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Warsaw Uprising of 1944: A Touchstone in United States and Russian Relations

Jordan Szczygiel

University of Connecticut - Storrs, miamid@snet.net

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Warsaw Uprising of 1944: A Touchstone in
United States and Russian Relations

By: Jordan Szczygiel

Warsaw Uprising Stirs Tension, Eventually Leading to the Cold War

On August 1, 1944, when the *Armia Krajowa* [AK] comprised of Polish partisans, took to the streets against the Germans, the only question in their minds was when Warsaw was going to be liberated. Instead of a quick victory, fighting raged on for sixty-three days ending with the eventual defeat of the AK. Even though the uprising failed to free Warsaw from the grasp of the Nazis, it did become a touchstone in the relationship between two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

Russia's actions during the course of the rising led many Americans, in particular William Averell Harriman, United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union, to express grave concern over future interactions. Russian officials had continually refused to provide assistance both directly and indirectly to the partisans until it was too late. The Soviets justified their inaction by saying that the Poles had not coordinated with the Red Army. Roosevelt believed it was not in the Western allies' interest to pressure Stalin for fear of losing a necessary ally. He also worried about negative publicity affecting his November re-election chances. President Roosevelt refused to challenge Stalin over the Polish issue. Consequently, the Soviet Union played the dominant role in the reconstruction of Poland's government up until Truman stepped in as president following Roosevelt's death.

Poland had a long-standing history of fighting for freedom, from the days of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, when the country's citizens challenged kings,

up to the twenty-first century.¹ Consequently, it came as no surprise when the Union of Polish Patriots summoned Warsaw to take up arms against the Nazis on July 29, 1944 at eight-fifteen in the evening on the Kosciusko Radio Station, out of Moscow.

“For Warsaw, which did not yield but fought on, the hour of action has now arrived. The Germans will no doubt try to defend themselves in Warsaw, and add new destruction and more thousands of victims. Our houses and parks, our bridges and railway stations, our factories and our public buildings will be turned into defense positions. They expose the city to ruin and its inhabitants to death... It is therefore a hundred times more necessary than ever to remember that in the flood of Hitlerite destruction all is lost that is not saved by active effort; that by direct, active struggle in streets of Warsaw, in its houses, factories and stores, we not only hasten the moment of final liberation but also save the nation’s prosperity and the lives of our brethren. Poles the time of liberation is at hand: Poles, to arms! There is not a moment to lose!”²

Following that broadcast, the resistance fighters lay in wait. Having already received permission from the exiled Polish Government in London, General Tadeusz

¹ Norman Davies , *Rising '44* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 169.

² Harriman A., William and Ellie Abel, *Special Envoy* (New York: Random House Inc, 1975), 335-6.

Bór-Komorowski, commander in chief of the Home Army, decided that the uprising would be launched on August 1, 1944. The exact reason of why that particular day was chosen to launch the uprising may never be known, but Jan Jankowski, Delegate and Vice-Prime Minister of Polish Government, provided some insight to the explanation during a radio broadcast on 1 September.

“There were several reasons for our uprising. We wanted to repel by force of arms the last blow the Germans were preparing to deal at the moment of their departure to all that were still living in Poland; we wanted to thwart them in their aim of revenge on insurgent Warsaw. We wanted to show the world that although we wanted to have an independent Poland, we were not prepared to accept this gift of freedom from anyone if it meant accepting conditions contrary to the interests, traditions and dignity of our nation. Finally, we want to free Poland from the nightmare of the Gestapo punishments, murder and prisons.

We want to be free and to owe this freedom to nobody but ourselves.”³

The combination of Jankowski’s analysis along with other Polish leaders, such as Bór-Komorowski and Propaganda Bureau Colonel Jan Rzepecki, led many to speculate that the uprising began primarily for political and ideological reasons.⁴

³ Janusz Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour: The Story of the Warsaw Uprising, 1944* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 15.

On the morning and into the early afternoon of 31 July, military and political leaders involved with the orchestration of the resistance were not planning on deploying troops the following day.⁵ However, that all changed during the course of an afternoon meeting between Generals Bór-Komorowski, Pelcynski, Okulicki and Major 'H.K.', as a German military radio station transmitted a segment explaining how the Russians were attacking Warsaw from the southeast.⁶ At the same time, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, Prime Minister for the Polish government in exile, was in Moscow. Mikolajczyk had gone to see Stalin with the hope of returning Soviet-Polish relations to a firm status, and in the process hopefully "clarifying the political atmosphere between the Allies in this decisive stage of the war."⁷ General Bór-Komorowski feared that Stalin would be able to strong-arm Mikolajczyk into an unfavorable settlement if the Soviets took Warsaw without the *Armia Krajowa*, Polish resistance forces, playing a major role.

Having heard about the Russian attack on Warsaw from the southeast, the "Home Army Generals assumed that the imminent entry of the Russians into the city was a foregone conclusion," especially considering how much they stood to gain,

⁴ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 400.

⁵ Jan M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 239.

⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. VI, *Triumph and Tragedy*, rev. ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company 1954), 115.

⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe*, Volume III, (July 31, 1944) 1301.

militarily and politically.⁸ Poland served as a corridor for Germany to attack Russia; therefore Stalin wanted an alliance between Poland and Russia in an attempt to prevent Poland from falling victim to Germany yet again. Russia hoped that Poland would “have a government which understood and valued good relations with its Eastern neighbor and that would be willing to preserve these relations in the interests of the struggle with our common enemy, Germany.”⁹ Stalin sought an independent state that was friendly to Russia. Poland could handle its own internal affairs. If the Red Army liberated Warsaw from the Nazis, the Russians could paint themselves as the “redeemers of the Polish capital”, giving them political leverage to set up the government that they desired.¹⁰

In September 1943, Russians had coordinated with the Home Army to form a plan of action known as “the Tempest.” The strategy called for the rebellion of the Home Army in local areas as the Red Army approached, consequently providing the Red Army additional support as it rid cities of the common foe, the Germans.¹¹ On 13 July, Vilna witnessed the success of “Tempest,” and then on 26 July, the city of Lvov observed a similar triumph. The past successes of “Tempest,” in addition to what the Russians stood to gain from liberating Warsaw, led Poles to believe that the Russians would undoubtedly attempt to gain control of the capital. Thus,

⁸ Ciechanowski, *Warsaw Rising of 1944*, 243.

⁹ *Stalin and the Cold War 1945 – 1953: A Cold War International History Project Document Reader*, (April 28, 1944, 10 pm), 2.

¹⁰ Ciechanowski, *Warsaw Rising of 1944*, 245.

¹¹ Katharine M. Stewart-Murray, *The Tragedy of Warsaw: and its Documentation* (London: John Murray, 1945), 5.

Colonel Bokszcznin expressed the common feeling among Poles, that the uprising would be a success, when he stated that “the course and outcome of the projected battle did not arouse the slightest feeling of apprehension, no one talked about it, and many considered it already won.”¹²

This, however, proved not to be the case because the Russians did not cross the Vistula until months later. Military officials and politicians still debate the reason for the delay. A significant amount of evidence points to military reasons though. On 5 July, Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, told Harriman that the intention was to have the armies in Byelorussia strike Königsberg in East Prussia and then continue southwest into northern Poland.¹³ The city would be left for General Zygmunt Berling, commander of the first Polish Army, which fought under the USSR, and the Polish partisans. Since the Red Army was not able to make it to Königsberg or northern Poland in early August, the Germans, charged with defending the capital, sustained uninterrupted radio communication with the west. Faced with an opposition that could call in reinforcements, the Russians realized that they were too spread out to stand a chance.

“The 48th and 65th Armies were still over 60 miles away from Warsaw, the right wing had only just reached the Narew river, the 70th Army was engaged in taking control of Brześć and the 47th Army was fighting at Siedlce; only lead elements of the 2nd Tank Army were approaching Praga. In the second

¹² Ciechanowski, *Warsaw Rising of 1944*, 246.

¹³ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 336-337.

place, the two bridgeheads over the Vistula at Magnuszów and Puławy, to the south of Warsaw, held by the 8th Guards and 69th Armies and the 1st Polish Army, were temporarily subjected to a strong counterattack by German forces.”¹⁴

General Chruściel, having received faulty information that Soviet tanks were in Praga, gave his support for the uprising to begin on the 1 August. Had General Chruściel known the true status of the Soviet forces, who knows if he would have submitted his approval? The uprising in Warsaw could have aided the Red Army in its effort to take the capital, just as the uprisings had provided assistance to the liberation efforts in Vilna and Lvov. However, due to the time of the rising, its chances of successively liberating the city were drastically lowered. Harriman later recalled:

“I think Stalin would have crossed the Vistula without any thought of how it would affect the London Poles – if he felt strong enough to overcome the German defenses. The Germans had brought in three more divisions to reinforce the garrison troops already in or near Warsaw. The Red Army had advanced so far and so fast it had run ahead of its supplies. The Russians had no boats or bridges ready. It was all improvisation. They discovered that getting across the Vistula, five to six hundred yards wide at Warsaw, would take a lot

¹⁴ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 417.

more stuff than they had, and Stalin was unwilling to admit it.”¹⁵

As the uprising commenced, partisans filled with pride and thoughts of success took their positions around the city. General Bór-Komorowski had assembled 35,000 to 40,000 individuals armed with only light weapons and a limited amount of ammunition, medicine, and food. At five in the evening during Warsaw rush hour, the *Armia Krajowa* sprang into action. The rationale behind the starting time was that rush hour would provide a distraction. Colonel Antoni Chruściel, Commander of the armed forces in Warsaw, also hoped the earlier start time would give him additional time to reorganize his men as well as combine his gains during the night.¹⁶ The disadvantage to the “w” hour was that it split the city up into sections and in the process cut off many people from their homes and loved ones. This forced Polish officials to deal with a number of homeless people and children separated from their parents. Not deterred by these challenges or the deaths of civilians who had been caught in the crossfire, citizens of Warsaw greeted the uprising with delight and eagerness, especially in light of the fact that the Germans had brought in two divisions in preparation for a new massacre of the population.¹⁷ Individuals of all ages and both sexes, wanting to contribute in any manner they could, began constructing barricades out of baths, barrels, buckets, and

¹⁵ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 336.

