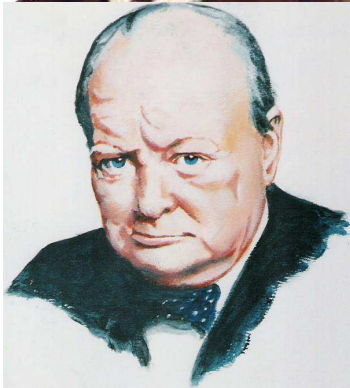


Carefully Thinking Over The Next Move.

*Anglo-American efforts to settle the war-time
dispute between Poland and the Soviet
Union, 1943-1944.*



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Raynor de Best

0712752

Bachelor of Arts, Leiden University

Contents

<i>Preface: Diplomacy as a Chess Game</i>	3
<i>Chapter 1: Introducing the Game Board and the players</i>	7
<i>Chapter 2: The contestants make their first moves, April – October 1943</i>	26
<i>Chapter 3: The White King and Queen argue, November – December 1943</i>	42
<i>Chapter 4: Black makes his move, Januaray – October 1944</i>	58
<i>Conclusion: Checkmate?</i>	67
<i>Bibliography</i>	69

Preface

*I wish you to consider the advisability of recommending to the President an announcement by him, in which he might be joined by both Churchill and Stalin, to the effect that the three Allied Governments would act as trustees to insure that Greece as well as the other nations of the Balkans would have the opportunity to express, as free citizens, the kind of Government they desire to have.*¹

American Intelligence Officer, William J. Donovan to Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's most trusted advisor, on December 12th, 1944.

Thus, Germans who take part in wholesale shooting of Italian officers or in the execution of French, Dutch, Belgian, or Norwegian hostages or of Cretan peasants, or who have shared in slaughters on the people of Poland or in territories of the Soviet Union which are now being swept clear of the enemy, will know they will be brought back to the scene of their crimes and judged on the spot by the peoples whom they have outraged. Let those who have hitherto not imbrued their hands with innocent blood beware lest they join the ranks of the guilty, for most assuredly the three Allied Powers will pursue them to the uttermost ends of the earth and will deliver them to their accusers in order that justice may be done.

Statement issued by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin, concerning wartime atrocities, 1 November 1943.²

On October 28th, 1944, two presidents had a secret meeting at a Chicago train station. United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt was to meet with Charles Rozmarek, president of the newly founded Polish-American Congress. The Congress tried to unite Polish Americans and to pursue a common political goal: safeguarding Poland's future when World War II was to end. FDR was on national campaign to search for votes in the upcoming presidential elections and hoped to influence the American Pole to let his community support the New Yorker and his war time efforts. Earlier in the White House, as Rozmarek recounts to Arthur Bliss Lane,

¹ *OSS Records*, OP-266, Folder 439.

² Samuel I. Rosenman, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Volume Twelve: The Tide Turns 1943* (New York 1969) 499-500.

Roosevelt had warned him ‘Stalin had fooled him [Roosevelt] twice and might possibly fool him again.’ In that meeting in Chicago, Roosevelt’s fears seem to have come true.

President Roosevelt in his talk with me expressed distrust of Stalin, having been fooled by him, as he stated, on a number of occasions. He plainly indicated that he was fearful that Stalin might again collaborate with Hitler as he did in the initial stages of the war and the president wanted at all costs to prevent such an alliance. He kept on repeating to me: ‘Let us win the war with Germany first.’ The president let it be understood that once Hitler was defeated, he would know how to handle Stalin.³

Roosevelt was not given the chance, however. He died early in 1945, before Hitler was defeated. Stalin and FDR’s successor, Harry Truman, were to escalate the conflicts between the United Nations and Russia and began a cold war.

The Grand Alliance of Great Britain, the United States and the U.S.S.R. in World War II at first seems to be a story of heroics. In 1940, it was very unlikely that Great Britain would ever emerge victorious from the battlefields of World War II. The German armies had overrun Poland, the Low Countries, France and many other countries in lightning speed, taking away many allies of the old British Empire. The invasion of the British Islands itself was at hand. The United States, on their part, did not want to participate in the war, while Soviet Russia made a non-aggression pact with Hitler. Great Britain in 1940, in other words, stood alone. In 1945, however, British troops marched to Berlin, alongside their American allies. Eventually, the Soviet Red Army captured the German capital. In five years time, formal relations between Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union had changed completely. The world had seen the rise of a highly successful, yet unlikely, military alliance. Many, however, tend to argue differently from this story of success. Both present-day historians and eyewitnesses account for the difficulties between the Big Three. A British interpreter at the Tehran Conference, for example, mentions that Stalin’s barbarous ideas were in contrast with the humanity of the American President and the British Prime Minister. ‘The establishment of justice and human rights’ was on the top of these two men’s agendas. None of this was to be found with Joseph Stalin, according to the interpreter.⁴

³ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, 61-62.

⁴ A.H. Birse, *Memoirs of an Interpreter* (London 1967) 156.

When I set out researching, I was very intrigued with this subject. The difficulties between Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin, that is what I originally wanted to research. Their diplomatic struggle may be hard to understand, yet they make a compelling story. As I made my way in much archival material, diplomatic correspondence, internal memoranda and the like, I began to realize, though, that this story has been told many times before. One can question therefore, from what new point of view this research will look at the relationship between the Big Three. While visiting The Hague, however, I found something of interest. On April 12th, 1943, the Germans announced on the national radio that mass graves were found in the forest of Katyn, near Smolensk in Western Russia. These graves were said to contain over 10,000 bodies of Polish officers, who had been brutally executed with a gunshot in the back of their heads. The Germans claimed those officers had surrendered themselves to the Red Army after the German-Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939 and were taken to Soviet labor camps as prisoners of war. In short, this was to be evident proof that the Soviet Union had committed a most terrible war crime. I was not so much intrigued with the crime itself or the immediate discussion afterwards whether it was just German propaganda or the Soviets were indeed responsible.⁵ It was the opinion of modern day historians on British and American diplomacy which mainly caught my eyes. Indeed, I found out that many years after the discovery of Katyn, it still remains one of the most important and sensitive topics in Polish historiography. In 2007, for example, Polish director Andrzej Wajda made a most chilling and impressive movie, *Katyn*, on this subject. Of course, early in 2010, a Tupolev Tu-154M containing the Polish government, heading for Russia to commemorate the victims of Katyn, crashed. The Soviet atrocity was and still is a major issue in Poland and one could read this in the historiography.

In dealing with World War diplomacy, one inevitably has to build on work done by former historians. The historiography used in this essay can be divided in two global ways. To start, there is a vast majority of literature which argues that Stalin's demands were astounding and impossible to fulfill at the time. The memoirs and biographies from wartime politicians such as Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Alexander Cadogan, Cordell Hull, Sumner Welles and many others are the most important source of material for this school of historians. They cite,

⁵ Which the Soviets were, as they themselves finally admitted in the early 1990s with the opening the Soviet archives. From 1943 onward, however, the Soviet Union denied every connection with the Katyn massacres and blamed the Germans for their false accusations.

for example, how Stalin asked 25 to 30 divisions of British troops to be sent in defense of the Soviet Union. Not only would this mean that Great Britain would dispatch its entire army, the massive operation of transport would have to happen through the Iranian railroad. This proved impossible, notably because the railroad was not even finished at the time. Stalin also claimed that Great Britain could easily launch an amphibious assault on France since almost no German troops could be found there, as they were all engaged in battle in the Soviet Union.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, appeared another historiographical view. *Glasnost* and the opening of Soviet archives proved to these academicians that Western historiography could not be further away from the truth. Gorodetsky, for example, explicitly argues that the traditional Western view of Stalin placing ‘aggressive and senseless demands’ was ‘simply an attempt to project the political reality in Europe after the war back onto the entirely different conditions that prevailed at its outset.’⁶ As the Cold War came to an end, and its rhetoric ceased to influence historiography, the way was eventually paved for a more critical view of Allied diplomatic relations. Not only Stalin’s actions were now being researched. Instead, how British and American politicians dealt with their Soviet allies became a subject of its own. Ostrovsky, for example, argues how reluctant the American government was to support the Polish community. Roosevelt, in his opinion, did everything he could to avoid British-Soviet problems and to put aside the ‘Polish Question’ itself. Due to the terrifying power the Polish-American community could pose to the President, especially during elections, Roosevelt was most reluctant to lend his support to either the Poles or the Russians.⁷ Filitov argues that Western historians have overlooked important parts in their own diplomatic history. He points to institutions, such as American State Department, the English Foreign Office or the Chiefs of Staff, and how much people within these institutions can debate diplomatic questions. Indeed, ‘by identifying specific attitudes and approaches with certain official bodies, Western studies have overlooked the undercurrents within each institution as well as its changing influence over time.’⁸

⁶ Gabriel Gorodetsky, ‘The Origins of the Cold War: Stalin, Churchill and the Formation of the Grand Alliance’ in: *Russian Review* 47, 2 (1988) 148.

⁷ Aaron Seth Ostrovsky, *Peace Planning for Poland and the United States during WWII* (2009) 48, 55.

⁸ Aleksei Filitov, ‘The Soviet Union and the Grand Alliance: The Internal Dimension of Foreign Policy’ in: Gorodetsky, Gabriel, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1991. A Restrospective* (London 1994) 97. Esbenshade argues that Eastern European historiography has been heavily influenced by, what he calls, national narrative. When

To these historians, Sir Stafford Cripps was one of the most important examples of a long unknown undercurrent within the British government. Cripps, the British ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1940 to 1942, was originally sent by Churchill for his renowned Marxism. Churchill in this way hoped that Cripps could gain access to the Soviet top more easily and ease British-Soviet relations. Cripps, however, did more than that: he sided with the Soviet Union and its demands. The ambassador understood early on how important it was to establish full military co-operation between Churchill and Stalin. To do this, Cripps knew he had to recognize the Soviet annexations in the Baltic. So, he tried to argue his case to Churchill and Eden, saying that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a defensive measure 'indispensable for the security of the Soviet Union as a result of the failure to provide proper diplomatic guarantees in the 1930's.'⁹ Cripps' arguments, however, were never heard. In a telegram to the Foreign Office on November 15th, 1941, therefore, he claimed that 'it appears that we are treating the Soviet Government without trust and as inferiors rather than as trusted allies.' Churchill was furious when he read the telegram. The Atlantic Charter and American requests not to enter talks with the Soviet Union on frontiers or the post-war world made discussion impossible and Churchill discarded the comments of his ambassador.¹⁰

Not only were the British and American governments internally divided, some historians, such as Harrison, argue that the British Foreign Office was 'willing to sacrifice the territorial rights of a junior ally'. In his opinion, already in October, 1939, the British Foreign Secretary had no problems with the Soviet invasion in Poland. Had the Russians not advanced to a boundary that was proposed by a Briton only 20 years before?¹¹ Some historians of Polish history tend to share in this view. In their opinion, the Western democracies are to blame for the atrocities and tragedy that occurred in Poland both during and after the war. Not only did they not prevent it, they actually *allowed* it to happen. As shall be seen in the following

one looks in Polish affairs, it is recommendable to have read his article: Richard S. Esbenshade, 'Remembering to Forget: Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe' in: *Representations* 49, special issue: Identifying Histories. Eastern Europe Before and After 1989 (1995) pp. 72-96.

⁹ Gorodetsky, 'Origins', 155.

¹⁰ H. Hanak, 'Sir Stafford Cripps as Ambassador in Moscow, June 1941-January 1942' in: *The English Historical Review* 97, 383 (1982) 338.

¹¹ E.D.R Harrison, 'The British Special Operations Executive and Poland' in: *The Historical Journal* 43, 4 (2000) 1076.

chapter, a diplomatic crisis such as Katyn is nowadays argued to be a ‘triumph of Allied self-interest and realist statecraft over abstract truth.’¹² In the opinion of these historians, that was the risk of waging such a massive war. ‘If smaller Allies would suffer, that was to be the price of waging a global struggle.’¹³

This historiographical interest in the Anglo-Americans from the late 1980s onwards, then, can be divided in three further ways or, as I call them here, schools. First, there is a *school of innocence*. These historians argue that people such as Churchill, Eden and Roosevelt had the best of intentions, but were simply outwitted. They tried whatever they could, yet, in the end Stalin was much more powerful. Raack, for example, argues that the leaders of the West could not have known of secret territorial agreements between Stalin and his pseudo-Polish government in Moscow. Britain and the United States could also hardly have known the full extent of how thousands of Poles were sent to camps or were moved to countries such as Kazakhstan.¹⁴ This first school is closely related to the view before the 1970s and continues to use its main arguments. To these historians, it is clear that Stalin still played a central role. He undermined the war time alliance and eventually played an important part in starting the Cold War. Even after investigating Roosevelt and Churchill’s dealings with the Soviet Union, one could not conclude anything other than that.

Lukas and Mayers are but two examples of the *school of blame*. This school rediscovered critical comments of, sometimes within, the Anglo-American governments during World War II and used them in their arguments. According to these historians, Great Britain and the United States were not outwitted by Stalin. Instead, they were fully aware of what the Soviet leader wanted, namely conquering Poland, and did not do enough to prevent that. Churchill and Roosevelt tried to keep Stalin on board at any cost, while chasing their own political agendas. In the opinion of these historians, Poland was a victim of that. Mayers, for example, tries to show how the Allied war effort was designed to please the Soviets. Through Lend Lease, convoys and a strong insistence on Germany’s unconditional surrender, Stalin was to

¹² George Sanford, ‘The Katyn Massacre and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1941-1943’ in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, 1 (2006) 157.

¹³ Jonathan Fenby, *Alliance. The Inside Story of How Roosevelt, Stalin & Churchill Won One War & Began Another* (London 2006) 185.

¹⁴ R.C. Raack, ‘Stalin Fixes the Oder-Neisse Line’ in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, 4 (1990) 476-480.

be kept away from any idea of making a separate treaty with Hitler once again. Poland's future was of no concern to them. Polish grievances were 'not considered in Linden or Washington to be worth jeopardizing the Anglo-US war time alliance with Russia.'¹⁵ Lukas argues how Admiral Standley, the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow until 1943, was starting to wonder that the Kremlin was using 'Katyn' as a way to press American and British agreement on Russian territorial claims in Poland. While being aware of this development, Roosevelt himself had given the Polish Ambassador in Washington his views on the matter. He simply told the diplomat that when Stalin would indeed press for a rectification of Poland's eastern frontier, the United States could not go to war with him over it.¹⁶

Some historians recently tried to fuse this second *school of blame* with the historiography before the 1970s. They carefully argue Stalin's intentions on the one hand. On the other hand, however, in showing the Soviet leader's plans these academicians try to argue how badly Roosevelt and Churchill responded to the Soviet menace. I will name three examples of this special category of historians within the *school of blame*. Firstly, Cienciala argues that Stalin was searching deliberately for a diplomatic break with the London Poles. The Soviets had already made contact with Polish communists as early as February 1942. They also stated officially in January, 1943, that Poles residing east of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Line were considered Soviet citizens. And between August and September, 1942, Stalin had used the Polish army division within the Soviet Union as diplomatic leverage. By refusing to supply it, the Soviet leader hoped to put pressure on Sikorski and his government in London in an attempt to settle the question of the Polish borders. The British managed to avert this crisis and urged for the reposition of the Polish army to Iran. With Polish officers to remain in charge of its army divisions in Iran, Britain and the Soviet Union were now to share its supply and armament. Yet, the Anglo-Americans were not seeing the danger that developing and how confident Stalin was becoming.¹⁷ Secondly, both Sanford and Paul claim that the Nazi

¹⁵ David Mayers, 'Soviet War Aims and the Grand Alliance: George Kennan's Views, 1944-1946' in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, 1 (1986) 59.

¹⁶ Louis Robert Coatney, *The Katyn Massacre: An Assessment of its Significance as a Public and Historical Issue in the United States and Great Britain, 1940-1993* (1993) 10; Richard C. Lukas, *The Strange Allies. The United States and Poland, 1941-1945* (Knoxville 1978) 42.

