

SOVIET-POLISH RELATIONS, 1919-1921

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SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
DEPARTMENT OF CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

SEPTEMBER 2008

ABSTRACT

The Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921 was a direct consequence of the ideological objectives pursued by the belligerents. Ideology shaped the political agenda and the diametrically opposed war aims of both states, and was implemented through the foreign policy, diplomatic negotiation and military engagements pursued. This proved to be *the* principal obstacle to the establishment of cordial relations. As western democracy and Russian Marxism battled it out, war was inevitable.

Externally, the Paris Peace Conference provided the necessary conditions for the resumption of traditional Russian-Polish hostilities, whilst the Allied States consistently demonstrated their absolute inability to directly influence either the development, or outcome, of the conflict.

Redressing the balance of historiography, this thesis includes a greater examination of the conflict from the perspective of the Soviet regime. This firmly controlled the Russian decision-making process. By charting the war, it becomes clear that both states deliberately pursued a dual offensive: traditional diplomatic negotiation and military campaign as conditions dictated. However, in addition, Soviet Russia developed a unique and innovative, revolutionary, *agit-prop*, diplomatic medium. This enabled adept Soviet diplomats to win the majority of diplomatic battles during the conflict, although often negotiating from a militarily weak position.

Nevertheless, the regime ultimately failed in its objective: to ignite socialist revolution in western Europe. The mistaken Soviet decision in July 1920 to cross the ethnographic border to forcefully sovietise Poland, in opposition to Marxist doctrine, irreversibly altered the complexion of the war and proved its pivotal turning point. This culminated politically with the short-lived establishment of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee in Białystok, and militarily, with the decisive defeat of the Red Army at the Battle of Warsaw. It is now certain that the Red Army offensive into Poland in July 1920 aimed not only at the sovietisation of Poland, but at spreading the socialist revolution to Western Europe and overthrowing the Versailles settlement.

The European revolutionary upsurge had largely extinguished during the previous year and in August 1920, Communist ideology ultimately failed to inspire the vast majority of the Polish population. Thus, by utilising the Soviet military to secure its war aims, Lenin and the *Politburo* inadvertently signed the death-warrant of socialist revolution in Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks are due to my supervisor Professor Richard Berry, for his patience and support in guiding me through this work over the past few years. His professionalism, insights and stimulating discussions have helped to make this research experience all the more enjoyable. I thank you.

I would also like to show my appreciation to my department, to whom I have been affiliated for many years, for its continued support. Its strong research tradition, which continues to grow from strength to strength, has provided an excellent environment in which to work.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the staff at the various archival repositories and libraries which I visited. Their knowledge, expertise and interest in the subject were of great help. Particular mention must be made of the exceptional help provided by Mr Andrzej Suchitz at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, London, to Pań Kowalski and his enthusiastic colleagues at the Piłsudski Institute, London, and to my colleagues at Glasgow University Library.

Without the support and love of my wonderful family and friends, this work would never have been completed.

To my mum and dad, for their constant love, unfailing belief in me and regular babysitting offers, I cannot say a big enough thank you.

To my friends, for the endless cups of coffee, late night chats and continued support, a huge thank you. You know who you are!

Most of all I would like to thank Neil for his love, unflinching support and proof-reading abilities, throughout the years. Thank you for everything. I could never have done it without you.

Finally, to our wonderful daughter, Caitlin, this is for you.

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Note on Orthography

Polish names are given in Polish (Julian Marchlewski, Feliks Dzierżyński). Russian names have been transliterated from Cyrillic into English using the Library of Congress System. Where accepted English versions of both place and peoples' names are well established, these are used (Warsaw, Brest-Litovsk, Trotsky). For places which have been allocated a variety of names in the period 1919-1921 (e.g. Lwów, Lvov, Lviv, Lemberg; Kraków, Cracow; Wilno, Vilna, Vilnius)¹, the name most widely used in 1919-1921 has been adopted, with the exception of quotations where they appear exactly as in the original.

