THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

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POLAND, RUSSIA AND GREAT BRITAIN

The crisis brought about by the dispute between Russia and Poland will, if it is not solved, open a sequence of events that may threaten the liberties of Europe (and not only of Poland), the Balance of Power, and the security of England and of the Empire. Let us, before attempting to examine the dispute and its implications, briefly survey the principal facts.

On April 25th, 1920, Poland took the offensive against Russia. The purpose of the campaign, as conceived by the head of the Polish State, and commander-in-chief of the Polish armed forces, Marshal Pilsudski, was to solve the Eastern European problem once and for all by creating a confederacy consisting of Poland, the Ukraine, and White Russia, and to recover, for Poland, the ‘historic’ frontier of 1772, that is to say, the frontier left to her as the result of the ‘First Partition’ (1772).

While there was room for compromise with regard to the frontier, there was none with regard to the Confederacy which, had it come about, would have meant the dismemberment of Russia.

The Poles occupied Kieff within a fortnight, but were heavily defeated in the Russian counter-offensive. They appealed to the Western Powers for mediation, and Great Britain proposed that the Polish forces should withdraw behind the ‘Curzon Line’¹ and that the representatives of Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Finland should meet in London ‘with the object of negotiating a final peace between Russia and its neighbouring states.’ Russia refused mediation, but agreed to negotiate directly with Poland.² Great Britain advised Poland to agree to direct

¹ The ‘Curzon Line’ was originally proposed by the Supreme Council in December, 1919, as the eastern frontier of Poland. In 1920 it was proposed as a line of demarcation between the Polish and Russian forces, pending a general settlement with regard to frontiers. It was never accepted, either as a frontier, or as a line of demarcation, either by Poland or by Russia. It has no relevance to the present dispute between the two Powers.

² The Russian Government, in their reply to the British invitation, stated that the ‘Curzon Line’ was exceedingly unfavourable to Poland and that they were prepared to offer Poland a more favourable frontier (cf. Temperley: History of the Peace Conference of Paris; cf. also Harold Nicolson: Curzon, The Last Phase, p. 205). The frontier now claimed by Russia is much more unfavourable to Poland than even the ‘Curzon Line.’
negotiations. On July 30th, 1920, the Poles appealed for an armistice. On August 10th the Russians stated their terms, and negotiations began at Minsk. The Russians demanded that the Polish army be reduced to 50,000 men and that the Poles should organise an armed gendarmerie, numbering 200,000, to which only members of trade unions should be eligible. These demands were incompatible with the continued existence of Poland as a sovereign Power. Just as the original Polish demands meant, as it were, vertical, or territorial, break-up of Russia, so the Russian demands meant the horizontal, or social, break-up of Poland—that is to say, the overthrow of the Polish State and the ultimate incorporation of Poland in the Soviet Union.

Poland had greatly overrated her own strength and had counted on a popular rising in the Russian Ukraine. Russia, in her turn, overrated her own strength also, and seems to have counted on a popular rising in Poland. The negotiations of Minsk dragged on as the Red Army advanced, but when it had reached the outer defences of Warsaw, the Poles rallied and, taking the offensive once more, drove the Red Army back as far as Minsk itself.

Neither Power had been able to inflict final defeat upon the other, and both were in desperate need of peace, for both had endured ruinous warfare since the year 1914. There was no prospect of a decision in the field, and a peace, in which both sides abandoned their original aspirations, was negotiated. The Treaty of Riga was signed on March 18th, 1921. The frontier agreed upon by the two Powers was roughly that of the 'Second Partition' in 1793, except for the southern sector, which followed the frontier between Russia and the former Dual Monarchy. Under Article 3 of that Treaty, 'Russia and the Ukraine abandon all rights and claims to the west of the frontier.'

The new Polish-Russian frontier became one of the few of Europe's new frontiers that was not an object of grievance or contention amongst the Powers concerned. The borderland, on the Polish side, never assumed the character of an irredenta, and, although it harboured discontented minorities, those minorities did not strive for reunion with the countries of their former allegiance. In this respect it differed from other borderlands which had been part of Germany, of Austria, of Hungary, and, notably, from Bessarabia, which had been annexed by Rumania. Russia has never recognised Rumania's title to Bessarabia as she recognised Poland's title to the borderland assigned to Poland by the Treaty of Riga. For a modification in Russia's favour of the Rumanian frontier there is a case, and, indeed, a strong one. For a modification of the Russian-Polish frontier there is none.