¹⁷ Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva, Wojciech Materski, ed., *Katyn. A Crime Without Punishment* (London 2007) 210, 425; R.C. Raack, 'Stalin's Plans for World War II' in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, 2 (1991) 213-215.

announcement of Katyn, a topic discussed in the next chapter, was conveniently timed for both Germany and Russia. The announcement of what happened there gave Goebbels the opportunity to split the United Nations in a crucial period of the war. The Red Army had found its strength again after many defeats and was now counter-attacking German panzers in Russia. Also, in April, 1943, the Germans were aiming to divert international attention away from their planned liquidation of the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw. The Polish government-in-exile wanted to be sure whether Germany's accusations were right or wrong. As the Poles said in a message to the Russians: 'only irrefutable facts can outweigh the numerous and detailed German statements concerning the discovery of the bodies.'¹⁸ Stalin seemed all but willing to conceal Katyn and use the German announcement to get his way. On April, 21st, 1943, five days before Stalin would formally end his allegiance to the Polish government-in-exile, he sent Churchill and Roosevelt the following message:

The fact that the anti-Soviet campaign had been started simultaneously in the German and Polish press and follows identical lines is indubitable evidence of contact and collusion between Hitler – the Allies' enemy – and the Sikorski Government in this hostile campaign. At a time when the peoples of the Soviet Union are shedding their blood in a grim struggle against Hitler's Germany and bending their energies to defeat the common foe of the freedom-loving democratic countries, the Sikorski government is striking a treacherous blow at the Soviet Union to help Hitler's tyranny. These circumstances compel the Soviet government to consider that the present Polish government, having descended to collusion with the Hitler government has, in practice, severed its relations of alliance with the U.S.S.R. and adopted a hostile attitude to the Soviet Union. For these reasons the Soviet Government has decided to interrupt relations with that Government.¹⁹

In Paul's eyes, German propaganda and cunning had given Stalin the accusation he needed to break diplomatic relations with the Poles. He argues that the discovery of the Polish mass grave was not a surprise to some high-ranking Poles in the government and the army and because of this knowledge had been lured into a diplomatic trap. The Poles knew that the Russians had deported many of their compatriots as prisoners of war to camps within the Soviet Union and the Russians knew the Poles knew. General Anders, the leader of the Polish

¹⁸ Sanford, *Katyn*, 108-109.

¹⁹ Allen Paul, *Katyn. Stalin's Massacre and the Triumph of Truth* (DeKalb 2010) 221.

Army in Iran, had himself been a prisoner in Lubyanka, a camp near Moscow. Reactions from the London Poles to the Katyn news were enough for the Soviets to break relations quickly. To name an example, General Anders made a speech two days after the Katyn announcement to his soldiers. It contained a powerful that the Soviets were all but willing to hear:

In spite of tremendous efforts on our side we have received absolutely no news of any of them. We have long held the deep conviction that none of them are alive but that they were deliberately murdered. I consider it necessary for the government to intervene in this affair with the object of obtaining official explanations from the Soviets, especially as our soldiers are convinced that the rest of our people in the U.S.S.R. will also be exterminated.²⁰

Cienciala, Sanford and Paul are certain. Roosevelt and Churchill were blind to what happened and when the truth came out, they did nothing about it. In April, 1943, Stalin effectively controlled Polish refugees in the Soviet Union; he was responsible for the supply of the Polish military forces in Iran as he had formed a puppet. The London Poles, in their eyes, were powerless, while Great Britain and the United States were both speechless and unwilling to act. Sanford notes how willing the British and Americans were to cast the actual truth, Russia's involvement in the killings, aside. The Americans, in his opinion, were more pragmatic and flexible in handling the difficulties of Katyn than the British with Roosevelt suppressing and excluding inconvenient evidence of Soviet guilt.²¹

Thirdly and finally, there is a small historical view that tends to look in depth to how the British and American governments came to their diplomatic actions. In this *school of reconstruction*, it is thought to be important how politicians and diplomats approached these difficult topics as Katyn and the 'Polish Question'. In Folly's opinion, 'exploration must be conducted to see what was actually assumed (...), on what evidence and under whose influence.'²² No longer should historians think in black and white, and assume that the Soviets made far too powerful demands or that the British and Americans saw the war effort as the most important goal of them all. Diplomacy posed moral questions on the participants and they had to choose, sometimes against their will, between the lesser of two evils. Folly

²⁰ Paul, *Katyn*, 219.

²¹ Sanford, *Katyn*, 158.

²² Martin H. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union, 1940-45* (London 2000) 3-4.

himself studied the opinion of the British Foreign Office in this matter, yet I personally believe that such an approach could be feasible in a debate which is clearly influenced by later moral opinion. In short, historians need to try to take distance from their own opinion and present the facts. This is however easier said than done, given the moral issues Anglo-Americans found themselves in.

I found it striking that mainly Polish authors and a few Britons claimed Poland was left to its fate by those it regarded as its protectors. The United States and Great Britain, in their opinion, did not do anything to save the Polish nation against the dangers of Stalin and his communist Red Army. Evidence for this opinion, they claim, could be found anywhere. Diaries from important statesmen, for example, literally said why Poland was not to be rescued. Everything seemed to point to the betrayal of Poland. The very country for which Great Britain went to war in 1939, in the opinion of these authors, was also the country that was divided at the Yalta Conference of 1945.

In this Master-Thesis for the University of Leiden, it would be far too great a challenge to face these historians head on and rewrite over 60 years of historiography on Anglo-American diplomatic handling of Polish affairs in World War II. However, in my opinion, it would be wise to reconstruct the story of diplomacy in this important period of time. Diplomacy, as said recently by a Hungarian student, is more difficult than it seems. In his words, 'diplomacy is to say bad things in the nicest way.' To honor this insight, and to give it more weight, I chose to use the metaphor of diplomacy being a chess-game with Britain and the United States on one side of the board and Russia sitting on the other. Both sides know their goal, winning the chess-game and diplomatically achieve what they wanted, but what really mattered where the moves before check-mate could be reached. In that Chicago meeting, Roosevelt seemed to think he still had a chance to beat Stalin, that he was only checked. It would be interesting, in my opinion, to take a look at those moves which could possibly lead to a check-mate and remove a veil of morality, of color, in the historiography that is haunting this topic for so long.

In this Thesis I ask myself the following question: *'How do historians look at British and American handling of the 'Polish Question' in World War II, from the moment 'Katyn' led to a break between the Soviet Union and the Polish government-in-exile in April 1943 tot the end of the Warsaw Uprising in September 1944, and in what ways did the United States and*

Great Britain want to solve this problem in accordance with the wishes of the Polish government-in-exile? Of course, this is a vast question and answering the question in definite would require a lot more space and argument than I can possibly provide here. Yet, by choosing for the ‘chess game’ metaphor, reconstructing Anglo-American diplomacy and discussing the historiography on this topic, I hope to add a more moderate view to the debate of the Allied intervention in Polish affairs during World War II.

Chapter 1: Introducing the game board and the players...

From the recording of these few facts one may conclude that the restoration of a strong, sovereign and independent Poland will not only be an act of historical justice but one of peculiar character and weight; corresponding to the peculiar part that Poland has had to play in the war and to her large moral and material contribution to the struggle – including the blood of her sons. In consequence of all this, the nation should belong to the victorious peoples when it is over, not to the vanquished; and with all the consequences pertaining to victory.

Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the Polish Prime Minister from July 1943 to September 1944, in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, issue 23, 1945.²³

We may, it seems to me, be faced with a reversal in European history. To protect itself from the influences of Bolshevism, Western Europe in 1918 attempted to set up a cordon sanitaire. The Kremlin, in order to protect itself from the influences of the West, might now envisage the formation of a belt of pro-Soviet states.

William Harrison Standley, United States ambassador to the Soviet Union from 14 April 1942 to 19 September 1943, in a cable to the State Department, 1943.²⁴

In the very year World War II was about to end, Polish Prime Minister Stanislaw Mikolajczyk made an appeal to the readers of the international academic magazine *The Slavonic and East European Review*.²⁵ In it, he emphasized, for instance, the heroics displayed by the Polish citizens during the war and how important Poland really was within the United Nations. Mikolajczyk's message was clearly written out of fear. It is one of many examples of Polish historiography on World War II which, in Padraic Kenney's words 'has been smacked by a

²³ Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, 'Poland in the New Europe' in: *The Slavonic and East European Review* 23, 62 (1945) 41.

²⁴ Allen Paul, *Katyn. Stalin's Massacre and the Triumph of Truth* (DeKalb 2010) 228.

²⁵ The article was published in 1945, yet it states very clearly that Mikolajczyk wrote his piece while he was still Prime Minister. This means it was already written right before September 1944.

sense of grievance.’²⁶ In 1944, the future of the Prime Minister’s nation was uncertain. Indeed, he did not have any idea at all what Poland or even the whole of Europe was going to look like after the war.²⁷ Instead of being a seemingly romantic description of Polish heroics this article was a desperate plea for survival. Poland, in his opinion, does have a rightful place in the new world order after 1945. During World War II, the Eastern European country had come to the brink of its destruction once again.

This first chapter will give a historical background to the events concerning Poland right before April 1943. I believe this is necessary for a number of reasons. First, the ‘Polish Question’ has shaped Polish history in many ways and therefore such a vast subject requires a sufficient explanation. Second, I believe it is very important to give the Poles, represented here by its own government-in-exile, a voice of their own in this story. How did they respond to the events in World War II? What was their reaction to the ‘Big Three’ (Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin) when they tried to come to an understanding about the future of the disputed state? Shortly describing Polish opinions and actions will lend, in my opinion, historical justice to those whose future was being decided by powers which they could hardly control. A brief introduction to the Poles shall be given. Third, and most importantly in this essay, I will introduce Britain and the United States. How did they respond to the Poles and Russians, before April, 1943? Fourth, and final, I would like to take a look on the historiography on these subjects and how it changed over time.

In short, this chapter about the ‘Polish Question’ will have a more global, perhaps even introductory character than the ones to follow. Yet, the Question itself should not be thought lightly. For it was Lord Hastings Ismay, Churchill’s chief military adviser and first Secretary General of NATO, who claimed after the war: ‘nobody can deny that the failure to secure freedom and independence for Poland has brought shame on the Western Democracies.’²⁸ A good introduction in this topic, in my opinion, is invaluable to understanding the difficult questions to which the Allies were posed after April, 1943.

²⁶ Padraic Kenney, ‘After the Blank Spots Are Filled: Recent Perspectives on Modern Poland’ in: *The Journal of Modern History* 79, 1 (2007) 134.

²⁷ Mikolajczyk, ‘Poland’, 41.

²⁸ Michael Alfred Peszke, ‘An Introduction to English-Language Literature on the Polish Armed Forces in World War II’ in: *The Journal of Military History* 70, 4 (2006) 1030.

1.1. Setting up the chess board: the ‘Polish Question’ and its history to 1943.

Before the outbreak of World War II, the ‘Polish Question’ had already raised difficulties for the Polish nation many times before. Indeed, well before Napoleon Bonaparte set out on his quest to conquer Europe Polish national borders were disputed. Prussia, Austria-Hungary and tsarist Russia all claimed parts of Polish territory. For hundreds of years, Poland was a major topic in political agendas. Its borders continuously shifted and, at some in points in history, the state even ceased to exist. World War I, however, was to give the Poles the opportunity to raise their old country from the grave once again. Poland formally did not exist any more after 1886. The President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, was to change this. He was aware of the need to redesign Europe after the war had ended. Nations had to be remade and borders were to shift in such a way that a future war could be prevented. More importantly, Wilson thought it important that no war again should be fought for disputed land. In his opinion, then, every ethnicity should have a single undisputed state. Put simply, Germany was to be exclusively for Germans, while Czechs were to be given a Czech state and Poles were supposed to live in Poland. Indeed, Poland was a special case for Woodrow Wilson. When he crafted his famous Fourteen Points, the thirteenth point was exclusively designed for recreating that old Eastern European country. The point called for ‘an independent Polish State, which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations.’²⁹ Of course, this raised Polish expectations for the resurrection of their state, which had lost its independency 123 years before.

Eventually, Polish frontiers were established in June 1919, at the Peace Conference of Versailles, and the Republic of Poland was created. However, this international decision immediately raised old issues with Poland’s eastern neighbor: the two year old Soviet Union. In 1919, the Treaty of Versailles claimed that Poland was to receive all of the territory it had possessed before it was partitioned for the first time in 1773. However, due to resettlement and colonization, the Polish nation did not mainly consist of Poles anymore. A German minority could now be found on the western frontier, especially in the area around the former

²⁹ Ostrovsky, *Peace Planning*, 38.

German port of Danzig. Alongside the eastern frontier now lived Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Belorussians. Lenin demanded that these Slav peoples were of old a part of tsarist Russia and, therefore, a part of nowadays communist Russia. The 'Polish Question', then, did not just only consist of the drawing of Poland's borders. It also questioned whether millions of people belonged to one state or the other. As it turned out, Wilson's original intent of creating a Polish state exclusively for Polish ethnicities was very difficult to realize after the end of World War I.³⁰

To solve these problems, the Allied Supreme Council proposed a new demarcation line on the eastern border of the new Polish Republic. This was to be the so-called Curzon Line of December 8th, 1919, named after its creator, British Foreign Secretary Lord George Curzon. The new demarcation line was to divide the areas on the Polish eastern frontier between its Polish and non-Polish civilians. In short, the Curzon Line was to separate the Polish Republic and the Soviet Union in such a way that it would please both nations and affirmed which people belonged to what state. On the one hand, the Curzon Line handed Poland the area of Bialystok and the cities of Lwów and Vilna, given the fact they were housing many Poles. According to Harrison, the cities of Lwów and Vilna were not just ordinary cities, they were very important to the Polish cause. In his opinion, the Poles believed Lwów and Vilna to be 'symbols of Poland's ancient tradition as the leader of Eastern Europe.' Indeed, 'without them, their country was just another small European state.'³¹ On the other hand, the Curzon Line handed the Soviet Union territories in Belorussia and the Ukraine. In 1919, then, areas with a Polish majority were acceded to Poland. The Soviet Union received areas with a Slavic majority.

The new demarcation line, however, seemed to increase the problems, instead of solving them. The people from the Ukraine, according to the Curzon Line now becoming Soviet citizens, were bitterly divided on whether they wanted to become a part of the Bolshevik nation. One part of the Ukrainians sided with the Soviets, while another part opted for Poland as their new nation. Poland's Chief of State, Josef Pilsudski, was not pleased either. He thought Poland was weak on the eastern frontier and feared his new nation was eventually to

³⁰ Tony Sharp, 'The Origins of the Teheran Formula on Polish Frontiers' in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, 2 (1977) 382.

³¹ Harrison, 'Special Operations', 1076.

be overrun by German armies on the west and Soviet armies on the east. Opting for a more easily defensible eastern frontier and sensing the time right for an invasion on the Soviet Union, Pilsudski moved his Polish armies into Belarus and the Ukraine. From 1920 to 1921, Poland and the Soviet Union were to fight each other over the question of Polish borders.³² This sudden war surprised the Soviet Union at first. Yet, Lenin's forces countered the Polish invasion. They marched to the Polish capital of Warsaw and were very close to conquering it. This failed however. Within one year after the war began, Polish forces yet again invaded the Soviet Union. On March 18th, 1921, the Polish-Soviet War ended with the Treaty of Riga and Pilsudski's efforts to gain Belarus and the Ukraine, in his opinion forming an important part within the old borders of the first Polish kingdom in medieval times, partly had an effect. The *Traktat Ryski* divided Belarus and Ukraine in half and effectively moved the Curzon line hundreds of miles to the east.³³ According to historian George Sanford, the Polish-Soviet war had important consequences for the relations between the two countries. Poland was now known to the Soviets as *paskaia Pol'ska*, a gentry-ruled state. It was also responsible for a humiliating defeat at the gates of Warsaw. The Red Army had failed the motherland, leaving its commanders embittered. One of these commanders, Josef Stalin, was to carry those experiences with him for the rest of life and supposedly turned it into a hatred for Poland. Indeed, whenever the opportunity for revenge arose, so Sanford argues, the Soviet war machine was to strike hard on its Polish enemy.³⁴

The Soviet Union was not the only nation which had many claims against the new Polish Republic after 1919. Germany, especially Hitler when he rose to power in the 1930s, also wanted to see their old lands returned. To achieve such a purpose, the Germans made a diplomatic move that surprised the whole world. On August 23rd, 1939, the Foreign Secretaries of both Germany and the Soviet Union signed a pact of neutrality, the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. If a future war should break out, this document made sure that Hitler and Stalin, who were known for not being very good friends, would not attack each other and stay out of each others' affairs. As many did not know at the time, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact also contained several secret agreements which were to shape the events that

³² Paul, *Katyn*, 284.

³³ Ostrovsky, *Peace Planning*, 32.