Note on Dates

Until 31 January 1918, Russia followed the Julian calendar, which ran 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar, used in Western Europe. The Soviet Government adopted the Gregorian calendar on 31 January 1918. The following day was dated 14 February. Dates concerning domestic Russian events are given in the Julian calendar until 31 January 1918 and in the Gregorian after that date. Dates relating to international events, including the Great War, are given in the Gregorian calendar.

¹ For further details see, Appendix B: *Variant Place-names*

Introduction

1. Introduction

The Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921 was a direct consequence of the Soviet and Polish leaders' ideological objectives. Soviet Russia, guided by Marxist ideology, sought to export socialist revolution to the western world, whilst rival federalist and annexationist agendas fought to become the dominant philosophy in Poland. Both states attempted to implement these ideologies through the political, diplomatic and military policies adopted during the conflict.

In examining the development of Polish-Soviet relations during these crucial years, this thesis pays particular attention to the respective diplomatic and foreign policies pursued as these directly reflected the ideological and political objectives of both states. In this way, it will address the principal obstacles to the establishment of cordial relations between the neighbouring states, from the outset of the conflict in February 1919 to its conclusion at the Treaty of Riga in March 1921.

Previous accounts of the war have been written primarily, from the Polish perspective. To date, the most notable works in English on the Polish-Soviet War were written by Norman Davies, Piotr Wandycz and Adam Zamoyski. *White Eagle, Red Star: the Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20* by Davies, was one of the first historical works to highlight the war and the possibility of further research into the topic, but is primarily an examination of the military conflict.¹ Likewise, Zamoyski's *The Battle for the Marchlands*, provides an important military evaluation.² *Soviet-Polish Relations, 1917-1921* is an excellent account by Wandycz, but it is two-dimensional, focusing largely on relations between Russia and Poland, and readily admits that it provides no detailed analysis of the international situation.³ Moreover, these sources were first written thirty to forty years ago and although all three authors read Russian, they were unable to visit and utilise the sources stored in the then Soviet archives. Consequently, an examination of their bibliographies demonstrates a heavy reliance on Polish and Western sources.

¹ N. Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: the Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20*, (London, reprinted 2003, 1st edition 1972).

² A. Zamoyski, *The Battle for the Marchlands*, (New York, 1981).

³ P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations, 1917-1921*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1969).

Before 1990, detailed study of the history of Polish-Soviet relations was forbidden under the Communist authorities in both Russia and Poland, and careful analysis of existing Soviet historical accounts is required. For instance, Trotsky claimed that in the Soviet sponsored documentary collection, *Krasnaia Kniga*, "...we reported all documents, not concealing any at all".⁴ This was untrue: the collection of diplomatic documents is, in fact, highly selective. Indeed, Soviet documentary collections often failed to mention the Red Army defeat at the Battle of Warsaw and resultant Polish victory at all.⁵ Moreover, the communist regime concealed all information which would have implicated Lenin personally in subversive activities, including his support for the Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee (*Polrevkom*) and his demands for a Soviet offensive into ethnographic Poland in July 1920.⁶ *Istoriia Pol'shi* is one example of extreme Soviet historical bias in its treatment of the Polish-Soviet War.⁷ Since the collapse of communism, much new material has been published in Poland.⁸ In sharp contrast, the history of the Polish-Soviet War has largely remained a blank spot in Russian historiography. Even today, many Russian historians appear keen to avoid raising inevitable difficult questions about the first defeat experienced by the Red Army at the hands of a foreign adversary.⁹

This work seeks to redress the balance of historiography, aided by the opening of the Russian archives following the collapse of the Soviet Union. A research trip to Moscow, conducted primarily in the rich archives of the *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii* (RGASPI) (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History), allowed access to collections previously unused by western researchers.¹⁰ The thesis also draws upon little used collections at the extensive archives of the *Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. Gen. Sikorskiego* (Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum); *Archiwum Instytutu Józefa*

⁴ I.I. Kostiuszko (ed.), *Pol'sko-Sovetskaia Voina 1919-1920: ranee ne opublikovannye dokumenty i materialy*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1994), doc. 116, p. 189; *Krasnaia Kniga: sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov o rusko-pol'skikh otnosheniiakh, 1918-1920*, (Moscow, 1920)

⁵ See, for example, V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31, (Moscow, 1966), p. 14.