¹⁶ Joanna K.M. Hanson, *The Civilian Population and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 72.

¹⁷ Statement by Colonel Tarnawa, a Polish officer, who was in Warsaw just before the rising. Soviet Home Service, September 2nd.

miscellaneous other things. By eight p.m., on 1 August, the Polish flag was flying from the Prudential building, the highest building in Warsaw.¹⁸ This initial success infused the capital's citizens with enthusiasm and a belief that the uprising marked the end of the war.

This triumph and zeal continued through the first few days of the uprising. On 2 August, after General Bór-Komorowski had successfully re-established radio communication with London, he informed the Polish government in exile of the sequence of events from the previous day. Having established communication with Poles abroad, Bór-Komorowski set up an *Information Bulletin* that would serve to keep the Poles informed as to what was occurring. The first *Bulletin* included instructions from the Civilian Commissioner pertaining to the treatment of German soldiers and German property. "On 3 August, the insurgents captured their first German tank; they repaired it and drove it into action against its former owners."¹⁹ On 4/5 August, the first sign of assistance came in the form of a Royal Air Force bomber over Warsaw. For the capital's citizens, this initial form of assistance signified that the city was liberated for the first time in over five years. This new found "freedom" did not come without a price. Over 2,000 people were killed in the first few days of the uprising.²⁰

Since Mikolajczyk was already in Moscow in the initial days of the uprising, he met with Stalin on 4 August. Initially, Stalin belittled the Poles but then

¹⁸ Tadeusz B. Komorowski, *The Secret Army* (New York: Macmillian Company, 1950), 221.

¹⁹ Davies, *Rising '44*, 247-8.

²⁰ Hanson, *The Civilian Population*, 79.

proceeded to explain that partisan activity was valuable. Nevertheless, by no means was he interested in mobilizing his army to provide assistance to the movement because he thought that the “Poles had risen up against the Germans prematurely.”

^{21 22} Stalin also refused to let Great Britain and the United States provide aid.

According to Harriman, Stalin wanted it understood that the Poles had acted independently and if the Germans defeated them the Russians had nothing to do with it.²³

Unlike the Russians who wanted no part of the uprising, the Germans looked upon it with a barbarian type of joy as they were now justified in liquidating the city. Heinrich Himmler, Minister of the Interior who oversaw the “Final Solution” and the forced labor system, declared: “Warsaw will be liquidated; and this city, which is the intellectual capital of a sixteen-to-seventeen-million-strong nation that has blocked our path to the east for seven hundred years will cease to exist.” ^{24 25} On 5 August SS – Ogruf. Erich von dem Bach arrived in Warsaw; his arrival marked a change in the course of the uprising.²⁶ Bach brought in his own men, which when combined with the forces that were already there created the dedicated Attack Group. The Attack Group, taking Himmler’s response to heart, were fixated on

²¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe, Volume III, (August 4, 1944, 1 pm) 1305.*

²² Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 337.

²³ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 337.

²⁴ BBC, “Heinrich Himmler,” *Historic Figures*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/himmler_heinrich.shtml (accessed March 10, 2013).

²⁵ Tadeusz Sawicki, *Rozkaz: Zdławić Powstanie* (Warsaw, 2001), p. 25.

²⁶ Davies, *Rising '44*, 248.

massacring everyone in their sight, sparing no one; “Estimates of their non-combatant victims in the suburbs of Ohta and Vola vary from 20,000 to 50,000.”²⁷ Despite the group’s ability to follow Himmler’s orders, Bach was not satisfied because of their minimal progress at crushing the rising. Accordingly, Bach set up a transit camp ten miles outside the city with a special task force, *Einsatzkommandos*, to carry out the executions, and allowing the Attack Group to concentrate on *Armia Krajowa*. Refocused on the partisans, Bach’s troops cut through the center of the city to the Vistula effectively dividing Bór-Komorowski’s troops in two.

As the Germans directed their attention towards crushing the uprising, Polish Political leaders, especially Mikolajczyk, were found in back rooms consulting with the Russians. The Poles, in pursuit of a favorable make-up of the Polish Government were working against the clock as the Russians did not appear to be coming to their aid against the superior German forces anytime soon. The time crunch also stemmed from the fact that the Poles wanted to hammer out a deal while they still had “political leverage” from the uprising. Concurrently, Polish officials enjoyed additional clout as Russian officials wanted to work things out with the Poles because they understood that the United Nations was looking upon the issue as an indication of future Soviet foreign policy.²⁸ The leverage was necessary if Polish officials had any hope of altering the stance of Russian official on Polish-Russian issues. George Kennan, deputy chief of the U.S. mission in Moscow,

²⁷ Davies, *Rising '44*, 252.

²⁸ Adam B. Ulam, *The Rivals: America and Russia Since World War II* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 44.

proposed that since Stalin relied heavily on his advisors, all of whom lacked the knowledge of foreign statesmen, Russia utilized a rigid foreign policy, where it refused to associate with any foreign powers except on Russia's own terms.²⁹

Harriman confirmed Kennan's belief as he explained how in the months preceding the start of the uprising, Stalin and Molotov were unwilling to recognize the exiled Polish Government located in London "as long as it included the named individuals who rightly or wrongly were considered irreconcilably antagonistic to friendship with the Soviet Union."³⁰ For the Russians to consider mediation, Mikolajczyk would need to include individuals from the new Committee of Liberation.