³⁴ George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940. Truth, justice and memory* (New York 2005) 7, 8.

were about to happen in Poland. On September 1st, 1939, World War II began with the German invasion of Poland along its western borders. Two weeks later, on September 17th, the Red Army surprised the world with an invasion along Poland's eastern frontier. As it turned out, the Neutrality Pact had divided Poland in half. Hitler's *panzers* were to take the west-side of Poland, while Stalin was given the east. Earlier Polish border disputes, together with strategic reasons, had led Hitler and Stalin to divide Poland among them. Again, a demarcation line was drawn. According to Cienciala, this new Molotov-Ribbentrop line of 1939 had a close resemblance to the 1919 Curzon line. In practice, Stalin was to receive everything the Soviet Union had lost in the Treaty in the Riga, bringing Poland's border back to the Curzon Line.³⁵

As can be seen above, Poland's borders both have a difficult history as they have been disputed many times. However, this 'Polish Question' had great consequences for the Polish citizenry. George Sanford, for example, argues that the Soviet Union was clear in its intentions. The Red Army was not to draw new borders for the Motherland, they were intent 'to destroy Polish political, social and cultural influence entirely, and to disperse the Polish population throughout the U.S.S.R., where it could be controlled effectively.'³⁶ This was also recognized during World War II itself. On May 18th, 1940, for example, the British Ambassador to Poland from 1934 to 1941, Sir Howard Kennard, sent the following note to Lord Halifax, an important member of the British Foreign Office:

The policy of deportations is once more being carried out on a large scale. The persons arrested largely belong to the intelligentsia and include the wives and families of Polish officers who are now abroad. It is further probable that many schoolboys have also been arrested. A similar fate hangs over the remaining Poles of the landowning class in the northern parts of the Soviet occupation, and it is all the more terrible as these survivors are mostly women and children, the menfolk of the family being in the main either abroad or in Russian prisons and internment camps.³⁷

In 1944, in a small article from the United States about Governments in Exile, Daniel Bell describes how the Soviets organized plebiscites in its conquered Polish territories on October

³⁵ Cienciala, *Crime*, 216-217.

³⁶ Sanford, *Katyn*, 24.

³⁷ Laurence Rees, *World War Two: Behind Closed Doors. Stalin, the Nazis and the West* (London 2008) 65.

22nd, 1939. Barely a month after the Red Army invaded them, the Poles were asked whether they were to join the Soviet Union. Bell argued that these so-called elections were ‘preceded by a reign of terror’ and ‘more than one million Poles – Gentiles and Jews – were deported to Siberia and Central Asia.’³⁸

The Soviet-German invasion of 1939 did not solve the ‘Polish Question’. Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union made former border agreements between the two nations something of the past. Indeed, the matter was several times very much alive during the rest of World War II. Even while Hitler’s *Wehrmacht* nearly reached the gates of Moscow, Soviet demands of Poland’s eastern lands still remained strong. Indeed, after the victories of Stalingrad and Kursk in early 1943, these demands seemed to grow even stronger every day. The *New York Times* of November 21st, 1943, stated the following:

There have been increasing signs lately that when Russian publicists talk about Russia they mean all the territory east of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line bisecting Poland. Soviet Ambassador Constantine Oumansky [the Soviet Ambassador to Mexico] indicated quite clearly in his speech at Mexico City recently that Russia considered her legitimate boundary with Poland to be rested on this line, which takes in a considerable portion of what was the eastern half of Poland before the outbreak of the war and included Brest Litovsk, Vilna, Grobno and Lwów.³⁹

By 1943, the Soviets had indeed regained much confidence in their claims on Poland. On January 16, 1943, the Polish Embassy at Kuibyshev, Russia, received a note which stated that the Soviet Union no longer regarded the entire population of eastern Poland as Polish citizens and that Poland’s 1920 claims of Ukraine and White Russia never were valid.⁴⁰ Indeed, in the middle of World War II the ‘Polish Question’ was all but answered.

1.2 The White player: the United States of America and Great Britain.

³⁸ Daniel Bell & Leon Dennen, ‘The System of Governments in Exile’ in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 232 (1944) 137.

³⁹ *New York Times*, November 21st, 1943.

⁴⁰ Bell, ‘Governments in Exile’, 138.

During World War II, Wladyslaw Sikorski was both Poland's Prime Minister as he was its Commander in Chief. He was responsible for the Polish underground movements during World War I and played an important part in the siege of Warsaw in 1921, when Soviet forces tried to capture the capital. In 1940, after being politically inactive for several years, the Polish president had appointed him to lead both political and military Poland through the dark days of the new war. Sikorski tried whatever he could. He devised a government from different political parties to ensure Polish unity and tirelessly tried to pursue Polish interests in world diplomacy. In the first moments of World War II, however, the 'Polish Question' was not directly the first concern of the populations of Great Britain and the United States of America. The British, on the one hand, effectively stood alone in their fight against Nazi Germany. Western Europe had fallen and Great Britain was about to be attacked. Not only did the Polish government take refuge in London, many other governments from the European mainland also travelled there. Each government, of course, carried its own request for the British. With so much happening at the same time, Polish demands and questions concerning their borders could easily end up low on Britain's list of priorities. The United States, on the other hand, did not yet participate in the war. Indeed, its population, with Roosevelt as one of the few exceptions, did everything it could to avoid U.S. troops interfering in European affairs.

This, however, does not imply that the British and American were neutral spectators of what was happening in Poland. On September 18th, 1939, an editorial in *The Times* clearly portrayed British views.

Only these can be disappointed who clung to the ingenious belief that Russia was to be distinguished from her Nazi neighbor, despite the identity of their institutions and political idioms, by the principles and purposes behind her foreign policy.⁴¹

The editorial, published one day after the Soviet invasion of Poland, argued that Stalin and his Red Army had finally showed their true colors. A lust for power and the destruction of Poland and, eventually, the free world was what drove both Nazis and communists. This clear cut opinion should not come as a surprise. Only just before, on August, 25th, 1939, the Anglo-Polish Treaty was signed in which the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, gave his unquestionable support to the Poles. Should any of the two nations be economically

⁴¹ *The Times*, September 18th, 1939.

penetrated or to be harmed in any other way, one would come to the rescue of the other.⁴² Britain, then, was allied to Poland. According to Gorodetsky, these British unilateral guarantees to Poland were diplomatically even more important than the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact or the Munich Agreement between Chamberlain and Hitler. Chamberlain was unaware, as Gorodetsky argues, how difficult it was to come to Poland's rescue. This made the Soviet Union a powerful player in European diplomacy. If Britain was able to secure Soviet help for Poland, Germany could be deterred from eastern expansion. Should the Germans secure Soviet neutrality in this Polish matter, the German *Drang nach Osten* had nothing to fear.⁴³ Despite all this, Britain held his promise to the Poles when Germany launched his invasion and declared war on the Nazis. Indeed, it still aided the Poles after the fall of France. In June 1940, when Sikorski asked Churchill whether his government was allowed to come to London, Churchill said to the Polish Prime Minister that 'England would keep faith with the Poles.'⁴⁴ The government was allowed to come and the Britons also stationed and supplied a Polish Division in Scotland. Many years after the war, Churchill remained ever grateful for the Polish pilots who defended British airspace in the Battle of Britain.⁴⁵

The United States did not supply a Polish army or gave refuge to a Polish government, yet Poles proved to be a powerful presence across the Atlantic. A significant Polish-American community looked critically to what happened to the country of their forefathers. 4 per cent of the whole United States population was of Polish descent during World War II. Poles also comprised 8.4 per cent of the 34.5 million Americans 'who were foreign born or native born of foreign or mixed parentage.' Not only were there many Polish-Americans, they were also to be found in the most important of industrial cities. Chicago, Buffalo and New York gave home to three million Poles, while Cleveland and Detroit were other important urban centers where Poles had a powerful position. Poles and their fellow Slavs composed a majority of the

⁴² Ostrovsky, *Peace Planning*, 39.

⁴³ Gorodetsky, 'Origins', 150.

⁴⁴ Harrison, 'Special Operations', 1075.

⁴⁵ When German diplomat, Rudolf Hess, landed in Scotland to supposedly negotiate a peace with Britain, Stalin was aware that the Poles were stationed there. He suspected that it was no coincidence that the German landed there. Kochavi, Ariek J., 'Anglo-Soviet Differences over a Policy towards War Criminals, 1942-1943' in: *The Slavonic and East European Review* 69, 3 (1991) pp. 458-477; Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War. Volume III: The Grand Alliance* (London 1951) 452.

working force in industries such as coal mining, steel, electrical equipment, cars and rubber. In short, the United States government was to be aware of its Polish-American citizens when it was to deal with the 'Polish Question.' Indeed, the Polish-Americans enthusiastically believed that Franklin D. Roosevelt was the ideal man to solve the Question. As said by Stephen P. Mizwa, director of the Polish-American Kosciuszko Foundation, 'the Polish-Americans have a sort of religious faith in Roosevelt. So far as Roosevelt is concerned, the Atlantic Charter is the Bible to which they are willing to swear.'⁴⁶

This Atlantic Charter, issued by Churchill and Roosevelt on August, 1941, in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, was to define British and American goals of war and became the hallmark of the United Nations alliance against the Axis. The Polish-Americans deemed the Charter so important for the inclusion of three, out of seven, important principles. First, the United Nations desired 'to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned'. Second, 'they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live. They are only concerned to defend the rights of freedom of speech and thought, without which such choice must be illusory.' Third, 'they seek a peace which will not only cast down for ever the Nazi tyranny, but by effective international organizations will afford to all States and peoples the means of dwelling in security within their own bounds and of traversing the seas and oceans without fear of lawless assault or the need of maintaining burdensome armaments.'⁴⁷ In short, to many it seemed as if Britain and the United States declared that they were going to solve the questions of frontiers and ethnicities, those very reasons why World War II began. Only when the Axis was finally defeated and the war was over, every ethnic group in Europe, so many believed, was to receive its own country. Anthony Eden learns of this view of postponing frontier questions on July, 21st, 1941, when an American delegation from Roosevelt visits him:

They told me that Roosevelt was most eager that we should not commit ourselves to any definite frontiers for any country before the peace treaty. H. [Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's most trusted advisor] said that U.S. would come into the war and did not

⁴⁶ Bell, 'Governments in Exile', 136; Ostrovsky, *Peace Planning*, 49, 58.

⁴⁷ Churchill, *Grand Alliance*, 385-387.

want to find after the event that we had all kinds of engagements of which they had never been told.⁴⁸

According to Eden, Churchill was not even interested in post-war problems at all. While this was understandable, Eden thought this view was most dangerous and hard to hold given the fact that the Americans wanted to do just that.⁴⁹ Cordell Hull, on the other hand, was clear in his opinion how to handle war time questions. In his opinion, Woodrow Wilson had to deal with various secret accords between the Allied governments during World War I. When the Peace Conference of Versailles began, Wilson had to deal with each and every one of them, while facing the interests of each Allied power at the same time. Indeed, so Hull claims in his memoirs, a written, common agreement on Allied war aims never even existed. Such terrible mistakes were not to be made in 1941. 'This time', so Hull says, 'I felt that the Allies should all be committed in advance to certain principles, leaving details of boundary adjustments and the like to be settled later. If the principles were strongly enough proclaimed and adhered to, the details would find readier solution when the time came to solve them.'⁵⁰

Four months after the publication of the Atlantic Charter the Japanese were to attack Pearl Harbor and Germany declared war on the United States shortly after that. Yet, one month before the Charter, something had happened that made Churchill very jubilant. On June 23rd, 1941, both he and Eden were staying at Chequers, the Prime Ministers' estate in Oxford, when Eden was awoken by a servant. The Prime Minister had sent his Foreign Secretary a cigar on a silver plate to celebrate the fact that Nazi Germany had invaded the Soviet Union. The British government warned Stalin several times of a possible German attack and now it had finally happened. In June, 1941, Britain was given the possibility to join forces with a potentially powerful, yet a most unlikely, ally in its fight against Hitler. That same night, Churchill addressed the English people of these developments. The man who was known for anti-communism and who, back in 1920, wanted to see the Soviet Union destroyed, emphasized that evening that 'this is no class war, but a war in which in the whole British

⁴⁸ Anthony Eden, *The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning* (London 1965) 272-273.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem* 282.

⁵⁰ Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, in two volumes. Volume II* (New York 1948) 1116.

Empire and Commonwealth of Nations is engaged, without distinction of race, creed or party (...).’ While Eden argued that the Soviet Union was as immoral as Nazi Germany and an ally which would not be trusted by the British people, Churchill argued differently. ‘Communism’, in his words, ‘was irrelevant.’ Kitchen argues that Churchill still detested communism at this time. Yet, the British Prime Minister clearly understood that every help to destroy Nazism was needed. If Germany was to invade the Hell called the Soviet Union, Churchill was prepared to promptly sign a pact with its Devil.⁵¹

To achieve this goal, however, would prove difficult from the outset. Stalin almost immediately makes his wishes known to the British and American governments. The Soviet Marshall either wants the British and Americans to reinforce his Red Army in Russia or to launch a second front. The United Nations, in Stalin’s opinion, must lead a diversion on the western side of Germany so Hitler’s forces are to be dispersed from Russian soil. Most importantly, he also wants assurance from both Churchill and Roosevelt in the matter of Russian post-war frontiers. Stalin wanted to be sure that the United Nations accepted the agreements of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Soviet authority over Eastern Europe, in short, was to be assured. Yet, the United States and Great Britain were not in the position to give their unconditional support for two reasons. First, as said above, the Atlantic Charter was originally designed to prevent any such agreements during wartime. Did not both Churchill and Roosevelt sign a document which claimed they respected the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live? How were the Anglo-American politicians going to deal with territorial changes in Poland when the Poles did not want them? And even if Stalin’s demands are met, does this effectively mean that the Atlantic Charter was not so much a blueprint for a country’s self-determination but a way of internationally controlling individual nations? The Allied commitment to certain principles in the Atlantic Charter can be found logical at first when one has WWI in the back of his head. Eventually, though, it was to become the biggest problem in the dilemma of choosing sides with Poland or Soviet Russia. Second, both Britain and the United States originally hoped to resolve important questions, such as frontiers, only when the war was over. Immediate Soviet

⁵¹ Martin Kitchen, ‘Winston Churchill and the Soviet Union during the Second World War’ in: *The Historical Journal* 30, 2 (1987) 415, 418.

demands, however, forced Western politicians to reconsider those thoughts and to question themselves whether or not they were both willing and able to solve something difficult as the 'Polish Question.'

Much has been said and written about Britain and America's handling of the Katyn affair and the following crisis regarding the 'Polish Question'. What is striking is that the current historiography seems to be colored. The *school of blame*, as I call it, is dominant and needs not so much actual revising. In my opinion, it is good to be remembered of the great consequences and personal tragedies that befell the Poles both during and after World War II. Yet, were American and English politicians as guilty as many had charged for so long? Or was there more to their decisions? To achieve a compromise between the three schools, to use the research from the schools of *innocence* and *blame* in a way to suit the more objective school of *reconstruction* will be the goal of the rest of this chapter and the one to follow.

Chapter 2: The contestants make their first moves, April - October 1943.

*No one can foresee how the balance of power will lie or where the winning armies will stand at the end of the war. It seems probable however that the United States and the British Empire, far from being exhausted, will be the most powerfully armed and economic bloc the world has even seen and that the Soviet Union will need our aid for reconstruction far more than we shall need theirs.*⁵²

Winston Churchill in a note to Anthony Eden, January 8th, 1942.

What this brief record shows is that the position so confidently and firmly taken by the British and American governments in January, 1942, was wholly at variance with the course that they later actually pursued. This change of policy on a matter of

⁵² Churchill, Second World War, 616.

*vital significance was apparently due to no conscious decision by either of them; rather they seem to have drifted into it without any real apprehension of all its implications.*⁵³

Former U.S. Foreign Undersecretary of State, Sumner Welles, in 1951.

On April, 12th, 1943, German radio stations announced the discovery of a mass grave. It was found within the Soviet Union and consisted over 4,000 bodies of Polish officers. Nazi Germany immediately accused the Russians of killing those officers three years before, in 1940. The *Polish Daily*, a newspaper for Polish refugees in London, argued nothing was wrong. Instead, it immediately claimed that these findings within the forest of Katyn, near Smolensk were a ‘terrible accusation’ and it ‘may be yet another lie of German propaganda, aimed at impairing Polish-Soviet relations.’⁵⁴ This discovery, however, was to put the Alliance of the United Nations to the test. From April, 1943, to August, 1943, government officials within the United States and Great Britain were beginning to ask themselves important questions. These questions were so important that they might influence the rest of the war and the upcoming decisions regarding the post war world. In this chapter, we take a look at this German discovery and how it made the ‘Polish Question’ important once again.

2.1 The game begins: the importance of ‘Katyn.’

When one searches the diaries and memoirs of such important British politicians as Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Prime Minister Winston Churchill for their views on Katyn, almost nothing can be found. Eden does not describe anything about Katyn in his post war memoirs. Instead, he describes his journeys to India. Churchill does name the German discovery in the Soviet forest either, albeit briefly. He quotes a few of his own lines, for example, to Polish Prime Minister Sikorski. In one of them, he tells his Eastern European colleague that if the Polish officers had indeed died, there was nothing they could do to bring them back. To the Russian Ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, Churchill supposedly said that ‘this was no time for quarrels and charges.’ ‘We have got to beat Hitler’, the Russian was

⁵³ Sumner Welles, *Seven Decisions That Shaped History* (New York 1951) 138.