⁶ When correspondence was especially sensitive, Lenin insisted that no copies be made and the original destroyed, R. Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin: from the Secret Archive*, (New Haven, 1996), p. 4.

⁷ *Istoriia Pol'shi*, (Moscow, 1958)

⁸ These include: M. Drozdowski (ed.), *Międzynarodowe Aspekty Wojny Polsko-Bolszewickiej, 1919-1920: antologia tekstów historycznych*, (Warsaw, 1996); U. Olech, *Wojna Polsko-Sowiecka 1919-1921: Materiały do bibliografii*, (Warsaw, 1990); J. Slusarczyk, *Polska a Państwo Radzieckie: Kalendarium 1918-1939*, (Warsaw, 1996); S. Bieleń, *Polska-Rosja Czas Przewartościowań*, (Warsaw: Centrum Badań Wschodnich Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1995); A. Koryn (ed.), *Wojna Polsko-Sowiecka 1920 roku: przebieg walki tło międzynarodowe*, (Warsaw, 1991); J. Szczepański, *Spółeczeństwo Polski w Walce z Najazdem Bolszewickim 1920 rok*, (Warsaw, 2000).

⁹ See, E. Kridl Valkenier, "Glasnost' and filling in the 'Blank Spots' in the History of Polish-Soviet relations, 1987-1990," in *Polish Review*, vol. 36, (1991), pp. 247-267; P. Wandycz, "Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Poland," in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 97, no. 4, (1992), pp. 1011-1025.

¹⁰ Some difficulties in using Russian archives do remain. Access to the personal files of Feliks Dzierżyński at RGASPI was denied to the author.

Piłsudskiego (the Piłsudski Institute), and The National Archives in London, and the National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Research was also conducted using numerous primary source materials held at: the Lenin Library, Moscow; Glasgow University Library; the Mitchell Library, Glasgow; the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; Stirling University Library; the British Library, London; the Centre for Russian and East European Studies Library, University of Birmingham, and Manchester Public Library. A large number of documentary collections, including recent publications not available to previous historians of the conflict, have also been consulted.¹¹ Newspapers reflecting the involvement of the major players in the war have been analysed, including those from Russia, Poland, Britain and France, and this international aspect is further reflected in the examination of a large number of memoir sources and original works by participants.

These factors have enabled the present reexamination of the Polish-Soviet War, including a greater examination of the conflict from the perspective of the Soviet regime than it has previously received. Its motivations, objectives, victories and defeats in the political, foreign policy and diplomatic battles with Poland and the wider international community, are assessed. This is essential if a balanced examination of the war is to be reached. In order, however, to research events surrounding the Polish-Soviet War as fully as possible, the present work also seeks to address the Polish dimension, utilising previously untapped resources in Polish and British archival collections, to shed light on Poland's political and diplomatic history at the time of the war, 1919-1921.

Chapter 1 examines the historical context of the war as this was to prove crucial for its outbreak, development and eventual settlement. Firstly, externally, the role of the Great War and the resultant Paris Peace Conference provided the necessary conditions for a resumption of the centuries' old Polish-Russian hostilities from 1919 to 1921. Until now, the role of the Paris peace-makers on the development of Polish-Soviet relations has largely been overlooked. Secondly, internally, ideological motivation directed the action of both states throughout the conflict, yet the ideology of Soviet Russia, in particular, has received little attention from historians of the war. As this is fundamental to our understanding of the conflict, this thesis seeks to redress the balance. This chapter is based primarily on the archival collections of the Polish Institute, the Piłsudski Institute, The

¹¹ Including most notably, I. I. Kostushko.

National Archives and the National Archives of Scotland, supplemented by previously underused documentary collections and eye-witness accounts.

Diplomatic negotiation and foreign policy initiatives were a continuous feature of Polish-Soviet relations during the war and were, in conjunction with military directives, employed to implement the respective state ideologies. Chapter 2, firstly, addresses the interdependent diplomatic-foreign policy relationship in both Soviet Russia and Poland, highlighting their ideological objectives. The Soviet decision-making process is examined, for the first time in the context of the war, to provide insights into the direction pursued by the regime in its Polish policy, whilst previously unused archival documents clearly demonstrate Polish strategy in the war with Russia. The chapter then assesses the practical implementation of their ideologies during the first year of the war, through the diplomacy, foreign policy and military objectives pursued. This, primarily, draws on little-used archival sources, memoir accounts and recently published documentary collections.