Mikolajczyk would have no part of the demands, calling those in consideration for inclusion questionable individuals. The two sides were not able to reach an agreement, and Mikolajczyk was "still worried that the majority of members of the Committee of Liberation were determined to communize Poland." Nevertheless, Mikolajczyk went back to London feeling content, due to the frank discussions and the promise of future aid from the Red Army.³¹

The future seemed promising for the Poles. They had recently obtained a pledge of assistance from the Reds. This was in addition to the supposed support

²⁹ "Who are these Men who Sleep so well" George Kennan. In *Stalin and the Cold War 1945 – 1953: A Cold War International History Project Document Reader*, 22- 25.

³⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe*, Volume III, (August 4, 1944, 1 pm) 1302.

³¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe*, Volume III, (August 12, 1944, 11 pm) 1313.

that the British had promised in the Polish-United Kingdom Treaty of Mutual Assistance signed on August 25, 1939. Article 1 in the Agreement is as follows:

Should one of the Contracting Parties become engaged in hostilities with a European Power in consequence of aggression by the latter against that Contracting Party, the other Contracting Party will at once give the Contracting Party engaged in hostilities all the support and assistance in its power.³²

Under the Article, the United Kingdom was clearly obliged to the Polish Government but nowhere in the treaty were partisans mentioned, so consequently, the British were not required to come to their aid. On August 12, 1944, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, Polish Commander-in-Chief, asked the allies for the assistance of the Polish Paratroop Brigade, which fell under their command.³³ Aware that the British were not compelled to do anything, Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff and Chairman of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee, responded to General Sosnkowski's request by saying that the English lacked the "necessary transport aircraft to fly in a unit and maintain it in Warsaw."³⁴

The British did not completely abandon the resistance fighters, however, they allowed the Polish special duties air crews in Bari, Italy to airdrop supplies to

³² Yale Law School, "The British War Bluebook: Agreement of Mutual Assistance Between the United Kingdom and Poland-London, August 25, 1939," *The Avalon Project*, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/blbk19.asp> (accessed April 4, 2013).

³³ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 399.

³⁴ Michael A. Preszke, *Battle For Warsaw 1939-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 192.

their comrades.³⁵ In total, the Poles carried out ninety-seven flights in August, eighty of which were to Warsaw. Unfortunately, seven crews were lost.³⁶ Sir John Slessor, British, Commander-in-Chief RAF Mediterranean and Middle East explained the difficulties:

It was one thing to drop supplies to pre-arranged dropping-zones marked by light signals in open country...It was quite another to bring a big aircraft down to a thousand feet...over a great city, itself the scene of a desperate battle and consequently a mass of fires and flashes from guns and bursting shells...and ringed by light AA [anti-aircraft] weapons.³⁷

Due to the barrage of anti-aircraft fire, the 1586th Polish Special Duties Squadron lost 16 crews in flights to Warsaw.³⁸ As a result of their high mortality rate and low degree of success, these trips were deemed suicidal missions. Subsequently, Sir John Slessor, British, Commander-in-Chief RAF Mediterranean and Middle East, halted them. Sir Slessor's order only made the termination of missions official, because "even ardent Polish patriots had begun reporting "technical problems" preventing

³⁵ "British Drop Arms to Warsaw Poles: Bor Acknowledges Aid Sent by Air, but Asks for More – Fighting Still Rages," *New York Times*, August 17, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

³⁶ Preszke, *Battle For Warsaw*, 198.

³⁷ E. D. R. Harrison, "The British Special Operations Executive and Poland," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 4 (2000): 1071-1091, <http://jstor.org/> (accessed April 3, 2013).

³⁸ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 411.

takeoff before he issued the order.”³⁹ By their conclusion the airdrops had provided the *Armia Krajowa* with 1,344 small arms, 3,855 machine pistols, 380 light machine guns, 237 bazookas, 13 mortars, 130 rifles, around 14,000 hand grenades, over 3,000 anti-tank grenades, over 4,500,000 rounds of ammunition, 8.5 tons of plastic explosives and 45 tons of food.⁴⁰

Harriman was aware that despite the Polish special duties flights, the Poles were losing ground, “including the west-central district of Wole and Theatre Square, in the heart of the city,”⁴¹ to the better equipped Germans and “faced total extermination, unless immediate and large scale aid was received.”⁴² Accordingly, he sent a letter to Molotov seeking immediate approval for American bombers to land in Ukraine. Starting in England the bombers would drop arms to the partisans in Warsaw, and then proceed to bomb nearby German airfields before finally landing in Ukraine.⁴³ Andrei Vishinsky, Deputy Foreign Minister, responded to Harriman’s request by declaring that the Soviets would not allow for the planes to land at the Poltava base in Ukraine. Vishinsky claimed if they did, questions may be raised as to whether the Russians really did not have anything to do with the “purely adventuristic affair [Warsaw Uprising].” Harriman met with Vishinsky the very next

³⁹ Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 219.

⁴⁰ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 411.