Not even the 'right of self-determination' can be invoked in support of the Russian claim to Eastern Poland—that is to say, the territory bounded by the Russian frontier in the east and by the rivers Bug and San in the west, the territories annexed by Russia under the so-called

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Ribbentrop-Molotov Agreement and referred to by herself as 'the western districts of White Russia and of the Ukraine.' The population is ethnologically composite. It is mainly Polish, Ukrainian, and White Russian. None of these three ethnological groups has an absolute majority. The Poles claim to be the largest of these, but the objectivity of the census, carried out by Polish authorities in 1931, has been severely criticised, apparently with some reason. The Ukrainians of Eastern Galicia, in particular, have challenged the Polish figures, claiming to be more numerous than those figures indicate. Absolute precision would be unattainable in any case, for mixed parentage, bilingualism, and religion rob ethnological determinants of their validity (religious conviction is a far stronger force than national consciousness in Eastern Poland).

It is true that the two 'national minorities,' the Ukrainian and the White Russian, in Poland have an ethnological affinity with the Ukrainians and White Russians of the Soviet Union, or, what in modern German and in very recent Russian terminology is called a 'blood relationship' or 'blood brotherhood.' But neither of these minorities has ever had a general desire to be incorporated in the Soviet Union.

This is all the more noteworthy seeing that neither has been contented under Polish rule. The White Russian organisation known as the Hromada was strongly pro-Communist, and in favour of union with Russia, but, although, for a time, it had a considerable following, it never met with general assent amongst the White Russians of Poland, and lost all its influence long before the Second World War. The same is true of the semi-Communist labour movement, Selrob, of the Polish Ukraine.

The powerful U.N.D.O. (Ukrainian National Democratic Union), which commanded a large following in the Polish Ukraine, and especially in the former Austrian territory of Eastern Galicia, did indeed desire separation from Poland, but not union with Russia. It desired the creation of a Ukrainian state, extending from the Caucasus into Central Europe, and independent of Russia as well as of Poland. The U.N.D.O. was in a state of constant conflict with the Polish authorities. But it was more anti-Russian than anti-Polish, even after the inhuman 'Pacification of Eastern Galicia' by the Poles in 1930. The aspirations on the U.N.D.O. and of the U.M.O. (Ukrainian Military Organisation), could not have been fulfilled without the dismemberment of Russia as well as of Poland. It based its hopes on Germany and on war between Germany and Russia. These hopes have proved entirely deceptive.

Pro-Russian sentiment amongst even the poorer peasantry of the Polish eastern borderland was chilled not only by the fate of the churches in Russia but by the 'collectivisation' of the Russian farms in 1932. When the Second World War began, pro-German sentiment was not as strong as it had seemed, for the Ukrainian troops in the Polish army fought with courage and discipline. But it still existed. It was, however, killed by the German occupation. In Eastern Poland, as elsewhere, the Germans have forfeited local sympathies by their brutality and their lack

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8 The Ukrainians of Eastern Galicia strove for union with the Russian Ukraine, but on condition that it should be separated from the rest of Russia.
of human understanding. What little may have been left of pro-Russian opinion amongst the Ukrainians and White Russians of Poland was killed by the terrible experience of the Russian occupation of Eastern Poland from September, 1939, until July, 1941. Oppressive as they had found Polish rule in the past, both the White Russians and the Ukrainians living within the frontiers of the Polish Republic, certainly prefer it both to Russian and to German rule. 5

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When the Treaty of Riga had been signed in 1921, relations between Russia and Poland improved steadily. A certain distrust of Poland persisted in Moscow, but chiefly because of apprehensions lest she might be forced by France, Great Britain and the United States to follow an anti-Russian policy—apprehensions which were not justified by events. Even Communist writers bore witness to the improved relationship between Moscow and Warsaw. For example, the Polish Communist, Domski, writing in the official journal of the Comintern, International Press Correspondence, a year after the Treaty of Riga was signed, on March 14th, 1922, declared that one of the main characteristics of Polish foreign policy lies in its peace policy towards Soviet Russia. 6

On March 15th, 1923, the Conference of Ambassadors, representing the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States, recognized the frontiers of the Polish Republic, including, specifically, the frontiers as defined in the Treaty of Riga. On July 25th, 1932, Poland and Russia signed a 'Pact of Non-Agression.' In the Preamble to this pact, the Treaty of Riga was reaffirmed, and under Article 1 the signatories pledged themselves to abstain from 'any act of violence attacking the integrity and inviolability of the territory or the political independence' of the other, and to 'avoid all possible warlike manifestations.' Under Article 3 each of the signatories undertook 'not to be a party to any agreement openly hostile to the other.'