⁵⁴ Paul, *Katyn*, 219.

told. Indeed, Churchill writes in his memoirs that it was unimportant for him to write about Katyn. Eventually, he says, details of what happened would become known and the truth would be revealed. In his words, as if being a guilty man, ‘everybody is entitled to form his own opinion.’⁵⁵ In short, Eden and Churchill did not want to write about Katyn after World War II had ended. To a certain extent, this is understandable. The German discovery of a Polish mass grave in Soviet Union territory, announced on April, 12th, 1943, was the beginning of a diplomatic fight between four members of the United Nations. Poland, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States were to consult, to influence, to overrule and even to betray one another in a struggle for achieving their own goals.

German accusations were made in a period of time when the Soviet Union seemed to be very popular in British and American public opinion. From March to April, 1943, Gallup-polls were held in England in order to find out which of the Allied countries was considered the most popular. The results were somewhat of a surprise:

Considering what each of these countries could do, which one do you think is trying hardest to win the war?

- U.S.A.: 2%
- China: 5%
- Britain: 33%
- Russia: 60%

Which country of the United Nations do you think has so far made the greatest single contribution towards winning the war?

- U.S.A.: 3%
- China: 5%
- Britain: 42%

⁵⁵ Winston S.Churchill, *The Second World War. Volume IV: The Hinge of Fate* (London 1951) 679-681.

➤ Russia: 50%⁵⁶

In 1941, Eden warned Churchill about British distrust to Stalin and his Soviet Union becoming an ally against Germany. Not only was he a communist, and therefore should he be distrusted, he had committed many crimes against his own people in the 1930's. Soviet victory in Stalingrad, the heroics displayed by the Russian people and a changing public appearance of Stalin had evidently changed this critical view two years later. Stalin was no longer the evil, eastern dictator who had collaborated with Hitler. Indeed, he had become a hallmark, a symbol of the Alliance against Germany. On January, 4th, 1943, the influential American magazine TIME pronounced Stalin 'Man of the Year' and gave the Russian a place on its cover.⁵⁷ German propagandists were aware of Russia's changing public appearance. They searched deliberately for something to accuse the Soviet Union with and to create confusion within the Alliance. On April, 17th, 1943, five days after the Germans had launched their accusations, a diary contained the following words:

The Katyn incident is developing into gigantic political affair which may have wide repercussion. We are exploiting it in every manner possible.⁵⁸

The writer of this entry was Josef Goebbels, German Minister for Propaganda. Clearly, he was a satisfied man.

The German accusations of what had happened in Katyn made the 'Polish Question', the settlement of Polish borders between mainly Poland and the Soviet Union, even more important. The Polish government-in-exile, from 1940 onward, suspected that the Russians had committed a terrible crime against some of its officers. Germany's discovery could be a confirmation of fears long held by the London Poles. On April, 17th, 1943, the Polish Minister of National Defense, Lt. General Marian Kukiel, issued a communiqué which describes how long the Poles have been searching for their missing officers:

On the 17th of September 1940 the official organ of the Red Army, the *Red Star* stated that during the fighting which took place after the 17th of September 1939, 181,000

⁵⁶ P.M.H. Bell, 'Censorship, Propaganda and Public Opinion: The Case of the Katyn Graves, 1943' in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5, 39 (1989) 70.

⁵⁷ <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19430104,00.html>

⁵⁸ Paul, *Katyn*, 220-221.

Polish prisoners of war were taken by the Soviets; the number of regular officers and those of the reserve among them amounted to about 10,000. According to information in possession of the Polish Government, three large camps of Polish prisoners were set up in the U.S.S.R. in November 1939:

1. in Kozielsk – East of Smolensk
2. in Starobielsk – near Kharkov, and
3. in Ostrashkow – near Kalinin, where police and military police were concentrated.

(...).

When after the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet Treaty of the 30th of July 1941 and the signing of the military agreement of the 14th August 1941, the Polish Government proceeded to form the Polish Army in U.S.S.R., it was to be expected that the officers from the above mentioned camps would form above all the cadres of higher and lower commanders of the rising Army. A group of Polish officers from Giazoviec arrived to join the Polish units in Buzuluk at the end of August 1941, not one officer however appeared from among those deported in another direction from Kozielsk, Starobielsk, and Osthaskov. In all therefore about 8,300 were missing, not counting another 7,000 composed of N.C.O.'s, soldiers and civilians, who were in those camps at the time of their liquidation.⁵⁹

The Polish government-in-exile knew that Polish prisoners from Kozielsk were sent to an area near Smolensk and that they were not heard of ever since. The Soviet Union never replied to questions in this matter. Now, the Poles wanted to know the truth:

We have become used to the lies of German propaganda and we understand the purpose behind its latest revelations. Faced however with abundant and detailed German information concerning the discovery near Smolensk of many thousand bodies of Polish officers, and categorical statement that they were murdered by the Soviet authority in the spring of 1940, the necessity has arisen that the mass graves which have been discovered should be investigated and the facts quoted, verified by a proper international body, such as the International Red Cross. The Polish

⁵⁹ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1943. The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, the Far East*. Volume III (Washington 1943) 376-377.

Government has therefore approached this institution with a view of sending a delegation to the place where the massacre of the Polish prisoners of war is said to have taken place.⁶⁰

Russia was furious, while Great Britain and the United States had not been consulted before the communiqué was issued. The London Poles sent their request to Geneva, only to find that they were not the only ones who had done so. Indeed, in a smart propagandist move the Germans also formally requested the International Red Cross for an inquiry in the Katyn killings. Only one hour separated the arrival of the two requests. Stalin had seen and heard enough. On April, 26th, 1943, the Soviet Union broke all diplomatic relationships with the Polish government-in-exile in London, making every agreement between the two countries non void. According to the Soviet leader, Poland and Germany were secret allies and both ganged up on his nation. Going even further, Stalin immediately contacted a group of Poles in Moscow and asked them to form a Polish government of their own. From now on, then, the Soviet Union seemed very close to breaking all ties with the United Nations, while trying to meet its Eastern Polish demands on its very own. If the 'Polish Question' was close to be answered, it now had to be re-asked altogether for the sake of keeping the Alliance together.

2.2 White moves to the rescue. April – October, 1943.

The diplomatic crisis between the Soviet Union and the London Poles after the announcement of the Katyn findings was to bring difficult questions to politicians from Great Britain and the United States of America. Throughout 1943 and 1944 they had to decide which side they were on. Were they to choose Stalin's Soviet Union, the ally who was maybe following a double agenda but was militarily powerful enough to check Germany's advance? Or was Poland to be chosen? The ally for which Great Britain originally went to war and who had supported the war effort as far as it could? Whatever the outcome would be, the choice would be hard.

Well before the Katyn crisis, British and Americans politicians were already being pressed to do something for Poland before the Germans announced their discovery of the mass graves near Smolensk. The government-in-exile repeatedly asked Britain and the United States for

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 378-379.

help. Officers from Kozielsk, so they said, were missing and Great Britain and the United States should ask what had happened to them. The London Poles tried to find their whereabouts, but the Soviet government never replied to their questions in full satisfaction. The Poles were so keen for assistance that even Sikorski's wife tried to enlist the aid of Eleanor Roosevelt in this matter. The Western leaders responded. On April, 27th, 1942, United States Admiral and Ambassador to the Soviet Union, William H. Standley, formally asked the Soviets what had happened to those missing Polish prisoners of war. The Admiral received word from Soviet officials that the Poles had been released two years earlier. The Russian government, however, was unaware of where these people were. Perhaps they had left for the Caucasus or Kazakhstan, but they could not be 100 per cent sure. The British as well asked questions about the prisoners and were rebuffed. It was after the fall of communism and the opening of Soviet archives in the 1990s which led to the discovery that Stalin himself had signed the order to shoot the missing Poles, of which they claimed never to have had any idea at all what had happened to them.⁶¹ British and American officials could only guess something was wrong. Yet, rising difficulties with Stalin led Anthony Eden to exclaim in 1942 that 'it already seemed likely that the Soviets intended to divide and rule their western neighbors.'

Anthony Eden, Britain's Foreign Secretary, is most critical in his memoirs to Soviet dealings with the West before Katyn. Well before the German accusations were to create a diplomatic rift and made solving the 'Polish Question' even more urgent, the Briton seems to suggest that Poland's future was heavily discussed before all that. While Eden strangely enough does not devote any word to Katyn in his memoirs, he does recount a visit to Franklin Roosevelt in Washington in March, 1943:

We then discussed in some detail the Russian demands, as explained to me by [Ivan] Maisky [Soviet Ambassador in London] before I left London. Somewhat to my surprise, Roosevelt did not seem to foresee any great difficulty over the Polish question. He thought that if Poland had East Prussia and perhaps some concessions in Silesia, she would gain rather than lose by agreeing to the Curzon line. In any event, Britain, the United States and Russia should decide at the appropriate time what was a just solution and Poland would have to accept (...). The big question which rightly

⁶¹ Lukas, *Strange Allies*, 37.

dominated Roosevelt's mind was whether it was possible to work with Russia now and after the war. He wanted to know what I thought of the view that Stalin's aim was to overrun and communize the Continent. I replied that it was impossible to give a definite opinion. Even if these fears were to prove correct, we should make the position no worse by trying to work with Russia and by assuming that Stalin meant what he said in the Anglo-Soviet Treaty. I might well have added that Soviet policy is both Russian and communist, in varying degree.⁶²

As the Soviet Union grew more popular in public opinion and its armies grew in strength, it seems that politicians were becoming aware of how important Russia could become in the future. Roosevelt began to see the Soviet Union as one of the 'five police-men', nations responsible for world peace. Indeed, the more likely it became that the communist state would survive Germany's attacks, the more both American and British Foreign Offices were beginning to anticipate eventual Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. Whether Stalin would use his power for the sake of the United Nations or for communist glory steadily became an important point of discussion within the Anglo-American governments after the April, 17th, 1943.⁶³

After the breaking of Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations, Churchill and Roosevelt tried whatever they could to keep Stalin and Sikorski together. Historians have, however, used Churchill's assurances to Soviet Ambassador Maisky on April, 23rd, 1943, in different ways. The British Prime Minister noted, 'we shall certainly oppose vigorously any investigation by the International Red Cross or any other body in any territory under German authority. Such investigation would be a fraud and its conclusions reached by terrorism.'⁶⁴ Another example of a difficult interpretable text comes from Eden. He tells Sikorski on April, 24th, 1943, that the British Government did not believe the Germans, yet 'it could not estrange such a powerful ally [as the Soviet Union]'. He recommended the Polish Prime Minister to take back his request to the International Red Cross and to denounce German claims 'as it was imperative for the sake of the common cause.'⁶⁵ To some, these remarks are ample proof of

⁶² Eden, *Memoirs*, 372-373.

⁶³ Eduard Mark, 'American Policy toward Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1946: An Alternative Interpretation' in: *The Journal of American History* 68, 2 (1981) 314; Bell, 'Censorship', 67.

⁶⁴ Coatney, *Assessment*, 17.

⁶⁵ Cienciala, *Crime*, 218-219.

an Allied betrayal to the country for which they went to war in 1939. This, however, is not the case. Instead of willingly denouncing aid to the Poles, it seems as if the British and Americans were not yet fully sure whether the Germans were actually speaking the truth. Just as the London Poles were keen to know what had really happened near Smolensk, Churchill and Roosevelt wondered who was right and who was wrong. As was noted by a German spy in American service, Roosevelt interpreted the German announcement as an attempt to split the United Nations. Of course, the American President was right in this regard and the German-American spy also noted the propagandist value of the Katyn massacre. Yet, he knew Goebbels and the Nazi government well and believed the situation was much more complicated than Roosevelt believed. The spy suspected Goebbels' henchmen were telling the truth this time.⁶⁶

Correspondence between Roosevelt and Stalin shows how the two tried to deal with the Soviet-Polish break. Contacts between the two Anglo-Saxon statesmen were very good, for they wrote reports to one another on a frequent basis. When reading these dispatches, it seems as if the two statesmen were doing everything they could within their power, albeit carefully, to intervene between Stalin and Sikorski. Churchill, for instance, hands Roosevelt a copy of a dispatch he sent to Stalin on April, 26th, 1943. In it, Churchill urges Stalin not to press home his accusations as well as trying carefully to bring Stalin to different thoughts:

Mr. Eden is seeing Sikorski today and will press him as strongly as possible to withdraw all countenance from any investigation under Nazi auspices. (...). He [Sikorski] is in danger of being overthrown by the Poles who consider that he has not stood up sufficiently for his people against the Soviets. If he should go we should only get someone worse. (...).⁶⁷

Churchill also urged Stalin to consider his attitude to Poland as a 'final warning rather than a break'. Also, Churchill requested that 'no announcement should be made until every other plan has been tried.' Kimball notes there was not much Churchill could have done. As historical context to Churchill's dispatch to Stalin, he describes how the London Poles were

⁶⁶ Steven Casey, 'Franklin Roosevelt, Ernst "Putzi" Hanfstaengl and the "S-Project," 1942-44' in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 3 (2000) 357.

⁶⁷ Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence: II: Alliance Forged. November 1942-February 1944* (Princeton 1984) 192-195.

told that England had little leverage with the Russian government. Soviet military successes and a slow Allied advance in Northern Africa were to blame for that.

Roosevelt sent Stalin a similar message. He understood the Soviet's problems, but he wished to see that relationships between the London Poles and the Russians had not yet ended. Instead, he hoped that talks were merely suspended. To Roosevelt, it was out of the question whether Sikorski had co-operated with the Nazis. The President was also aware of the anti-Nazism from the Polish-American community and he urged Stalin to realize that 'knowledge of a complete break between you and Sikorski would not help the situation.'⁶⁸ Just like Churchill, Roosevelt hoped to carefully bring the two nations back together again. Both the British Prime Minister and the American President realized the potential dangers of a rift to the war time alliance and hoped to intervene without having to take definite sides fore either power. Indeed, Roosevelt responded to Churchill's message in an approving way:

I like your telegram to Stalin very much and will read it to the Cabinet today. We must work together to heal this breach. So far it has been Goebbels' show.

On April, 28th, 1943, Churchill sent Roosevelt a more jubilant copy of a dispatch to the Russians. The two leaders seem to approach the Polish-Russian crisis in a similar way:

The Poles are issuing tonight the communiqué in my immediately following. You will see that we have persuaded them to shift the argument from the dead to the living and from the past to the future. So far this business has been Goebbels' greatest triumph. He is now busy suggesting that the U.S.S.R. will set up a Polish government on Russian soil and deal only with them. We should not, of course, be able to recognize such a Government and continue our relations with Sikorski who is far the most helpful man you or we are likely to find for the purposes of the common cause. I expect that this will also be the American view. My own feeling is that they [the Poles] have had a shock and that after whatever interval is thought convenient the relationship established on July, 30, 1941, should be restored. No one will hate this more than Hitler and what he hates most is wise for us to do so.⁶⁹

British and American aims in the Katyn crisis of 1943 were clear. The Poles were to drop their stone cold character, as should the Soviet allegations be played down and a potential

⁶⁸ Fenby, *Alliance*, 185.

⁶⁹ Fimball, *Correspondence. Alliance Forged*, 198-199.

threat of a Russian-Polish rival government in Moscow prevented. On April, 30th, 1943, Roosevelt did not send this dispatch to Churchill, for reasons unknown. Yet, he again approved with Churchill's message to Stalin:

You are quite correct in expressing the belief that we share your view that Sikorski is the most helpful Polish leader we or the Russians are likely to find for the purposes of the common cause. The setting up of a rival Polish government by the Soviet government constitutes in my opinion the chief danger at the present time and should be avoided at all costs. I believe you have chosen exactly the right line with Stalin on this point. (...). Unless the other Allied nations can prevail on Russia and Poland to adopt a course of collaboration with all members of the United Nations and to declare a truce with regard to all controversial questions likely to impede the prosecution of the war, our whole effort will be ~~jeopardized~~ impeded. The winning of the war is the paramount objective for all of us. For this unity is necessary. All individualistic and nationalistic ambitions in the meantime must be held in abeyance. We must close our ranks on every front for the prosecution of the war. This is the only road to freedom.⁷⁰

Recently, with Churchill saying that 'if he [Sikorski] should go, we should only get somebody worse', Laurence Rees argued that the British Prime Minister was being 'brutally pragmatic' to the Poles. Rees also mentions Churchill saying to Eden on April, 28th, 1943, that 'there is no use prowling morbidly round the three-year-old graves at Smolensk.'⁷¹ Churchill and Roosevelt's position in the Katyn crisis during April 1943, however, looks clearly enough according to their own war time correspondence. The two considered themselves arbiters in a German-caused rift which could potentially destroy both the United Nations alliance as a future solution to prevent another world war. Poland was not to be doubted for and Sikorski was as good as a war time leader one could get. Goebbels, however, had dealt enough damage and it was to be repaired fast. Who had committed the Katyn crimes was not the most important question to be answered in the diplomacy of April, 1943.