Chapter 3 charts the development of the war from January to July 1920, with particular reference to the diplomatic field which directly responded to changes and shifts in Soviet policy. It answers the questions: why did the war, and the diplomacy surrounding it, progress as it did? In addition, it assesses ongoing Allied involvement in the conflict, building upon their positions adopted at the Paris Peace Conference. Both Poland and Russia continued to pursue dual policies: diplomatic negotiation and military campaign, but for the first four months of the year, it was the former which took centre stage. As the year progressed, Poland became an increasing concern for Russia and so the chapter examines the three-pronged Soviet offensive launched: traditional and revolutionary diplomacy, agitational-propaganda and military engagement, evaluating the ability of the regime to successfully win the majority of diplomatic battles, despite fighting from a militarily weak position.

By April, a military solution was sought by Piłsudski, driven by his ideological programme, transforming the war in scale and intensity, before the following three months witnessed a concerted Soviet counter-offensive which threatened the heart of the Polish state. The decision in July to cross the ethnographic border to forcefully sovietise Poland, taken in opposition to Marxist doctrine, irreversibly altered the complexion of the war. This culminated politically, with the establishment of a Provisional Revolutionary Committee in Białystok and militarily, with the decisive Battle of Warsaw the following

month. For this chapter, the source material is drawn primarily from the collections at The National Archives, and previously unpublished documentary collections.

One of the most significant events of the Polish-Soviet War was the establishment, at the height of the conflict, of the Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee (*Polrevkom*) in Białystok, in July 1920, yet its origins, objectives and activities have been little studied by historians. Chapter 4 will, for the first time, provide a detailed evaluation of the *Polrevkom*, for its importance cannot be underestimated. If the Polish-Soviet War formed part of the Soviet regime's earliest venture to export revolution by military force westwards, the *Polrevkom* was its first attempt to establish a Soviet Socialist Republic in ethnographic Poland. This was the culmination of the practical implementation of Soviet ideology in Polish territory and consequently, had lasting implications for the evolution of relations between Russia and Poland.

In particular, the relationship of the *Polrevkom* with the Russian Communist Party (RKP(b)) will be examined, to determine the extent to which the latter provided a blueprint for its work. New light is shed on its aims, its immediate tasks, most notably in the pressing economic fields of industry and agriculture, and its heavy involvement in disseminating Marxist ideology through the expansion of the Soviet propaganda offensive, to both the Polish and *Entente* populations. The chapter will conclude by assessing the reception accorded to the Committee's ideological programme by the Polish inhabitants, which proved crucial to its fate, before evaluating its lasting consequences for the two states. Its failings proved to be those of the entire Soviet foreign policy and diplomatic agenda during the conflict, and as such deserve greater examination than previously received. This chapter is primarily based on sources held in *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii*.

Chapter 5 provides a reassessment the decisive months of July and August 1920 for the outcome of the Polish-Soviet War, by drawing on previously unused archival resources at The National Archives and Polish Institute, and recently published Russian archival collections. Both states stepped up their diplomatic offensives and propaganda drives as the military situation intensified and they continued to play to an international audience. *Entente* intransigence, first witnessed at the Paris Peace Conference, reached its zenith during these two months, and this chapter will examine the ineffectual responses of the Allies to appeals from both Poland and Russia for assistance and demonstrate just how out of touch they had become from the reality of the situation.

This period proved absolutely critical. It witnessed the climax of Polish diplomatic-military advances, and Soviet Russia's three-pronged ideological attack, first begun in early 1919: diplomatic manoeuvring; *agit-prop* offensive and military engagement. Ideologically, these months were absolutely vital for the Soviet regime: by temporarily overlooking Marxist doctrine, it inadvertently signalled a turning point in its ideological development. This would have lasting repercussions for the future of the Russian Revolution. Consequently, the chapter will conclude by asking if Soviet Russia was misguided, idealistic and too optimistic in the policies pursued, or was there a possibility that international revolution could have broken out during the conflict? The answers to these questions shed light on developments within both Soviet Russia and Poland at the cessation of hostilities.