On July 3rd, 1933, an agreement was signed at London 7 by the representatives of Russia and her neighbours Poland, Rumania, Estonia, Latvia, Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan. Under Article 2 of this agreement, if one of the signatory Powers invades the territory of another with its armed forces, 'with or without a declaration of war,' that Power shall be regarded as an aggressor.

On February 14th, 1934, Mr. Litvinoff spoke on behalf of the Russian Government at a reception given in honour of the Polish Foreign Minister, Mr. Beck, at Moscow. Mr. Litvinoff referred in warmest terms to the excellent relationship that existed between Russia and Poland and to the profound process of rapprochement which 'largely occurred during

1 Italics in the original.
2 For official texts of documents relating to Polish-Russian, Polish-German, and Anglo-Polish relations from 1933-9, v. The Polish White Book (Hutchinson, London).
3 The Warsaw Defence Command did not sue for an armistice until September 29th.
which will correspond to their national characteristics.' Under Article 1
of this agreement, the 'frontier' between the Russian and German 'State
interests in the territory of the former Polish State' was defined (a map
being appended). Under Article 2, this frontier was recognised as 'final'
by both Powers. Under the same Article they declared that they would
'resist any interference with this decision on the part of other Powers.'

In this way the Fourth Partition of Poland was accomplished.9 She
was divided, almost equally between Germany and Russia.10 The two
halves were not merely subjected to military occupation by Germany and
Russia, they were annexed. Of the 'New Order' which the
Germans imposed much has become public knowledge since. Less is
known of the 'New Order' imposed by the Russians. But before we
examine the latter—and the events which resulted therefrom—let us
examine the relationship established between Poland and Great Britain.
The Anglo-Polish Agreement for Mutual Assistance was signed on August
25th, 1939. Under Article 1, Great Britain pledged herself to give 'all
the support and assistance in her power' if Poland were to 'become
engaged in hostilities with a European Power in consequence of aggression
by the latter.' Article 2 gave precision to Article 1, in so far as Great
Britain pledged herself to support Poland if her independence were
threatened 'directly or indirectly' by a European Power and she 'con-
sidered it vital' to offer armed resistance.

Great Britain honoured her pledge on September 3rd, 1939, by going
to war with Germany.11 It should be observed that the Anglo-Polish
Agreement contains no specific reference to Germany, nor does it specifically
pledge either Great Britain or Poland to wage war in defence of the
other. But it was clear—and any other interpretation would have been
as pernicious as it would have been impolitic—that when Poland was
attacked, Great Britain could only 'give all the support and assistance in
her power' by going to war with Germany. Poland, when she was
attacked by Russia 'reserved the right' to invoke the Treaties in force
between her and her Allies. Great Britain and France12 had a clear
casus belli with Russia, but to make war on Russia as well as on Germany in
the situation as it was in September, 1939, would have helped neither
them nor Poland. Their own survival as independent Powers, and that
of Poland also, depended on the total defeat of Germany which, as
events were to show, could not have been accomplished if Russia had
been an enemy instead of an Ally. Nor did Poland make use of the

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9 The three previous partitions were in 1772, 1793 and 1795–6.
10 The eastern part, annexed by Russia, comprises just over one-half of the territory
of the Polish Republic, and over one-third of the population.
11 On September 19th, a message from the people of Britain 'was broadcast to the City of Warsaw,' declaring that 'all the world is admiring your courage,' that Poland had
become the standard bearer of liberty in Europe,' and that 'we, your Allies, intend to
continue the struggle for the restoration of your liberties.'
12 The Polish-French alliance had been reinforced so as to bring it into conformity
with the Anglo-Polish alliance by a 'Protocol,' signed on September 4th, 1939 (Polish