⁴¹ “Poles in Warsaw Appeal For Help: Underground Forces Say They Face Extermination if Aid is Not Sent Speedily,” *New York Times*, August 11, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 339.

day, reminding him that if the Russians revoked their assurance of aid to the Poles it would have stern repercussions in London and Washington, but to Harriman's despair Vishinsky would not budge. The Soviet refusal led American politicians to express concern over their attitude. Fearing that if the Russians were not checked, things would spiral out of control, Harriman called Washington to challenge Stalin. Harriman claimed if Washington allowed the Soviet Government to continue to utilize its current policies, "the belief of the American public in the chances of success in postwar cooperation would be profoundly shaken."⁴⁴ When confronted, the Russians responded by threatening to retract the U.S.'s ability to utilize the three air-shuttle bases in Ukraine, but Harriman was not daunted. The scare tactic worked on Washington, however, as Harriman was told to ease up for fear of jeopardizing continued use of the bases. Nevertheless, he did advise President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull that "we [America] should in our long-term relationship with the Russians, impose our views on them as firmly as possible and show our displeasure whenever they take action of which we strongly disapprove."⁴⁵

Harriman may have had strong private feelings on how to handle Russia's lack of cooperation, but in view of the sensitivity of the issue he put forth a very different front in the public sphere. He declared that the "alliance between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. is firm and is expected to endure for decades" and that there "will be no serious trouble between the Soviet Union and the United States on the Polish

⁴⁴ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 340

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

problems.”⁴⁶ Roosevelt, aware that the “Poles would play a significant role in the election”⁴⁷ tried to divert attention away from Polish issues, asserting that they were complex matters. “I suppose I know as much about that particular thing as any American, and I don’t know enough to talk about it.”⁴⁸ Dewey attacked Roosevelt’s passive stance, claiming he was employing “personal secret diplomacy” that was costing Poland.⁴⁹ One of the reasons among others that Roosevelt had to utilize “secret diplomacy” was because the American public may not have supported his policy of favoring Russians over the Poles.

Stalin, though aware of how the political situation in America could “vitally affect them [Russia] and their relationship with the United States” if Dewey and the “reactionary and isolationists around him” were to be elected, still refused to budge on a joint-appeal that Roosevelt and Churchill made on August 20. “We hope that you will drop immediate supplies and munitions to the Poles of Warsaw, or will agree to help our planes in doing it very quickly?”⁵⁰ Stalin disregarded the appeal.⁵¹

⁴⁶ “Poles Reassured on U.S.- Soviet Ties: Harriman Tells Lublin Group There Will Be No Trouble Over Factions,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

⁴⁷ *Cold War 1945 – 1953: A Cold War International History Project Document Reader*, (April 28, 1944, 10 pm.), 1.

⁴⁸ Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances*, 221.

⁴⁹ Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s lost Alliances*, 220.

⁵⁰ *Stalin’s Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman, 1941-45*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957; London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1958), vol I, pg. 254.

⁵¹ “Polish Premier Invited to Head ‘Unity’ Regime,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 29, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

Instead, he criticized the “handful of power-seeking criminals”⁵² that had convinced the citizens of Warsaw to partake in an uprising they had no hope of winning, and as a result of their actions, the Red Army must fight off German counterattacks on the east bank of Vistula before it can liberate Warsaw.⁵³ Moscow’s Communist party newspaper, *Pravda*, called the uprising a political maneuver employed by the Polish government-in-exile to “make propaganda and strengthen its prestige in the United States and England.”⁵⁴ Shortly afterward, Michal Rola- Zymierski, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army fighting alongside the Russians, reiterated the *Pravda*’s assertion by declaring that the Warsaw uprising was “a thoughtless act uncoordinated with the Red Army and apparently had the political motive to enhance Mikolajczyk’s position.”⁵⁵

Feeling that the tide was turning against them, the Polish government-in-exile, sought backing from the United States and Great Britain.⁵⁶ On 29 August, these western allies answered the call granting combatant rights to the AK: “The Polish Home Army, which is now mobilized, constitutes a combatant force, forming an integral part of the Polish Armed Forces.”⁵⁷ On 9 September, the British

⁵² Ulam, *The Rivals*, 43.

⁵³ *Stalin’s Correspondence*, Vol I, 255.

⁵⁴ “Tell How Guns Were Flown to Warsaw’s Army,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 20, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

⁵⁵ “Polish Premier Invited to Head ‘Unity’ Regime,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 29, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

⁵⁶ “London Poles Seek Guarantee: U.S. British Underwriting of Compact with Soviet Called Vital for Independence,” *New York Times*, August 29, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

⁵⁷ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 413.

Government extended the combatant rights to Warsaw citizens as well. These two declarations were of the utmost importance, because they assured General Bór-Komorowski and Colonel Chruściel that if the AK surrendered; the United States and England would do their best to ensure the partisans would be treated as POWs and not executed.