Finally, chapter 6 considers the last diplomatic acts of the Polish-Soviet War. The negotiations which began at Minsk in August 1920 were finally concluded with the signing of The Treaty of Riga in March 1921. This chapter will examine how the Soviet regime, yet again, tactically manoeuvred to gain the upper hand at the negotiating tables, despite being militarily defeated. New information about the peace talks has been gathered primarily from the archival collections, held at the Polish Institute and The National Archives, allowing a reassessment of the diplomats' achievements in the months leading up to the treaty signing. Documentary collections and memoir accounts provide additional information about the events. What were the objectives of both delegations and to what extent did this reflect their initial ideological aims at the outset of the war? How successful was the treaty for the contracting parties? Was the ideological programme of either belligerent implemented? How was the peace settlement received in Russia, Poland and internationally? And did it successfully resolve the age-old Polish-Russian conflict? These questions will be considered, before the conclusion to the thesis draws together its various integral themes.

2. What was the Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1921?

An evaluation of the Polish-Soviet War by its participants or by historians fails to provide a consensus as to its definition and nature. What type of war was it? The conflict, quite simply, represented a different war to the different sides and participants involved. For the leadership of the Russian Communist Party (RKP(b)), the contest was initially viewed as both a continuation, and an extension, of the Russian Civil War, by which

domestic and foreign opponents had threatened to overthrow the Soviet regime, since its formation in October 1917. In contrast, for the large majority of Poles, the confrontation, from the outbreak of military engagements in February 1919, was regarded as a national war against a foreign adversary. Finally, for others, including many Western contemporaries and historians, the Polish-Soviet War represented not simply a clash of socialist versus nationalist ideologies, but embodied a continuation of centuries-long hostilities between two neighbouring states, which was to have lasting implications for Europe and the wider world at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹²

2.1 Soviet/Russian Interpretation

The Marxist ideology of Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky and the RKP(b) conditioned the Soviet leadership to regard the Polish-Soviet conflict as a “class” war, to be fought against the bourgeois ruling classes of “White-Guard Poland”.¹³ On 6 March 1920, Lenin informed the Moscow Soviet of Workers’ and Red Army Deputies that the conflict was a class war, instigated by the Polish landowners, capitalists and imperialists, “...because they feel their end approaching”.¹⁴ Over the next year, this was to become a recurrent theme in the writings and speeches of RKP(b) members. For instance, on 5 May 1920, in a speech to Red Army soldiers departing for the Polish Front, Lenin confirmed that the regime was fighting, “Polish magnates, landowners, and capitalists”, not the working class, and warned, “Remember, Comrades, we have no quarrel with the Polish peasants and workers”.¹⁵

However, despite the promotion of this viewpoint, the Communist Party leaders were persistently opposed by individuals, even within their own party, who regarded the war as having a nationalist component. For example, Evgenii Preobrazhenskii felt compelled to write about the national-class debate to Lenin, no later than 5 May 1920, and demand that action be taken against colleagues who strayed from the class interpretation. He stated, “I propose to cease the unseemly ‘patriotism’”. Radek, in a speech, referred to the ‘National

¹² See, *Chapter 1*.

¹³ Soviet contemporaries and historians advocated this interpretation. For example, Soviet Western Front Commander, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, who directed the Soviet advance towards Warsaw in July-August 1920, spoke of Poland’s entry into the already existing civil war, M.N. Tukhachevsky, “Pokhod za Vislu” in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1964), p. 114.