In the meanwhile, however, discussion had sprung within governmental organization of Great Britain and the United States about Polish actions in response to Goebbels' propaganda. Some Americans, for example, were angry with the London Poles and their formal request of

⁷⁰ Ibidem, 203.

⁷¹ Rees, *Behind Closed Doors*, 186-187.

inquiry to the International Red Cross. Stephen Biddle, a United States ambassador in London, asked aloud why Sikorski had not consulted London and Washington before sending a message to Geneva. 'That', said Biddle, 'had unfortunately created the impression in my mind to effect that when his government was making trouble, it preferred not to consult us. When it got into trouble, it looked to us to get it out.'⁷² William Harriman, Roosevelt's special envoy in Europe, was also critical of Polish actions. In a conversation with Sikorski on May, 1st, 1943, the Polish Prime Minister acknowledged that the request had been a great mistake, yet it was issued under great pressure from his government and behind Sikorski's back due to illness. Still, Sikorski feared a Soviet takeover of the whole of Eastern Europe if Stalin persisted in his break with the London Poles. Harriman, however, told him that the Polish settlement was to have disastrous effects in Moscow whether the German accusations were true or not.⁷³ In the British Foreign Office, a few people asked themselves whether it was right for Britain to arbitrate between Poland and Russia. If the mass graves were indeed created by the Soviets, was it right to silence a major war crime from a powerful ally? Bell emphasizes that this discussion was excluded from public opinion. Indeed, while wondering what was morally good, British politicians were glad to see that the attention in the press for Katyn had slowly died down in May, 1943.⁷⁴

April 1943, then, was all about keeping damage to the war time alliance and Polish-Soviet relations to an absolute minimum. Roosevelt and Churchill immediately responded to keep the alliance together. However, Katyn had not yet fully turned into the moral question it was to become. Indeed, in May, 1943, in Goebbels' words, the Katyn affair was yet to drive a deep wedge between the Allies. In public, nobody could see this. Internally, however, Katyn's

⁷² Lukas, *Strange Allies*, 39.

⁷³ W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946* (New York 1975) 200.

⁷⁴ P.M.H. Bell, 'Propaganda and Public Opinion: The Case of the Katyn Graves, 1943' in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5, 39 (1989) 80. Alan Foster has written a lot on how the British press was to deal with Russia and their alleged crime of Katyn. Alan Foster, 'The Beaverbrook Press and Appeasement: The Second Phase' in: *European History Quarterly* 21, 5 (1991) pp. 5-38; Alan Foster, 'The Times and Appeasement: The Second Phase' in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 16, 3 (1981) pp. 441-465.

aftermath was to raise moral issues on the 'Polish Question' to new heights. These long term effects of the Katyn massacres will now be dealt with.

On August, 13, 1943, Churchill sent Roosevelt another message. This time it contained an internal memorandum from Britain's Ambassador to Poland, Sir Owen O'Malley. Churchill described it as 'a grim, well-written story, but perhaps a little too well-written.' It would certainly be worthwhile for Roosevelt to read it, Churchill suggested. Also, he wanted to have it back when Roosevelt had finished reading it 'as we are not circulating it officially in any way.'⁷⁵ O'Malley argued Soviet guilt in the Katyn affair, yet no he was aware there was not much to do for the British government.

But though of positive indications as to what subsequently happened to the 10,000 officers there was none until the grave at Katyn was opened, there is now available a good deal of negative evidence, the cumulative effect of which is to throw serious doubt on Russian disclaimers of responsibility for the massacre. (...). In handling the publicity side of the Katyn affair, we have been constrained by the urgent need for cordial relations with the Soviet government to appear to appraise the evidence with more hesitation and lenience than we should do in forming a common sense judgment on events occurring in normal times or in the ordinary course of our private lives; we have been obliged to appear to distort the normal and healthy operation of our intellectual and moral judgments; we have been obliged to give undue prominence to the tactlessness or impulsiveness of Poles, to restrain the Poles from putting their case clearly before the public, to discourage an attempt by the public and the press to probe the ugly story to the bottom. In general we have been obliged to deflect attention for possibilities which in the ordinary affairs of life would cry to high heaven for elucidation, and to withhold the full measure of solicitude which, in other circumstances, would be shown to acquaintances situated as Poles now are. We have in fact perforce used the good name of England like the murderers used the little conifers to cover up a massacre; and in view of the immense importance of an appearance and of the heroic resistance of Russia to Germany, few will think that any other course would have been wise or right. (...). This dislocation between our public attitude and our private feelings we may know to be deliberate and inevitable; but at the same time we may perhaps wonder whether, by representing to others something less than the whole truth as far as we know it, and something less than the

⁷⁵ Kimball, *Alliance Forged*, 389.

probabilities so far as they seem to us probable, we are not incurring a risk of what - not to put a fine point on it - might darken our vision and take the edge off our moral sensibility.⁷⁶

In Maresch' opinion, the responses from the British Foreign Office were clear cut. Especially, the reaction from the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alexander Cadogan, said much:

(...) quite clearly for the moment, there is nothing to be done. As to what circulation we give to this explosive material, I find it difficult to make up my mind. Of course, it would be only honest to circulate it. But as we know (all admit) that the knowledge of this evidence can not effect our cause of action or policy, is there any advantage in exposing more individuals than necessary to the spiritual conflict that a reading of this dispatch excites?⁷⁷

While agreeing with O'Malley and feeling much sympathy for the Poles, the British Foreign Office concluded it simply could not do anything against Russia. Indeed, how much O'Malley sided with the Poles, even he knew that the British government could not bring his information out into the open. It was immensely dangerous, as it was capable of destroying the entire wartime alliance and the ideal way of shattering Stalin's positive image in Western public opinion. Also, the Atlantic Charter would become meaningless. How could such a powerful nation, who had violated human rights by massacring innocent people, ever uphold such principles as outlined in Placentia Bay? If the truth could have so many consequences, was it not better to conceal it from public opinion? In May, 1943, Churchill, Cadogan, Eden and Clark Kerr, the Ambassador in Moscow, were beginning to realize that Stalin was indeed responsible for the mass graves near Smolensk. The Germans had not lied. However, in Bell's opinion, it was impossible to let this truth affect their policy. Instead, the British had to fight hard to keep Polish-Soviet reconciliation a viable option and keeping the alliance very much alive.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Rohan D'Olier Butler, 'The Katyn Massacre and Reactions in the Foreign Office Memorandum by the Historical Adviser' in: *Departmental Series Eastern European & Soviet Department ENP 10/2 (1973) 9-12*; Rees, *Behind Closed Doors*, 188-189.

⁷⁷ Eugenia Maresch, *Katyn 1940. The Documentary Evidence of the West's Betrayal* (Stroud 2010) 49.

⁷⁸ Bell, 'Censorship', 71.

By the time Churchill sent Roosevelt the disturbing O'Malley report, little could he have known that the White House seemed to have made up its mind on its position against Russia. On August 2nd, 1943, Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's most trusted advisor, received the following note from a special investigation committee. This committee was determined to find out whether the Soviet Union was a reliable ally and Hopkins now received the results of their research:

Russia's position in War II is in marked contrast with that which she occupied in [World] War I. She collapsed before the termination of [World] War I and had no effect whatsoever in the final defeat of Germany, which was accomplished by the Allies without her assistance. In [World] War II, Russia occupies a dominant position and is the decisive factor looking toward the defeat of the Axis in Europe. While in Sicily the forces of Great Britain and the United States are being opposed by 2 German divisions, the Russian front is receiving attention of approximately 200 German divisions. Whenever the Allies open a second front on the continent, it will be decidedly a *secondary* front to that of Russia; theirs will continue to be the main effort. Without Russia in the war, the Axis cannot be defeated in Europe, and the position of the United Nations becomes precarious.

Similarly, Russia's post-war position in Europe will be a dominant one. With Germany crushed, there is no power in Europe to oppose her tremendous military forces. It is true that Great Britain is building up a position in the Mediterranean vis-à-vis Russia that she may find useful in balancing power in Europe. However, even here she may not be able to oppose Russia unless she is otherwise supported.

The conclusions from the foregoing are obvious. Since Russia is the decisive factor in the war, she must be given every assistance and every effort must be made to obtain her friendship. Likewise, since without question she will dominate Europe on the defeat of the Axis, it is even more essential to develop and maintain the most friendly relations with Russia.

Finally, the most important factor in the United States has to consider in relation to Russia is the prosecution of the war in the Pacific. With Russia as an ally in the war against Japan, the war can be terminated in less time and at less expense in life and resource than if the reverse were the case. Should the war in the Pacific have to be

carried on with an unfriendly, or negative attitude on the part of Russia, the difficulties will be immeasurably increased and operations might become abortive.⁷⁹

The British seemed to be aware of what had happened in Katyn, the Americans might have been. Yet, both governments seemed to have decided that this new information had come too late. Russia's importance in the war was now too great to put at risk. It was, however, a choice between the lesser of two evils. Britain, with O'Malley as its most illustrative example, was fully aware of what had happened in Katyn. Yet, they also knew the dangers of telling the truth. Was His Majesty's Government to protect its loyal ally, with the effect of potentially destroying the entire Alliance or was it to hide the truth? It appears she choose the latter. The United States considered Russia to be the missing link in its war effort and, therefore, considered her friendship to be of vital importance. However, being the creators of a document which claimed that a nations' self-determination was one of the hallmarks of fighting World War II, this was to pose difficulties for Roosevelt and his administration. How far was the United States to go, in order to satisfy Soviet needs? These dilemmas led to gloomy researches from many historians. In the opinion of, for example, Sanford, Poland's fate had already been sealed in the summer of 1943. When Sikorski suddenly died in a plane crash in June 1943, Poland's future looked even bleaker. With his death, Sanford continues to argue, the unity that had existed within the Polish government was no more. From that moment on, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk became the new Prime Minister of Poland, with Kazimierz Sosnkowski as its new Commander in Chief. The latter was known to be a bitter anti-Soviet.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Washington and Quebec, 1943* (Washington 1943) 624-627.

⁸⁰ For more information on Sosnkowki and the Polish Army in Iran, see: Michael Alfred Peszke, 'The Polish Government's Aid To and Liaison with Its Secret Army in Occupied Poland, 1939-1945' in: *Military Affairs* 52, 4 (1988) pp. 197-202; Matthew R. Schwonok, 'Kazimierz Sosnkowski as Commander in Chief: The Government-in-Exile and Polish Strategy, 1943-1944' in: *The Journal of Military History* 70, 3 (2006) pp. 743-780.

Chapter 3: The White King and Queen argue, November – December 1943.

*If it was right to proclaim the principle that the United States would not agree to and would not recognize any territorial changes made in the course of the war, it was inappropriate to assert at the same time that the countries which had territorial disputes would not recover sovereignty until the end of the war.*⁸¹

Mikolajczyk in November 1943. He sums up his anger to the American delegacy of the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Moscow.

*Our armed strength, our material resources, the moral authority of President Roosevelt and, even more perhaps, our allies' need of us, would give us infinitely greater leverage now than we could have after the victory was won [after World War I]. (...). The principles for postwar policy laid down by the Atlantic Charter provided an altogether desirable pattern. Yet, they constituted a pattern and nothing more.*⁸²

Former Foreign Undersecretary of State, Sumner Welles, in 1951.

⁸¹ William Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbor. The Making of the Second World War* (London 1985) 44.

⁸² Welles, *Seven Decisions*, 125-127.

At the end of 1943, the Red Army continued its swift advance on Poland's borders. On September, 26th, 1943, Russian forces recaptured Smolensk and the forest of Katyn. They immediately renounced the German accusations that the Soviet Union had committed the crime and started their own inquiry to prove the opposite. While O'Malley tried to prove Soviet guilt to the British government, the Russians were now starting to forge a story of their own. The Polish government-in-exile was still denounced, seen as a collaborator of the Soviet Union's German enemy. Yet, while Polish-Soviet relations seemed to decline, the relations between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin seemed to improve. Indeed, it was in this period that two important conferences were held between the most important people of the three governments. First, there is the *Foreign Secretaries Conference* in Moscow. From October, 18th to November, 11th, 1943, the Foreign Secretaries of Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union met in Moscow and paved the way for the first meeting of the war time allied leaders. In the *Tehran Conference* from November 28th to December 1st, 1943, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin met face to face for the first time. Surely, Polish-Soviet relations must have been raised in these important conferences?

3.1 The difference shows: the Foreign Ministers Conference in Moscow.

When preparations for the Conference in Moscow began, the British delegation was well prepared. Anthony Eden had visited Moscow two years earlier, just after Germany's invasion in the communist nation. According to his interpreter, Arthur Birse, nothing was to be new about Moscow or meeting with Russian Foreign Secretary Vyacheslav Molotov. Yes, the topics to be discussed were vast. Molotov wanted to talk about the second front, the question when the United States and Great Britain were going to launch a proper assault on the European continent. American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, was authorized to discuss a Four-Power Declaration on war aims and to form an international organization to keep the peace after Germany's defeat. Eden himself wanted to enhance consultation between the Allies on European questions connected with the war.⁸³ Yet, Eden was thought to know well who he was going to visit. Birse noted, however, a difference from Eden's visit to Moscow. 'He [Eden]', as Birse says, 'must have found certain changes in the appearance of the city,

⁸³ Wojtech Mastwy, 'Soviet War Aims at the Moscow and Teheran Conferences of 1943' in: *The Journal of Modern History* 47, 3 (1975) 483.

compared with what he had seen two years earlier when the outcome of the war was still in doubt.’⁸⁴ Russia’s position in the war had become increasingly stronger and therefore many within the English and American governments believed Germany was going to lose the war. Hitler’s downfall was no longer a question ‘if’, it had become a question ‘when.’ The conferences in Moscow and Tehran were to decide how to speed up that process and what was to be done when the war was over. In this environment of making important decisions for the future, the ‘Polish Question’ and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and Russia indeed played their part. As can be seen in the accounts of Anthony Eden and Cordell Hull, two of the most important participants of the Moscow Conference, Poland was discussed in this meeting. Whether Poles, Americans or Britons liked it, however, remains to be seen.

In the summer of 1943, Roosevelt held a meeting with his advisors and Hull in preparation for the upcoming conference of the three Foreign Secretaries. In this meeting in the White House, Poland’s borders were an important topic to the American President. Roosevelt opted that the ‘Polish Question’ should be solved with a Polish-Soviet frontier ‘somewhat east of the Curzon Line, with Lwow going to Poland.’ Also, he told his advisors that Stalin should accept his solution on ‘moral grounds’. Roosevelt thought that the Soviet Union’s military position in Eastern Europe was much stronger than it was ever before. Russia’s advance should be stalled in Eastern Poland, or else they might be able to claim Germany or even continental Europe as their own. Poland, however, was not a matter for which the United States of America was going to war against the Soviet Union. Of course, the current war against Japan and Germany could not allow such a thing. The Americans, however, were aware of Russia’s important role in the post war world. A future third world war was to be prevented at all costs by five countries, the ‘five policemen’, who could patrol and guide the world in peace. The Soviet Union was to become one of these five nations. In the summer of 1943, then, Roosevelt was willing to appeal personally to the Russian leader and to urge him to accept the President’s solution on Poland. On the one hand, the Polish nation was to be preserved, and Russia’s inevitable advance was to be checked before it happened. On the other hand, Stalin was to be pleased with receiving the territories he so longed for well before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Act in 1939, as well as to be guaranteed to become a part of the international

⁸⁴ Birse, *Interpreter*, 137.

organization to safeguard peace after World War II had ended.⁸⁵ In 1943, the United States Government seemed to be having two different agendas with Poland. On the one hand, the old faithful ally was to be preserved as it was their good right. On the other hand, however, one might argue that Poland was to become a buffer state to check a Russian advance into Western Europe.