Unclear of the future but still wanting to reach a resolution, the Polish Government submitted to Moscow a proposal on 30 August, which was already approved by the Polish Underground, for the establishment of the new government. The proposal called for:

“The immediate takeover of the administration of the liberated Polish Lands. All foreign troops are to be removed following the cessation of hostilities. Elections based on universal, equal, direct, secret and proportional suffrage to occur as soon as normal conditions are established in the country. Until the implementation of the Constitutional assembly following the elections, a National Council, composed of an equal number of representatives from the five political parties, will be appointed to assist the Government as an advisory body. The Government will bring about an agreement with the Soviet Government to jointly prosecute Germany and

by doing so the hope is to form a long-term relationship
between itself and the Soviet Union.”⁵⁸

Stalin’s decision on whether the proposal was acceptable, served as a touchstone in Polish-Russian relations. If he accepted the proposition, it would mark the end of the long-running dispute. On the other hand, if Stalin denied the proposal, Premier Mikolajczyk and the London Government would be at the mercy of the Soviets and their Lublin Committee. The most controversial part of the proposal was that restructuring of the Polish government in 1944 would be based on the 1935 Constitution, and not the 1921 Constitution that the National Committee delegations were pushing for.

In early August during a series of meetings with members of the Polish Committee of Liberation, Mikolajczyk was presented with a proposition that the Constitution of 1921 should act as the foundation of the new Polish government. Mikolajczyk would be given the position of Premier in an effort to appease the London government, but fourteen of the eighteen positions available were to be filled by members of the National Committee. The proposal was rejected, because when the Constitution was originally in place the Polish government was unable to maintain order or prevent corruption, as it allocated too much power to the legislature at the expense of the executive. This lack of control led to a coup d’état in 1926, resulting in a modification of the Constitution to strengthen the executive

⁵⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe*, Volume III, (August 30, 1944, 9 pm) 1315-7.

branch.⁵⁹ Attempting to reach common ground, Mikolajczyk countered the Committee, proposing that they keep the President and build a Cabinet around the four recognized democratic parties, “eliminating the Sanacja party, as well as the Workers Party and possibly the Communists.”⁶⁰ Bolesław Bierut, leader in the Polish Committee of Liberation, claimed Mikolajczyk’s inclusion of all the parties was not necessary since “political parties were a thing of the past.”⁶¹

As the first attempt to reach a resolution did not pan out, the London Government put forth the proposal on 30 August formulated around the 1935 Constitution. Justifying the inclusion of the 1935 Constitution on the fact that if it “were nullified, it would also void all laws concluded or promulgated by the Polish Government after that date, including the Atlantic Charter and the UNRRA convention.”⁶² Ultimately, Stalin felt that the proposal would not establish a government that was both independent and favorable to the Russian government.

Stalin knew if he stood firm he could obtain a Polish government that was friendly to the Russian cause, because the Polish Government was continually losing “bargaining power,” as the situation in Warsaw was deteriorating rapidly. As John Ward reported in *The Times*, conditions were appalling:

⁵⁹ George J. Lerski, *Historical Dictionary of Poland: 966-1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 81.

⁶⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe*, Volume III, (August 4, 1944, 1 pm) 1309.

⁶¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe*, Volume III, (August 10, 1944, 2 pm) 1310.

⁶² “Poles Still Hope For Stalin’s Nod: London Government Says All Now Depends on Answer to Its Last Proposals” *New York Times*, September 3, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

“On every conceivable little piece of ground are graves of civilians and soldiers. Worst of all, however, is the smell of rotting bodies, which pervades over the whole center of the city. Thousands of people are buried under the ruins...Soldiers defending their battered barricades are an awful sight. Mostly they are dirty, hungry and ragged. There are very few who have not received some sort of wound. And on and on, through a city of ruins, suffering and dead.”⁶³

The citizens were physically and morally devastated when the struggling partisans lost control of the Old Town and Powiśle, in late August. To many the loss of Old Town on 2 September symbolized the inevitable failure of the uprising. The fall of Powiśle meant the one power station was lost, leaving citizens without power after 4 September.⁶⁴

With *Armia Krajowa* losing ground, the Poles only hope rested in the power of the United States and Britain to pressure Russian officials. There were a couple of reasons to be skeptical that the western allies would come through. Roosevelt felt it was not in the allies' best interest to pressure Stalin for fear of losing a strong military ally. On 25 August, Churchill constructed a telegram intended for Stalin, pertaining to American planes making an airdrop over Warsaw. Churchill asked bluntly: “Why should they not land on the refueling ground which has been assigned to us behind the Russian lines without inquiry as to what they have done on the

⁶³ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 414.

⁶⁴ Hanson, *The Civilian Population*, 149.

way?”⁶⁵ When asked if he would provide his support for the telegram, Roosevelt replied by saying that “he was not willing to join Churchill in such a bold statement: “I do not consider it advantageous to the long range general war prospect for me to join with you in the proposed message.”⁶⁶ Roosevelt realized from the numerous conferences discussing post-war peace agreement that the world was going to be divided into spheres of influence among the allies. Consequently, he did not want to upset the current power balance between the western allies and Russia, afraid it may result in a threat to the United States’ post-war national security. Not deterred, Churchill sought out other means to pressure the Russians, including notifying Molotov how the British public had begun to question why the Soviets were doing nothing to help the Poles in Warsaw.⁶⁷ Infuriated that none of his tactics had worked, Churchill proposed ignoring the embargo and landing on the Soviet airfields. Just as with the telegram, Roosevelt refused to back Churchill for fear it would jeopardize the alliance.

