer at the underground army: "What kind of army is it—without artillery, tanks, air force? They do not even have enough hand weapons. In modern war this is nothing . . . I hear that the Polish Government instructed these units to chase the Germans out of Warsaw. I don't understand how they can do it. They don't have sufficient strength for that."

Mikolajczyk asked Stalin whether he would help the Warsaw uprising by supplying arms. "We will not permit any action behind our lines," he said. "For this reason you have to reach an understanding with the Lublin Committee. We are supporting them. If you don't do it, then nothing will come out of our talk. We cannot tolerate two governments."[6]

The scene was being played out much as Harriman had prophesied on January 21. Washington had chosen the course of sitting tight to await developments. Feeling powerless to alter the course of events inside Poland, it watched with rising alarm as the Russians installed their friends in power. Only the Russians were by reason of geography in a position to liberate Poland. And as Stalin said to Tito* in 1945,

*It was actually Milojan Djilas with whom Stalin spoke.—Ed. note.

"Whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise."[7]

Harriman continued to believe, however, that in Poland it might have been otherwise—if the British government, backed strongly by the United States, had pressed the Polish government-in-exile to swallow the Curzon Line and get rid of its bitter-end generals like Sosnkowski. It was, he felt, the only hope (a slender hope, admittedly) of preventing a wholly Russian solution to the Polish question.

Endnotes

1. FRUS (*Foreign Relations of the United States*), *1944*, Vol. III, *The British Commonwealth and Europe* (1965), pp. 1240–43.

2. *Stalin's Correspondence*, Vol. I, p. 196.

3. FRUS, *1944*, Vol. III, pp. 1249–57.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 1268–70.

5. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy*, p. 22.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 237–42.

7. Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York, Harcourt, 1962), p. 114.