A few months later, when Eden met Hull in preparation for Moscow, the British Foreign Secretary notices American reluctance in putting certain topics on the conference table:

We agreed that if our two countries had to make concessions, we must be ready to table our needs in return. I gave Mr. Hull a note about probable Russian demands, pointing out that neither the British, nor, as far as I know, the United States Government had ever given the Russians any list of their views. My chief concern was that if these questions were left until the Soviet armies re-entered Poland, Polish-Soviet differences would be all the harder to solve.⁸⁶

Anthony Eden was not aware of Roosevelt's personal opinion a few months before and believed the American delegation was not authorized to discuss Poland's future at the Foreign Secretaries Conference. It seems, then, that the United States government had changed their opinion with regard to solving the 'Polish Question' well before the Conference had started. Hull's entries in his own memoirs confirm such a view:

Both our governments should be in a position at all times to exert their best efforts and influence to restore relations between Russia and Poland. But this influence is likely to be impaired, as the British aide-memoire well states, if one of our Governments agrees to represent the interests of Poland at Moscow. The Russians, being a very suspicious people, are not favorably disposed toward this policy in any respect; and it would be easy for either the British or this Government to jeopardize its good standing with Russia, which is all important to maintain in the present and the future as well.⁸⁷

Eden was clearly surprised of such a view. He, as we shall see later on, seems to have sided with the Poles and wanted to at least raise the 'Polish Question' in Moscow:

⁸⁵ Lukas, *Strange Allies*, 43.

⁸⁶ Eden, *Memoirs*, 403.

⁸⁷ Hull, *Memoirs*, 1269.

But there was one ominous void in our discussions. In recent months the Soviet armies had advanced some two hundred miles on the central and the southern sectors of the front. Once they were into Poland, our negotiating power, slender as it was anyway, would amount to very little. With this in mind I had to talk with Mr. Hull, but I found him most unwilling to make any move. He argued that he had no instructions about Poland and that he could not go beyond his authority. This seemed to me unnecessarily reserved, because I was not suggesting detailed discussion about frontiers. The Polish Government had told me they were not ready for this, only that we should show keen concern for Poland's future. But I was unable to shake Mr. Hull. Nevertheless, I decided to raise the subject on October 29th and began with a reference to the absence of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union. I said that we were concerned because we had played no small part in bringing about the Soviet-Polish Agreement of 1941. The present position created embarrassment for us all.⁸⁸

The entry on the final Protocol of the conference stated about Poland that merely 'an exchange of views took place.' The re-establishment of Polish-Russian relations was not discussed in Moscow, neither was the question of where Poland's frontiers were going to be. Hull was relieved. In his opinion, Poland was a 'Pandora's box of infinite trouble', a delicate matter that should not be handled in any way before the war had ended. If discussion arose of Russia's boundary issues in Moscow, Hull could have endangered the Four-Nation Declaration on the United States Organization to which the American government had placed its post war hopes.⁸⁹ When the American Secretary of State returned in Washington, then, he was jubilant:

I had never felt in better voice than when I spoke to the joint session of Congress on November 18. Attention seemed rapt. 'From the outset', I said, 'the dominant thought at the conference was that, after the attainment of victory, cooperation among peace-loving nations in support of certain paramount mutual interests will be almost as compelling in importance and necessity as it is today in support of the war effort'. I pointed out that, although we reached important agreements, there were no secret agreements and none had been suggested. Analyzing the achievements of the conference, particularly the Four-Nation Declaration, I said: 'As the provisions of the

⁸⁸ Eden, *Memoirs*, 415-416.

⁸⁹ Also, as a memorandum proves, 'the risk of a [Soviet] separate peace [with Germany] will be much reduced when a second front has been opened never mind where.' See, Henry Field to Brigadier General William J. Donovan, *Report on Possibilities of a Soviet-German Peace*, September 21st, 1943.

Four-Nation Declaration are carried into effect, there will no longer be need for spheres of influence, for alliances, for balance of power, or any other of the special arrangements through which in the unhappy past, the nations strove to safeguard their security or to promote their interests. The question of boundaries, I said, had, by its very nature, to be left in abeyance until the termination of hostilities. This was in accordance with the position maintained for some time by our Government. 'Of supreme importance,' I pointed out, 'is the fact that at the conference the whole spirit of international cooperation, now and after the war, was revitalized and given practical expression.'⁹⁰

The British and American participants in Moscow, then, seem to differ greatly in their opinions from one another. Both Eden and Hull knew Poland was a difficult question to answer. After Katyn, the gap between Russia and Poland was almost impossible to cross. It seems, however, that the British delegation was more prepared to answer it, or at least name their views on it, than their American counterparts. It led to outcries after the war from both important participants in the Roosevelt administration as well as modern day historians. William Harriman, United States Ambassador in Moscow, noted he was dead opposed to the appeasement policy toward Russia. 'I feel strongly', Harriman wrote in 1943, 'that we must be friendly and frank but firm when they behave in a manner which is incompatible with our ideas. Otherwise, we are storing up trouble for the future. I am also convinced that Stalin will have greater confidence and respect for us, as an ally in the war and post war. These views, I have held and expressed for at least 18 months.'⁹¹ This diplomatic dilemma of pleasing Russia or anger them by fighting for Poland's rights made some say that things such as the Katyn massacre were embarrassing and should be ignored as far as possible.⁹²

3.2 The difference turns into disagreement: the Tehran Conference.

The Conference of Tehran, Iran, was to be the first meeting of the Big Three, the leaders of Allied superpowers Great Britain, Russia and the United States. In Paul's opinion, Tehran was also to seal Poland's fate. At the end of 1943, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin had reached an

⁹⁰ Hull, *Memoirs*, 1314-1315.

⁹¹ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 206.

⁹² Kitchen, 'Churchill and Soviet Union', 426.

‘agreement in principle’ on Polish post war borders. Mikolajczyk was supposed not to play a role on the conference table. Indeed, the new Polish Prime Minister learned the truth of this agreement in October 1944. In Paul’s opinion, then, Roosevelt and Churchill had deliberately deceived the London Poles and used them as something to be bargained with.⁹³

It might be true that the London Poles were unaware of the results of the conference. They did, however, hope for a discussion on the ‘Polish Question’ in the first meeting of the three war time leaders. The Polish Ambassador in Washington, for example, mentioned to Hull and Roosevelt that the government-in-exile was prepared to resume relations with Stalin and that the Soviet leader should be appealed in doing so. The London Poles also wanted Stalin’s approval for a safe return to Poland should the Red Army ‘liberate’ it. Should the Soviet Union discard Poland’s wishes, the London Poles were forced to regard the Red Army’s entrance into Poland as an invasion. In that situation, the Polish underground ‘Home Army’ was not to join Soviet armies. Instead, it would be fighting against them. Giving up Poland’s ‘eastern territories to the Soviet Union even if it got as compensation East Prussia, Danzig, Oppeln and Silesia’ was not an option. This memorandum was sent to the White House on November, 19th, 1943, one month before Tehran started.⁹⁴ According to Eden and the British Foreign Office, Poland had little choice. In the British opinion, the resurrection of the Curzon Line of 1919 was the only real solution available. On November, 22nd, 1943, Mikolajczyk visits the British Foreign Secretary and hopes to press home his views. According to Eden’s memoirs, the Polish Prime Minister knew his hand was empty. The London Poles lacked real authority in this difficult affair. Russia and the Polish homeland were far away from London, making correspondence and controlling the nation difficult. Also, after the Katyn crisis, Stalin had installed his own Polish government. This made matters even more difficult for both the London Poles and its Western allies. On that evening in 1943, Mikolajczyk asked his Anglo-American allies for help. The British Foreign Secretary, on his part, desired to support the London Poles in any he could. In fact, he told Mikolajczyk he was already planning to raise Polish issues during the upcoming Tehran Conference. ‘There might be some difficulty with the Americans, who seemed disposed to put off discussing territorial questions till the end of the war’, Eden added in his remark. Success could therefore not be guaranteed, yet Eden sounded hopeful. American views in solving the ‘Polish Question’, the postponement of any

⁹³ Paul, *Katyn*, 247.

⁹⁴ Feis, *War Waged*, 283.

discussion in this matter until the war had ended, he believed unwise.⁹⁵ Mikolajczyk's account of this evening, however, was different:

I saw Eden shortly before he left, and for the first time (to my surprise) he brought up the question of Poland's postwar eastern frontier. There was scant possibility that Russia would anew relations with the Polish government, Eden said, unless we agreed to give the Reds that huge portion of Poland which the Red Army had invaded in 1939 as an ally of Hitler. I was familiar, of course, with the guarded, semi-official demands that had been coming out of Moscow for the previous year concerning the territory of post war Poland. At the same time, I was flabbergasted to hear Eden echoing those thoughts as if they were routine, not contemptible. (...). If we give up this territory, which, actually, we are not empowered to yield, it will only be the beginning of Polish demands.⁹⁶

While Eden said he sided with the Poles and did, in short, whatever he was able to do for their cause, Mikolajczyk was baffled. He believed Eden was, to a certain extent, siding with Soviet Russia! Great Britain was giving away Polish territory and so met Stalin's demands. Mikolajczyk's blunt language to Eden puts one to the heart of the matter. The two biggest Western nations of the United Nations and creators of the Atlantic Charter seemed to have chosen for Stalin, and *realpolitik*, instead of meeting Polish frontier demands. This was not what the London Poles wanted to see happening at the first conference between the Big Three.

Tehran, however, was not a conference at which frontier questions would receive the upmost of attention. It was mainly a military conference, dedicated to hastening the end of the war. The date for the British-American invasion of Normandy was to be decided here. This mainly Soviet demand was, in Birse's words, 'nothing new' as it was 'monotonously repeated' in 'a well-worn theme.' Operation Overlord was meant to divert sixty German divisions from the Soviet front and therefore required both careful military planning as well as good relations with the Russians. Not only was Tehran to set a date for 'D-Day', it was also to announce the agreement of a United Nations post war organization, increased co-operation between the Big Three and Stalin's informal assurance to the Americans of joining the war against Japan after

⁹⁵ Eden, *Memoirs*, 421-422.

⁹⁶ Mikolajczyk, *The Rape Of Poland. Patterns of Soviet Aggression*, 45.

Germany's defeat. Birse, the British interpreter in Tehran, argued afterwards that there was even more in this conference. It was, in his words, the Soviet Union's application for membership of the club. Throughout the conference, the Soviet Union seemed to be the stronger participant and Stalin openly desired equal partnership with Roosevelt and Churchill in the settlement of European affairs.⁹⁷ In Paul's opinion, the little bargaining power Great Britain and the United States had is easily explained. During 1943, Stalin had won important victories at Stalingrad and Kursk and was 'liberating' Eastern Europe at lightning speed. In November, 1943, as we have seen, Russian forces had already re-conquered the Katyn forest and were closing in on Poland's borders. In the meanwhile, the Allies were also successful in their military campaign. The Allied forces in Northern Africa had just defeated Rommel and his *Deutsches Afrikakorps*. The campaign was long, however, and the Russians did not consider the upcoming Italian campaign as a real second front. In this light of little bargaining power, it should be understood from Paul that Churchill and Roosevelt wanted to make 'major concessions' in the 'Polish Question'. Russian aid in Operation Overlord, both in planning and execution, were crucial in the Allied war plans. This situation could potentially reshape the 'Polish Question' from the threat it was for several months into a way to please the Soviets and secure their assistance in defeating Germany. Churchill was aware of this. In his words, 'the security of the Soviet Union's western frontier was of paramount importance.'⁹⁸

As seen before, the Anglo-American politicians were to choose between the lesser of two evils. Were they to protect Poland or to let it fall and support Stalin instead? In Tehran, it seemed that both Britain and the United States had made up their minds. The upcoming invasion in Normandy, their little bargaining power, the dangers of bringing the Katyn truth in the open, it all led to the decision to cast Poland's wishes and self-determination aside and opt for the war effort. One piece of the game, Poland, was omitted from play to achieve the greater good of victory. When the conference was over and newspapers and radios reported the Big Three's decisions, Mikolajczyk was therefore baffled once again:

In London we restlessly awaited the outcome of a meeting that was to mean so much to our country. The official announcement, when it came on December 6, 1943, was astoundingly vague and brief. It took up the military question of

⁹⁷ Birse, *Interpreter*, 138.

⁹⁸ Paul, *Katyn*, 250.

pressing the war to a conclusion, but there was no mention of what decisions had been taken concerning Poland, if any.⁹⁹

The futures of both Germany and Poland were indeed discussed at Tehran, albeit briefly. While Germany's future was to be investigated by the newly found European Advisory Commission later on, Stalin was deciding what to do with the Poles. In his opinion, Poland was an important part of Russia's 'sphere of influence.' The Soviet leader wanted to see four things at Tehran. First, future aggression against the Soviet Union, mainly from Germany, had to be prevented in whatever way possible. Allied supervision over German strategic points was, in this regard, a viable option. Second, Britain and the United States were to recognize Soviet incorporation of the Baltic States in the U.S.S.R. and the Polish-Soviet border of 1939 should be restored. Third, the Soviet leader wanted to see whole-season operative Baltic ports and a corresponding part of East Prussian territory in order to achieve that goal. Fourth, if Britain was willing to accept Soviet demands on the Baltic, Stalin would be willing to accept Churchill's ideas on the Polish borders. Should that happen, Polish lands east to the Curzon would be handed to the Russians, while Poland would be compensated to the Oder River. The Big Three, then, would compensate Poland the territory it lost on the East with up to 400 miles of land towards the West.¹⁰⁰

One can argue that Churchill tried to focus attention on Poland when he made known his plans to invade Europe through the center. The British Prime Minister used the metaphor of a crocodile in this respect. If Nazi occupied Europe was a crocodile, so Churchill told at the conference, the Balkan was to be its 'soft underbelly.' Instead of facing the monster head on, Churchill was opting for a more indirect approach. Not surprisingly, this plan was rejected in Tehran, due to the preparations for Operation Overlord and Russian insistence on an invasion in Normandy. According to Paul, any real hope of 'saving' Poland was now gone.¹⁰¹ At the same time, Roosevelt used the principles of the Atlantic Charter as slogans in order to 'uphold' Poland's territorial integrity. Although these slogans were used, Roosevelt was careful not to obligate himself too much in such matters. Indeed, by the time of the Tehran

⁹⁹ Mikolajczyk, *Rape of Poland*, 47.

¹⁰⁰ Pozdeeva, 'The Soviet Union: Territorial Diplomacy' in: David Reynolds ed., *Allies At War. The Soviet, American and British Experience, 1939-1945* (New York 1994) 369.

¹⁰¹ Paul, *Katyn*, 318.

Conference, the United States had drawn back substantially from its earlier willingness to take initiatives on behalf of the Polish government in its dealings with the Kremlin.¹⁰² Washington was reluctant to act even as an intermediary now, urging Britain to assume that role because of its treaty commitments to the Polish state. The British noted, however, how Roosevelt was trying to influence Stalin at the cost of British diplomatic efforts:

His (Roosevelt) manner was pleasing, but I wondered what there was, behind that intellectual face. I remembered the New Deal and all that followed, but I knew too little of his background to form any opinion of my own. However, as the Conference proceeded I came to the conclusion that if he knew how to deal with American problems and domestic politics, he knew little of Soviet mentality, or had been badly advised. It was not enough, as he evidently thought, to clap Russians on the back and say they were good fellows, in order to reach a mutually advantageous agreement with them. Something more subtle was required. He was dealing with a semi-Asian power, and a communist one into the bargain. Nor did I like his taking sides with Stalin, ostensibly as a joke but nevertheless tactlessly, in allusions to British colonialism. Nothing was said about Russian colonialism, or for that matter American. I felt he was too ready to play into Stalin's hands.¹⁰³

Roosevelt seemed determined to strike a deal with the Soviet leader in regard to the 'Polish Question' and to win his favor. On December 1st, 1943, the final day of the Conference, the American and Russian delegations met each other and discussed topics without the British being present. Charles Bohlen, United States diplomat and Soviet expert, minutes this secret conversation:

THE PRESIDENT said he had asked Marshal Stalin to come to see him as he wished to discuss a matter briefly and frankly. He said it referred to internal American politics.

He said that we had an election in 1944 and that while personally he did not wish to run again, if the war was still in progress, he might have to.

¹⁰² John P. Vloyantes, 'The Significance of Pre-Yalta Policies regarding Liberated Countries in Europe' in: *The Western Political Quarterly* 11, 2 (1958) 215; Ostrovsky, *Peace Planning*, 56.

¹⁰³ Birse, *Interpreter*, 155.

He added that there were in the United States from six to seven million Americans of Polish extraction, and as a practical man, he did not wish to lose their vote. He said personally he agreed with the views of Marshal Stalin as to the necessity of the restoration of a Polish state but would like to see the Eastern border moved further to the west and the Western border moved even to the River Oder. He hoped, however, that the Marshal would understand that for political reasons outlined above, he could not participate in any decision here in Tehran or even next winter on this subject and that he could not publicly take part in any such arrangement at the present time.

MARSHAL STALIN replied that now the President explained, he had understood.

THE PRESIDENT went on to say that there were a number of persons of Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian origin, in that order, in the United States. He said that he fully realized the three Baltic Republics had in history and again more recently been a part of Russia and added jokingly that when the Soviet armies re-occupied these areas, he did not intend to go to war with the Soviet Union on this point.