In Roosevelt’s eyes, this alliance was crucial for the United States’ post-war security. Solidifying international security was of particular short-term importance, with the November elections looming. Many Americans felt that the U.S. needed to help Russia and accept her policies because of the instrumental role the Red Army would play in the wars against Germany and Japan. In line with the public,

⁶⁵ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 413.

⁶⁶ Hanson, *The Civilian Population*, 158-9.

⁶⁷ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 413.

American officials wanted to work with the Soviet Union.⁶⁸ Harriman attempted to alter Washington's attitude to a firm but friendly *quid pro quo* attitude towards Russia because he was convinced that if America continued to employ the same stance with the Soviet Union "there is every indication that the Soviet Union will become a world bully wherever their interests are involved."⁶⁹ Harriman perceived the way that the Russians were dealing with Poland as a prime example of how they were willing to bully anyone in an attempt to obtain what they desired. Since Harriman viewed pressure on Poland as equivalent to pressure on America, "he offered an incontrovertible, even hyperbolic, argument for confrontation."⁷⁰ Even still, Roosevelt was unwilling to place any added pressure on Stalin. Truman, though, would later formulate the United States policy around Harriman's conviction that Soviet control of Poland threatened vital U.S. interests.

In the end the additional pressure was not necessary as the Kremlin yielded shortly after, "allowing allied planes to land on American airfields in the Soviet Union provided that a plan of such operations will be submitted to the Soviet authorities and will be agreed upon."⁷¹ Recognizing that if they continued to refuse to provide assistance international criticism would mount so Soviet planes started airlifting supplies to the citizens of Warsaw starting 13 September. Regrettably the majority of airdropped items fell into the areas controlled by the Germans since by

⁶⁸ H.G. Nichols, *Washington Dispatches 1941-1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 431.

⁶⁹ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 344-5.

⁷⁰ Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, 220.

⁷¹ Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy: A Pattern in Poland*, (New York: Wiley, 1958), 255.

that time they controlled most of the city. In total 589 planes flew 2,243 sorties and spent 2,501 flight hours in the air over Warsaw.⁷²

In helping the *Armia Krajowa*, Stalin recognized its existence and authority as well as the Underground government. Mikolajczyk attempted to utilize this newfound recognition to make one final effort to unify the National Committee of Liberation and the Polish government in London. He hoped that removing two individuals that persistently clashed with the Soviet Government, General Soskowski and General Kukiel, Minister of War, of their duties the two sides could reach an agreement.⁷³ The only problem was that Edward B. Osobka-Morawski, president of the National Committee, despised General Soskowski's replacement, General Bór-Komorowski, to the point that he sought to prosecute him for the untimely Warsaw Uprising.⁷⁴ It was clear the Russians were not going to make any further efforts to work out a compromise, unless the Americans and British made them.⁷⁵ With that, all hope of the Red Army coming to the aid of the partisans was lost. General Bór-Komorowski understood that despite his men's most valiant efforts, they would not be able to take control over the superior Germans without the Russians. Therefore, on 28 August, General Bór-Komorowski had Lieutenant-Colonel Zygmunt Dobrowolski of the *Armia Krajowa* meet with General von dem

⁷² Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, 184.

⁷³ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe*, Volume III, (August 30, 1944, 9 pm) 1319-20.

⁷⁴ "Polish Rivals' Dispute Nears Explosion Point: Reconciliation Seen as Impossible," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 2, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

⁷⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe*, Volume III, (August 30, 1944, 9 pm) 1320.

Bach to discuss possible options on how to proceed. General von dem Bach offered four proposals:

“The recognition of combatant status for all AK male and female fighters and officers would be allowed to keep their personal arms; the International Red Cross would supervise the surrender; and the civilian population would be evacuated from Warsaw. If the AK wished to continue fighting, then the Germans still wanted the evacuation of the civilian population, after which ‘the fighting would be carried out with every available means until the town and army were totally destroyed.”⁷⁶

Following a briefing by Lieutenant- Colonel Zygmunt Dobrowolski on the meeting, Bór-Komorowski decided to plead to Stalin for assistance: “At this extreme hour of need I appeal to you, Marshal, to issue orders for immediate operations which would relieve the garrison of Warsaw and result in the liberation of the capital.”⁷⁷ Stalin, by this time, had made the decision to no longer work with the Poles in London. It may have made sense to cooperate with the “London émigrés during the August talks with Mikolajczyk if he had accepted the Committee of Liberation’s radical reforms,” but because he had not, it no longer did.⁷⁸ Concurrently,

⁷⁶ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 422.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Władysław Gomułka memoirs, [October 1944], *Cold War 1945 – 1953: A Cold War International History Project Document Reader*, 123.