He went on to say that the big issue in the United States, insofar as public opinion went, would be the question of referendum and the right of self-determination. He said he thought that world opinion would want some expression of the will of the people, perhaps not immediately after their re-occupation by Soviet forces, but some day, and that he personally was confident that the people would vote to join the Soviet Union.

MARSHAL STALIN replied that the three Baltic Republics had no autonomy under the last Czar who had been an ally of Great Britain and the United States, but that no one had raised the question of public opinion, and he did not quite see why it was being raised now.

THE PRESIDENT replied that the truth of the matter was that the public neither knew nor understood.

MARSHAL STALIN answered that they should be informed and some propaganda work should be done.¹⁰⁴

On that secret meeting, Roosevelt told the Soviet leaders he could not *officially* support the re-establishment of the Curzon Line. Presidential elections were coming and Roosevelt was

¹⁰⁴ <<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=906#5>>

going to need the Polish-American vote. Accepting a Polish partition could lead to great electoral problems for Roosevelt and the end of his plans to establish a new international world order. In telling Stalin, however, that he had no problem with the general idea of shifting Polish frontiers to the west, Roosevelt had paved the way for potential misunderstanding. According to his own later interpretation, FDR did not have the intention to immediately accept the Curzon Line in the East due to the upcoming elections. Yet, Stalin and Molotov both understood Roosevelt to be committed in their plans of re-establishing the Curzon Line. One might think this was a tactic of telling the Soviet leaders what they wanted to hear, yet the real motivation remains ever unclear. It left Eden, after he found out of the secret meeting, embittered:

If we could get on to the business soon we might be able to hammer something out. A difficulty is that Americans are terrified of the subject which Harry [Hopkins] called 'political dynamite' for their elections. But, as I told him, if we can not get a solution, Polish-Russian relations six months from now, with Russian armies in Poland, will be infinitely worse and the elections much nearer. (...). President Roosevelt was reserved about Poland to the point of being unhelpful. He mentioned his political difficulties to us, but it was not until long afterwards that I learned he had also explained them to Stalin. He told the Marshal that for electoral reasons he could not take part in any discussion of Poland for another year, nor be publicly associated with any arrangement. This was hardly calculated to restrain the Russians. (...). My feelings at the close of the Conference were less easy than they had been in Moscow. I found the sudden shifts in Stalin's policies disturbing and could not fathom the apparent American unwillingness to make ready with us for the Conference in advance. Above all, I began to fear greatly for the Poles.¹⁰⁵

American officials, it seems, privately appeared to have come to the conclusion that the United States could do little for Poland except exhort the Soviets not to be too hard on the Poles. As John Gaddis pointed out, the United States would not 'fight for self-determination in Eastern Europe. The one question still unsettled was how to present this policy in the United States as anything other than a violation of the Atlantic Charter.' Washington never did find the answer to this problem.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Roosevelt seemed jubilant to American

¹⁰⁵ Eden, *Memoirs*, 427-429.

¹⁰⁶ Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbor*, 45-46.

journalists when he returned from Tehran. The President believed the meeting had ‘lived up to his highest expectations’ and he was engaged in ‘many excellent talks’. When a journalist asked Roosevelt to describe Stalin, the President responded called him ‘something like me – he is a realist.’¹⁰⁷

The London Poles were furious after they found out nothing had been decided on Poland’s future. When Eden returned from Tehran, Mikolajczyk and the British Foreign Secretary met each other and had a fight of arguments. On December, 20th, 1943, the Polish Prime Minister plainly states his dissatisfaction to the British efforts in Tehran. Eden was furious:

Molotov told me, ‘I want to see a strong, independent Poland, but I can not collaborate with the Polish government, because it has no good will’- Eden quoted. And then on his own he added, ‘And since you had bound my hands by refusing to discuss frontiers, I could do nothing more.’¹⁰⁸

Indeed, Churchill sent Eden to the Polish Prime Minister that day to make them accept their solution to the ‘Polish Question.’ Whether the Poles liked it or not, they had to give up half their country and reorganize their government before they were able to reopen diplomatic relations to the Soviets. Eden was instructed to put the matter to the Poles so that they were to believe that ‘by taking over and holding firmly the present German territories up to the Oder, they will be rendering a service to Europe as a whole by making the basis of a friendly policy towards Russia and close association with Czecho-Slovakia.’¹⁰⁹ Eden tried to convince the Polish Prime Minister of the importance of his decision, yet to no avail:

‘I share the Prime Minister’s [Churchill’s] view that Stalin will not try to annihilate Poland or incorporate it into the Soviet Union,’ Eden said. ‘But it is obvious that Stalin’s demands center around the establishment of the Curzon line as the future boundary between his country and Poland. Naturally, we agreed to nothing in this respect. We were not empowered to do so either by the British government or by your own.’ I [Mikolajczyk] replied that no one

¹⁰⁷ Samuel I. Rosenman, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Volume Twelve: The Tide Turns 1943* (New York 1969) 549-550.

¹⁰⁸ Mikolajczyk, *Rape of Poland*, 45.

¹⁰⁹ Feis, *War Waged*, 287-288.

was empowered arbitrarily to seize or yield half an Allied country. 'Stalin is ready to make compensation to you in East Prussia and Opole Silesia and establish the western frontier of Poland and the Oder line. The Prime Minister believes that if you would agree to this, there would be a good chance of an agreement with Russia, one that would make Poland independent and stronger than before the war.'¹¹⁰

Poland's leader felt betrayed by British behavior. How could they so easily give away such vast parts of land to an unreliable dictator? Moscow and Tehran had not solved the 'Polish Question' in Polish favor. Instead, the Poles believed these two conferences had made matters worse for them.

The London Poles were not the only one who were critical to what happened in these conferences. Some important British-Americans, such as United States Undersecretary of State Cordell Hull, did not try to restrain themselves in their opinion on Moscow and Tehran. In such a way they became the first of many critics, historians included, on these topics:

As I see it, the critics of the agreements reached at Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam are confusing cause and effect. The agreement so bitterly assailed would have been far different had the President decided in 1942 to insist upon the creation of a United Nations council charged with the duty of finding solutions for political and territorial problems before the end of the war. His refusal to do so was in accord with the advice given him by his Secretary of State, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and by most of his White House advisors, as well as with the views then held by the Prime Minister of Great Britain. It was a decision dictated by the President's conviction that as Commander-in-Chief his paramount obligation was to permit nothing to jeopardize the winning of the war. Yet with the advantage that hindsight gives us, it seems fair to say that it was this decision that was largely responsible for the division of the world today into two increasingly warring camps.¹¹¹

The matter is more delicate than this, however. As Ostrovsky correctly notes, one must be aware of the continuous changes which occur and reshape or redefine foreign policy. Foreign policy, in his words, is not a tangible concept that adheres to a standardized form of conduct

¹¹⁰ Mikolajczyk, *Rape of Poland*, 48.

¹¹¹ Welles, *Seven Decisions*, 145.

but instead it is an amorphous force that has the ability to change the face of a nation or dictate the future of another.¹¹² Great Britain and the United States of America possibly knew what had happened in Katyn. They knew who Stalin was and what he had done in the 1930s. In fact, Stalin remarked at the Tehran conference that every German war criminal was to be shot. Roosevelt and Churchill knew he was not joking. Yet, the Western leaders had to choose their move and they choose to trust the Soviet leader. In fact, they had no other choice. The bargaining power of both allies was weak and Russia's help in Operation Overlord was desperately needed. All the same, Eden and Hull were divided in how to cope with Stalin and his demands for the Polish frontiers. While Eden and Churchill hoped to solve the matter as soon as possible, due to both their sympathies for Poland and political considerations, Roosevelt wanted to ensure Russia's help in the post war world and choose to put such delicate questions on hold. Upcoming presidential elections and the role of the Polish-Americans therein also complicated matters. To Mikolajczyk and his London Poles, however, the exact argumentation did not matter anymore. They did not expect these treacherous moves from their closest allies and thought both Britain and the United States were selling out the Polish state.¹¹³

Chapter 4: Black makes his move, January – October 1944.

*The President will do nothing for the Poles, any more than Mr. Hull did at Moscow or the President himself did at Tehran.*¹¹⁴

Anthony Eden after Mikolajczyk visited the White House in July, 1944.

It was hardly wise to postpone the effect to solve so extremely delicate a question as the Polish frontiers, for example, until the armies of triumphant Russia had actually occupied the territories involved or to put off creating an international agency, which would have simplified the solution of such questions, until the various

¹¹² Ostrovsky, *Peace Planning*, 9.

¹¹³ Paul, *Katyn*, 286-287.

¹¹⁴ Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbor*, 59.

*governments concerned had taken stands that made any joint solution highly doubtful.*¹¹⁵

Sumner Welles in his book *The Time For Decision*, written in 1944.

On January 11th, 1944, the inevitable had happened. The Red Army crossed the Polish-Soviet borders from the Treaty of Riga, settled in 1921. The Soviet Union had entered Polish territory once again. Little but a month after the historic conference of Tehran, the Allied leaders of the West now had to make haste with their decision regarding Poland's future. This dilemma, however, came at an unfortunate time for the United Nations. The United States were advancing swiftly on the Pacific front, Italy was near surrender and the invasion of Normandy was at hand. As Reynolds put it, 'only from 1944 did the America and Britain join the Soviet Union as an equal partner in the war against Hitler's Fortress Europe.'¹¹⁶ The historian chose his words deliberately. Before 1944, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union had to go to great lengths to achieve close co-operation with each other. From now on, however, the three Allied leaders were for the first time really united in their military operations and mutual communication. Due to the agreements in the Moscow and Tehran Conferences, a proper Alliance was now in effect. It was only a matter of time before Germany would be defeated by the combined strength of the Big Three.¹¹⁷ Important questions, however, were not yet solved. Was Stalin going to co-operate when the war was over? What was he to do in Eastern Europe, with the territories he claimed to be righteously Russian? Tehran and Moscow did not provide clear cut answers, whilst the Soviet war machine raged on. This uncertainty led to increasing debate within the American and British governments and much more resentment from those who claimed that the Polish-Soviet affair had not been dealt with properly.

4.1 The powerless White player, January – July 1944.

¹¹⁵ Welles, *Time For Decision*, 328.

¹¹⁶ Reynolds, *Allies At War*, 419.

¹¹⁷ Graham Ross, 'Foreign Office Attitudes to the Soviet Union during the Second World War' in: *The Historical Journal* 30, 2 (1987) 526.

As seen in the last chapter, American Secretary of State Cordell Hull was reluctant to raise the 'Polish Question' during the Tehran and Moscow Conferences. Roosevelt tried to please Stalin with an unofficial, albeit restricted *fiat* to the Soviet leader's ideas on what to do with Poland's frontiers. Due to the Polish-American community and the upcoming presidential elections, Roosevelt was unable to give Stalin what he wanted. By saying, however, he agreed with the Russian arguments, he hoped Stalin would understand the United States was not being hostile to him. It seemed, then, that the United States Government had made up its mind: the Soviet Union was to remain in the United Nations Alliance at all costs. The reasons for choosing this diplomatic strategy were obvious, according to Mark. Between the Moscow Conference and the late summer of 1944, Soviet-American relations looked promising. Stalin was, for example, grateful for American Lend Lease and he met with Roosevelt, signaling a more open Soviet foreign policy. He had also endorsed American economic principles at Moscow, and signed a pact of mutual assistance with Czecho-Slovakia which gave the Soviets control of Czech foreign policy and military affairs, but left their internal politics untouched.¹¹⁸ Perhaps, some of Roosevelt's administration believed, Stalin was willing to cooperate with the United States after the war in an effort to protect the world from future harm. Not everybody, however, agreed to this. The assistant of the United States Ambassador in Moscow, George Kennan, was very critical to American reasoning:

If we insist at this moment in our history in wandering about with our heads in the clouds of Wilsonian idealism and universalistic conceptions of world collaboration, if we continue to blind ourselves to the fact that momentary peaceful intentions of the mass of inhabitants of Asia and eastern Europe are only the products of their misery and weakness and never the products of their strength. If we insist on staking the whole future of Europe on the assumption of a community of aims with Russia for which there is no real evidence except in our own wishful thinking, then we run the risk of losing even that bare minimum of security which would be assured to us by the maintenance of humane, stable and co-operative forms of human society on the immediate European shores of the Atlantic.¹¹⁹

After the Tehran Conference, the United States Government had not changed its view. It was still reluctant to commit itself in the Polish-Soviet border disputes. This was a major contrast

¹¹⁸ Mark, 'American Policy', 323.

¹¹⁹ Mayers, 'Soviet War Aims', 69-70.

to Roosevelt's efforts directly after Katyn, when he tried to bring the two governments closer together. The risk of alienating Stalin was simply too great and Roosevelt was aware his government could not do much against Soviet claims in Eastern Poland.¹²⁰

The British, on the other hand, tried whatever they could to break Polish resolve in the matter. As seen above, Mikolajczyk and his London Poles felt betrayed and left alone. To them, their allies seemed to have abandoned them and were now pressing them to accept Soviet demands. The matter, however, is more delicate than this. One might argue that British politicians were aware of the Russian threat for Poland and they were doing everything they could to save them. On January 30th, 1944, Churchill made a secret request to the British Ambassador to the London Poles. The man, who had told the British Government of Soviet guilt in the Katyn atrocities more than six months before, was being asked by the Prime Minister to re-investigate the matter. Churchill timed his request well. In the first days of January, 1944, the Soviet Union publicized their version of what had happened in Katyn. This Burdenko report was a lot different from what the Germans had claimed in April, 1943. Forensic investigation, so says the report, had showed that the Polish officers were not murdered in 1940, when the Soviets occupied the territory, but in 1941. Also, recovered German bullets and Polish diaries seemed to prove the point that it was Nazi Germany, not Soviet Russia, which had committed the crime.¹²¹ Faithfully, O'Malley set out to work once again, questioning whether or not the Burdenko report was right. On February 11th, 1944, his second dispatch was finished and secretly distributed among the top of the British Government. O'Malley's conclusions had not changed from six months before. The Soviet Union was, in his opinion, still guilty of the crimes in Katyn.

Coincidentally, or not, the British were in heavy argument with the London Poles, while O'Malley was researching his second dispatch. The Poles were still angry because the 'Polish Question' had not been discussed at Tehran. Also, they had learned of Soviet propaganda claiming a Russian-supported Polish government in Warsaw. To them, it was enough proof of Stalin's intentions. At those meetings in February, 1944, O'Malley was present. On February 6th, 1944, John Colville, Churchill's secretary and writer of the *Downing Street Diaries*, noted

¹²⁰ Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbor*, 47, 49.

¹²¹ As it turned out, German bullets were indeed used by the Soviets. German pistols were seen as more reliable than Russian ones.

that O'Malley stayed to dine with Churchill and told Colville the Balkan and East European countries still felt Germany being their only hope of protection against the Russian menace.¹²² Indeed, Mikolajczyk felt he had to reject 'dictatorial demands.' The British Prime Minister was furious:

Churchill: *You know there will be no restoration of Polish-Soviet relations unless you consent to Russia's territorial demands!*

Mikolajczyk: *I am not empowered to give away half of my country.*¹²³

Matters got worse on February 22nd, 1944. That day, Churchill explained to the House of Commons on how Polish borders were to be changed. It infuriated the Poles even more.

The fate of the Polish nation ranks first in thought and politics of government and the British Parliament. I was glad to hear from the mouth of Marshal Stalin that he too is determined to build and maintain a strong Poland, independent and united, as one of the leading powers of Europe. We have never guaranteed any specific Polish borders. We have not given our consent to the occupation of Wilno by the Poles in 1920; the British view, against this, found sound expression in 1919 in what is called the 'Curzon Line.' I feel a deep sympathy to the Poles, but I also understand the Russian point of view. The liberation of Poland shall have to be accomplished by Soviet armies who, after suffering losses amounting to millions of men fallen in battle, have come to break the German military power. I do not feel that Russian, related with the security of its Western frontiers, exceed the limits of what is reasonable and just. Marshal Stalin and I agree on the need to compensate Poland at the expense of Germany, as well as in the North and the West.¹²⁴

Churchill's speech was to demonstrate yet again the difficulty of finding an answer in the 'Polish Question.' On the one hand, Stalin was not pleased with the unfolding developments. The Russian sent Churchill an infuriated message, claiming the Prime Minister 'had

¹²² John Colville, *The Frings of Power, Downing Street Diaries. Volume Two, 1941-April 1945* (London 1987) 90.

¹²³ Mikolajczyk, *Rape of Poland*, 53.