Mikolajczyk, held the Russians in contempt because they had “disarmed the *Armia Krajowa*, arrested many of the officers and conscripted the men into the 1st Polish Army in Soviet-occupied Poland.”⁷⁹ Therefore, he sought to steer Poland away “from the road, on which the Committee of Liberation” had introduced her and install a Polish government composed of London émigrés that would work with the western allies.⁸⁰ Determined to prevent this from occurring, Stalin began preparatory works to transform the Committee of Liberation into Poland’s provisional government. Stalin, having officially decided to bypass the London exiles in establishing the provisional Polish government, would no longer be providing assistance to the partisans. With no substantial aid in the foreseeable future the partisans tragically surrendered at 8 p.m. on 2 October. Bór-Komorowski had been able to secure a peaceful agreement with Colonel Heller, in which the soldiers of the *Armia Krajowa* were granted the rights of the Geneva Convention, and soldiers and citizens alike were free from persecution.⁸¹

Victorious, the Germans ignored the peace settlement and deported 239,000 Warsaw citizens for labor in the Reich and occupied territory.⁸² Those incapable of working were left to fend for themselves. Seeking to help their fellow countrymen, Poles from various neighboring villages placed peasant carts along the railway track

⁷⁹ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 416.

⁸⁰ Władysław Gomułka memoirs, [October 1944], *Cold War 1945 – 1953: A Cold War International History Project Document Reader*, 123.

⁸¹ Komorowski, *The Secret Army*, 370.

⁸² “Polish Dispute Wrecks Hope for Coalition: Recriminations Grow Over Warsaw,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 5, 1944, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 25, 2013).

for refugees seeking asylum. The peasants would then proceed to invite the exiles into their homes.⁸³ After overseeing the evacuation of Warsaw's civilian population, a total of 15,378 insurgents and 922 officers, including 3,000 women, who had been part of the *Armia Krajowa* marched out of Warsaw as POWs.⁸⁴ The men joined other Polish POWs, but since the Germans had not dealt with women POWs before they did not know how to handle them. "The women were sent to various camps in Germany, usually adjacent to the men's camps, but were forced to live in appalling conditions, including living in tents rather than huts like the men."⁸⁵

In the aftermath of the Uprising between 200,000 to 250,000 men, women and children, roughly a quarter of Warsaw's population lay wounded or dead. Of the approximate 40,000 individuals in the *Armia Krajowa*, 10,200 were killed, 7,000 were missing and presumed killed, and 5,000 were seriously wounded, making the casualty rate over 50 percent. The Germans experienced a similar level of loss, with 10,000 being killed, 7,000 missing and presumed killed, and 9,000 wounded.⁸⁶

With Warsaw emptied out, the Germans stripped the buildings of anything valuable. "Thousands of wagon-loads of furniture, carpets, pictures and clothing were being dispatched into the Reich. All museums, libraries, collections, factory

⁸³ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 423.

⁸⁴ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 424.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, 210-11

equipment, workshops and laboratories were transported to Germany.”⁸⁷ Then the *Verbrennungs and Vernichtungskommando* (Burning and Destruction Detachment) began to destroy the capital. In a three month span the detachment destroyed 10,455 out of Warsaw’s 24,724 buildings. When describing the destruction Soviet bomber pilot Alexandr Markov wrote: “We knew that Warsaw was once the most beautiful capital in Europe. Now, when we flew over it we saw huge palls of smoke, and even from the air we could smell burned flesh. My spine crawled to see so much beauty transformed into ruins...all those golden bell towers gone.”⁸⁸

Even though the uprising failed to free Warsaw from the grasp of the Germans, it came to serve as a touchstone in relations between Russia and the United States. Concerned with restoration of post-war peace among the allies, Roosevelt did not want to alter the spheres of influence by taking a firm stance against Russia’s policies. Harriman, annoyed with Washington’s soft stance against Russia tried to alter it, but Roosevelt fearing the possible consequences would not listen. When Truman took over the Presidency following Roosevelt’s death on April 12, 1945, Harriman saw his opportunity to re-shape Washington’s policies towards Moscow.

Truman, anxious to prove that he was worthy of his new title, declared “we [America] need to get tough with the Russians...we’ve got to teach them how to behave,” after hearing Harriman say that Roosevelt’s lenient policy stance was born

⁸⁷ Stefan Korbonski, *Fighting Warsaw: The Polish Story of the Underground State 1939-1945*, trans. F.B. Czarnomski (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1954), 407.

⁸⁸ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 424.

out of “fear of the Soviets.”⁸⁹ Lacking Roosevelt’s poise or assurance, Truman depended on guidance from James Byrne, Harry Hopkins and Harriman.⁹⁰ Infuriated with the Soviet’s inaction during the Warsaw uprising, Harriman portrayed the Soviet Union’s domination of Poland as a threat to vital U.S. interests. Thus, the United States was responsible for ensuring Poland’s freedom up to and past the Curzon Line. “Or else Polish blood would stain American hands.” Truman, reiterating what Harriman said, warned Molotov that America could not allow Soviet control of Poland. Molotov, exhibiting patience towards the inexperienced Truman, attempted to explain how the Big Three, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, had functioned. Not wanting to appear fearful of the Russians, Truman continually cut off Molotov as he tried to discuss post-war restoration efforts. Ironically, Harriman, who had employed the “fear” thesis to alter American officials stance towards Russia, would later “regret that Truman went at it so hard because his behavior gave Molotov an excuse to tell Stalin that the Roosevelt policy was being abandoned...I think it was a mistake.”⁹¹ The strong-arm stance that Harriman preached and Truman would come to utilize from that point on, resulted in the formation of a slippery slope that ended with the Cold War.

⁸⁹ Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, 313.

⁹⁰ Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, 317.

⁹¹ Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 454.

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