¹²⁴ Translated to English from a originally French text. Anders, *Memoires*, 236.

committed an act of injustice and unfriendliness towards the Soviet Union.¹²⁵ Stalin believed both Churchill and Roosevelt had both consented themselves with Russian plans to Poland and now Churchill seemed to back down. Churchill was now to choose once more whether or not he was going to follow the principles of the Atlantic Charter, which could be found in his speech, or to denounce them altogether by publicly announcing a solution to the 'Polish Question.'¹²⁶ On the other hand, the London Poles were angered even more than they had already been earlier that month. Not only that, General Anders' Polish divisions from Iran, at the time engaged in the Italian campaign, issued the following declaration on February 25th:

The soldiers of the Polish army in the Middle East do not accept the idea that an inch of Polish territory should be ceded to the Bolsheviks. We are going to fight against the Germans, without sparing any sacrifices, but we also consider the Bolsheviks as our enemies. If they turned out to be victorious in Europe, no guarantee for their purposes can be given to us. Poland shall cease to exist for a long period of time and the Polish nation would be destroyed.¹²⁷

In February 1944, then, British politicians tried whatever they could in regard to Poland's future. Finding an answer, however, which was to please both the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviet Union was most difficult. Stalin wanted to make sure the informal agreements at Tehran were kept alive, while the Poles did not want to know of any such thing. Therefore, Churchill and Eden tried to batter Mikolajczyk into submission and raising political pressure on him. British opinion on the Soviet Union's reliability was also shaken and became more uncertain, due to O'Malley's second dispatch in this period. It led Anthony Eden to exclaim that 'the evidence [of the Burdenko Commission] is conflicting [with O'Malley's findings] and whatever we may suspect, we shall probably never know.'¹²⁸

¹²⁵ A.A. Gromyko, ed., *Correspondence Between the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. and the Presidents of the U.S.A. and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. Volume One: July 1941-November 1945* (Moscow 1957) 216-217.

¹²⁶ Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbor*, 51-52.

¹²⁷ Translated to English from an originally French text. Anders, *Memoires*, 237.

¹²⁸ Whether Eden condemned the Soviet Union for the Katyn massacre in this remark, is not completely certain. On April 8th, 1944, physician Sir Bernard Spillbury told O'Malley it was medically very difficult to establish German or Soviet guilt in the shooting of Polish officers near Smolensk. Butler, *Katyn*, 13.

Throughout 1944, Great Britain and the United States were walking a tightrope of holding the Soviet Union within the Alliance and keeping Polish anger at bay. At times, this proved difficult for the Anglo-American leaders. Churchill, on the one hand, was sometimes furious at Stalin as he could not cope with the Russian's demands. At a garden party on March, 26th, Churchill thundered his thoughts on Stalin for fifteen minutes against Harriman, claiming Britain had done whatever it could for both Russia and Poland but being scoffed at from the very beginning in 1941. Even Colville claimed in the Downing Street Diaries at that time it seemed 'our efforts to promote a Russo-Polish understanding have failed.'¹²⁹ Roosevelt, on the other hand, had to face a potential crisis with the Polish-American community in March 1944. Discussions engulfed the country whether or not Lange and Orlemanski, two important leaders of the Polish Left, and staunch communist supporters, were allowed to visit the Soviet Union. Eventually, Roosevelt gave his permission but with noticing American irresponsibility for the behavior of the two Poles.¹³⁰

4.2 Black strikes: the Warsaw Uprising.

August, 1st, 1944, was to be the start of the climax for British and American handling with the Polish-Soviet disputes. On that date, the Polish underground 'Home Army' started an uprising against its German aggressor. The plans for an uprising, to be initiated when a 'liberating' army was nearing the Polish capital, were effective at the start and the insurgents speedily controlled the city's communication and transport networks. From that moment on, the waiting for Soviet troops to enter the capital and to give the Germans the final blow had begun. No Red Army was to liberate Warsaw, however. Instead, Russian tanks stopped their advance and entered the city only months later. By that time, over 200,000 Poles had lost their lives and the capital was almost completely destroyed. The Red Army eventually liberated Warsaw on January, 17th, 1945. Colville described the Uprising as 'a grim problem. They are

¹²⁹ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 328; Colville, *Frings of Power*, 100.

¹³⁰ Two Polish-Americans, Lange and Orlemanski, leaders of the Polish Left en staunch communist supporters, wanted to visit the Soviet Union. Roosevelt eventually gave his permission for the journey, but declared itself irresponsible for anything the two Poles did. For more information on this matter, I highly recommend reading internal memoranda, such as: Foreign Nationality Groups in the United States, no. B-101 'Activity on the Polish-American Left', issued on October 29th, 1943; Foreign Nationality Groups in the United States, no. 195 'The Polish-American Left', issued on June 16th, 1944.

fighting desperately against fearful odds.’ From August, 1944, Mikolajczyk, Churchill and Roosevelt were to deal immediately with a stubborn Stalin and to convince him to come to Warsaw’s aid. Yet, as Colville noted on August 24th:

The Russians are deaf to all pleas and determined to wash their hands of it all.

- [Possible] Explanations:
- 1) (...) they were seriously checked at the gates of Warsaw.
 - 2) (...) a curious pride which makes them determined that other powers shall not do what they can not do.
 - 3) (...) finding that the population of Warsaw and the underground movement are behind the Polish Government in London and do not support the puppet Moscow Polish National Liberation Committee.¹³¹

The Warsaw Uprising brought the matter of the Lublin Committee to the fore and was to test the United Nations and their mutual commitment to their utmost of lengths.

On July 22nd, 1944, the Red Army ‘liberated’ the Polish city of Lublin. It was the first major city in Poland brought under Soviet control, making it an ideal place of installing the Polish rival government Stalin was beginning to support after he denounced the London Poles in April, 1943. This Lublin Committee became Russia’s version of Poland’s government and was effectively the key to a military dictatorship from the Red Army. Reconciliation between Mikolajczyk’s government in London and Stalin was now further away than ever. This was proved on August 3rd, when the Polish Prime Minister urged Stalin to speak to him on the Warsaw Uprising. The Soviet leader basically told him that the real Polish Government was to be found in Lublin and that they should be contacted. The Lublin Poles saw Mikolajczyk and argued that were was no uprising in Warsaw, the Curzon Line was to be the Polish-Soviet demarcation line and that the London Poles were to receive four out of nineteen positions

¹³¹ Colville, *Frings of Power*, 132.

within the new government. There was nothing the Prime Minister could do to break Russian resolve.¹³²

The nations who were alleged to have betrayed Poland now seemed to come to its rescue. Allied fighter and bomber squads focusing on German industry, were now being instructed to supply the besieged capital. Stalin, however, closed his airports, making it impossible for the Allied airplanes to refuel and resupply. As an effect, the Warsaw Uprising and Russia's behavior sparked an intense discussion within the American and British governments and their policy towards the Soviet Union. Cordell Hull, for example, the man who was reluctant to deal with the 'Polish Question' at Tehran, now told Roosevelt on August 16th that the Anglo-Americans could not abandon Poland at this point and leave it to its fate, whether the Russians liked it or not.¹³³ Eden was doubtful when Churchill journeyed to Moscow to speak with Stalin on this matter in person:

I was not hopeful for the outcome of our mission. The Russians had already grabbed the territory they wanted, so that the Curzon Line was no longer the real issue. It was what happened in Poland that mattered. While we would agree that an early union between the Government in London and the National Committee in Lublin was desirable, I was unhappily conscious that the Soviet Government had every motive to play for time. The longer their puppets had to extend their rule and destroy the official underground movement, the worse for free Poland. (...). Our best chance was to protest the damage to Anglo-Soviet relations which must result from failure to agree a fair settlement for the Poles, but this was an uncertain weapon.¹³⁴

Bohlen and Kennan, furthermore, discussed the matter between them and they were bitterly divided. Bohlen, on the one hand, accepted Roosevelt's reasoning. He thought drastic military intervention from the United States was not going to change things in Warsaw and would have serious repercussions in diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. This would perhaps mean the loss of the eastern frontier against Germany, no Russian assistance on the Pacific front and creating a post war organization a lot more difficult. Kennan argued that all military

¹³² Jaime Reynolds, 'Lublin versus London. The Party and the Underground Movement in Poland, 1944-1945' in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 16, 4 (1981) 619-622; Paul, *Katyn*, 294.

¹³³ Hull, *Memoirs*, 1446.

¹³⁴ Eden, *Memoirs*, 481.

assistance possible should be given to the Poles and supplies to the Russians should be stopped.¹³⁵ Finally, Harriman believed that this all was a plan from Stalin to get rid from potential enemies. ‘These [Poles in Warsaw]’, so Harriman notes, ‘were the Poles loyal to the London government-in-exile, who stood in the way of his Lublin Committee.’ Indeed, he notes to Roosevelt that Stalin based his politics on ‘ruthless political considerations.’¹³⁶

On August 29th, 1944, Great Britain and the United States accepted the underground ‘Home Army’ in Warsaw as an official fighting army for the United Nations. This effectively meant it now was to be regarded as an army to be fought with under international rules, such as the rules of engagement or treaties concerning prisoners of war. Carr argues that this was a bold diplomatic move from the two nations, meant to anger the Soviet Union and to escape albeit slightly from her will. Yet, they had come too late. Talks between Churchill and Stalin were fruitless and the United States did not find a solution to the ‘Polish Question.’ While Britain was united against the Soviet Union and the way they dealt with Warsaw, Churchill was reluctant to make the final move of stopping every convoy to Russia. Eden and the Prime Minister discussed ‘gate-crashing’ the Soviet airfields, forcing the Soviets to choose sides when British airplanes wanted to land on Russian soil. In the United States meanwhile, Hopkins, Roosevelt’s trusted advisor, was determined to keep the White House out of the affair as much as he could. He withheld cablegrams from Churchill to the president out of a belief that the British were using the United States as a tool for their own sake. In the end, one can argue, the Warsaw Uprising had not fundamentally changed British and American’s dealings with Stalin. Britain tried to do whatever it could, but it had to have the support of the Americans. The White House looks to have been in doubt, with some choosing sides for the Poles and others clearly opting for the longer run with the Soviets. Mark goes as far as claiming that Washington saw Warsaw as part of a long-feared Anglo-Soviet struggle for power, each claiming certain parts of Europe in a relentless quest for spheres of influence? Had Britain not imposed a government of its own in Greece?¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Mayers, ‘Soviet War Aims’, 67.

¹³⁶ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 337, 340.

¹³⁷ Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbor*, 79-81; Mark, ‘American Policy’, 324.

Conclusion: checkmate?

In the introduction of this Master-Thesis, I argued that not everything could be covered. British and American diplomacy during World War II is a vast subject, even when one tries to focus specifically on Poland. Also, Poland is the bearer of a very difficult history, being disputed for so many years. We started this Thesis with explaining the ‘Polish Question’ and its difficulties, to lend historical truth to that aspect. Afterwards, we set out on a reconstruction of events and opinions. It seemed as if historiography, as described in three different schools in the Introduction, on British and American handling with the Poles was flawed and haunted with hindsight, how well researched and cleverly constructed as it may be. Historians of the schools of *innocence* and *blame* tended to argue that Churchill and Roosevelt consciously did not respond to Soviet threats. These authors, who were mainly Poles, carry the scars of the past. They know from hindsight that the Soviet Union was guilty of the crimes in Katyn. They also know that over 200,000 people died in the Warsaw Uprising and they know Poland was to deal with a Soviet conqueror well until the 1980s. They condemned the Americans and British for their lack of proper efforts to save Poland and consequently called them traitors.

Personally, I opt for the third school of *reconstruction*. Although it is understandable why historians tend to think in such an emotional way, they should not forget what really happened in the historical context of the 1940s. In 1939, the Western image of Stalin and the Soviet Union was that of a barbarian from the east, who was willing to strike deals with other dictators to conquer Europe. From 1941 onwards, however, this image rapidly changed. Russia was becoming the most important country for the Allied war effort. Victories at Kursk and Stalingrad ensured that Stalin and his Red Army were to be seen as the Allied David fighting off the Nazi Goliath against all odds. When Goebbels announced the discoveries at Katyn in April, 1943, and Russia ended its diplomacy with Poland, the immediate reaction of Churchill and Roosevelt was to bring the two nations back together. It was all German propaganda, in their opinion. To the President and the Prime Minister, it seemed as if the most powerful member of the Grand Alliance was trying to abandon them. When O’Malley revealed the truth in May, 1943, the British Government realized their response was morally wrong, yet the war effort was to be put on top of everything else. *They had no other choice*. His Majesty’s Government could risk everything, most importantly the credibility of the Atlantic Charter, by telling what had really happened in the forests near Smolensk. At

approximately the same time, the United States realized that Russia was to become a world power after World War II and its advancing armies were to become an important key to securing peace in the post war world. This made Roosevelt and some members of his administration believe that important questions as frontiers should be settled after the war.

Not only does this school of reconstruction do justice to the difficulties of diplomacy and its effects on the war effort, it also pays a lot of attention to the difficult communication between the war time leader. Throughout this Thesis, and throughout the accounts of meetings between the likes of Churchill, FDR, Stalin and Mikolajczyk, one can find misunderstandings or complete assumptions based on only a few words said by one statesman to the other. Notorious examples are the talks between Roosevelt and Stalin on the Curzon Line and the mix-ups between Anthony Eden and Mikolajczyk. Not only is diplomacy very difficult, it could change identity within a flash. Unknowingly (or knowingly?), diplomats and statesmen said things the other side gladly wanted to hear. These assumptions made things even more complicated and, in my opinion, are vital in understanding this period of time.

Also, we have seen that both Great Britain and the United States showed affection for the fate of the Polish nation. Instead of consciously deciding to sacrifice their old ally for a new, albeit dangerous, one, they came to its rescue in the Warsaw Uprising and they tried to convince the Poles earlier on that there really was no other option. Indeed, it was better to accept Russian demands and gain a bit of territory in the West instead of potentially losing it all. To many historians, however, this point proved how opportunistic the Western leaders were dealing with this problem. I do not think that this opinion is fair. In Moscow and Tehran, it seemed that Eden and Churchill were willing to solve the question of Poland's frontiers, while Roosevelt and Hull were against that. Eden says that the Poles were not willing to co-operate, so limiting the Foreign Secretary's hand and that there was virtually no bargaining power against the Soviet Union at the time. Hull and Roosevelt looked at the bigger picture, claiming that other things were far more important. Operation Overlord, Roosevelt's re-election and the potential threat of opening a Pandora's Box of frontier questions were the matters at hand, how unlucky that may be for the Poles. Indeed, the United States eventually decided that Poland would be a case for the Britons to deal with. Their commitments elsewhere did not allow them to come to Poland's rescue.

By using the metaphor of the chess game, I hoped to have shown that the matter is a lot more difficult than just being a willing choice from Allied leaders to abandon their Polish friends. The context in which the Anglo-American diplomacy of this period takes place is very important. I shall name three examples here. First, the history of Poland was very complicated and the question of its frontiers could not be solved in only a few days. Its leaders were gathered in London, its armies stationed in Iran and Scotland. This made the Polish government-in-exile anxious to do something, yet they were not strong enough to intervene directly against Stalin. They were simply too far away from their country. Katyn's aftermath made matters even more difficult for the London Poles, since Stalin tried to establish a Polish government of his own. Second, Roosevelt and Churchill, though sometimes frustrated with the Soviet leadership, could not always be aware of what Stalin was planning or doing all the time. When the Germans announced the discoveries at Katyn, at first both Churchill and Roosevelt thought to witness another effort of German propaganda and gave their support to Stalin. Later on, indeed, the British and the Americans found out their initial response was wrong, but it was far too late to back down at that point. Stalin and his Red Army was too important for the current war effort against Nazi Germany and might yet play a major role in the Pacific theatre against Japan. The Soviet Union, despite all their misgivings, also seemed more open than ever. Stalin received Allies in Moscow and went to Tehran in person to meet the Allied leaders and make important agreements on the post war organization. There were simply far larger issues at stake than just Poland and it was something that had to be carefully weighted by Churchill and Roosevelt. Third, not everybody within the Anglo-American governments seemed to agree with the outlined policies. We saw many arguments from (mainly American) politicians such as Sumner Welles and Ambassador Harriman, claiming that their policy was plain wrong. While not immediately leading to a palace revolt, this could become something disturbing and one can imagine that it took a long time to deal with these various opinions and to keep them from public opinion.

I hoped to have argued that historiography on this topic should be less colored and be less condemning to what happened behind the closed doors of diplomacy. Instead of looking at this topic through subjective eyes, as seen in the schools of blame and innocence, one can only truly understand the diplomatic events of this time when looking at it from a 'reconstructive' view. The politicians simply could not know what was to happen and it could be they were overrun by events. In short, it does not matter whether one was check-mated by

the other or not. The game that led to it is what matters and what was the argumentation behind taking certain moves. One can carefully think over its move, there is always an option it may turn out a lot different than was originally intended.

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