¹⁴ V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 40, (Moscow, 1965) p. 196, (hereafter *PSS*); *Izvestiia*, 7 March 1920.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, vol. 41, pp. 110-111. This official line was promoted by the RKP(b) newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, 6 May 1920. See also, *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii Sovetsko-Pol’skikh otnoshenii*, (Moscow, 1965), vol. 3, doc. 18, pp. 40-41, (hereafter *D & M*).

war'. Today in *Agitrosta*, Bergman published an indecent article concerning love of the homeland by the true Russian people".¹⁶ So concerned was Lenin about the presentation of the war that he immediately responded,

I propose the directive: all articles about Poland, the Polish war, to be looked through by responsible editors as their personal responsibility. Do not exaggerate, do not fall into chauvinism, always to single out *PANS* and capitalists from the workers and peasants of Poland.¹⁷

In this policy, the Soviet leader was fully supported by Leon Trotsky who, as Commissar for War, knew only too well the importance of presenting a united class programme to the workers and peasants of Russia and Poland, whom he required to enlist as Red Army recruits. Consequently, Trotsky ordered the closing down of the Soviet General Staff's periodical *Voennoe Delo* after it had published an article about the Poles which had used language,

...riddled through and through with a spirit of crude chauvinism. It is enough to mention that the article speaks of the 'innate jesuitry of the Polacks', which is contrasted with the honest and straightforward spirit of the Great-Russian race. There is no need to explain how greatly this sort of crude and false generalisation contradicts the spirit of fraternity which inspires the attitude of the Russian working class towards the working masses of Poland.¹⁸

The Polish-Soviet War was not, however, identified by the Soviet regime simply as a continuation of the class war against domestic opponents in the Russian Civil War. With the explicit objective of spreading socialist revolution across national borders, westwards to the advanced capitalist countries, the Russian communists aimed to turn the Russian Civil War into an international war between the classes. As a result, the inevitable danger facing Soviet Russia from the class opponents of the worldwide proletariat was a constant refrain of the Soviet leaders in 1919-1921. Not only was the new opponent facing Soviet Russia in 1919 a recently reestablished foreign state, but the Russian communists also firmly believed that Poland was a puppet manipulated from behind the scenes by Britain and France.¹⁹

¹⁶ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 47, p. 88. See, *Biographical Notes*.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 88-89; V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 51, doc. 338, p. 193. *PAN* was the Soviet term for a Polish landowner.

¹⁸ L.D. Trotsky, *The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky: how the revolution armed*, (trans. Brian Pearce), vol. 3, (London, 1981), p. 209. However, as the war progressed, Trotsky increasingly appreciated the important role which nationalism could play in securing support for the Communist regime.

¹⁹ Traditionally, Soviet historians stressed this interpretation of the war. For instance, B. Ponomaryov et al, argued that, "...the imperialists were pushing Poland into an adventure", B. Ponomaryov, A. Gromyko & V. Khvostov (eds.), *History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1945*, (Moscow, 1969), p. 128.

This succeeded in giving the war an international dimension and transformed the civil war from a domestic affair into a conflict with much wider implications. According to Lenin, "...it is not only the Russian or Polish question that is being decided, but the question of their [the imperialists'] own survival".²⁰ Following the failure of Allied intervention during the civil war to bring about the downfall of the Soviet regime, Lenin believed that the Polish-Soviet War, "...marked a new attempt by the Allies to destroy the Soviet Republic... this time with the help of Poland".²¹ In a speech to the Joint Session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, the Moscow Soviet of Workers', Peasants' and Red Army Deputies, trade unions and factory committees, on 5 May 1920, he reiterated,

...this war is a link in a long chain of events revealing the international bourgeoisie's frantic resistance to the victorious proletariat, a frantic attempt by the international bourgeoisie to crush Soviet Russia, to overthrow the first Soviet State at all costs and by all means.²²

Even after the defeat of the Red Army at the Battle of Warsaw in August 1920, Lenin remained unshaken in his belief that the war had been fought not only against their near-neighbour, but had also been waged against the British and French. Accordingly, on 2 October 1920, ten days before the peace preliminaries which ended the conflict were signed, Lenin informed workers in the leather industry that,

...the chief thing pushing the Poles into war with us was, of course, the power of international capital.... It was a new attempt by the Allies to destroy the Soviet Republic.... The Versailles treaty has turned Poland into a buffer state, which is to fence Germany off from contact with Soviet communism, and is regarded by the *Entente* as a weapon against the Bolsheviks.²³

However, despite the Soviet leaders' best efforts to direct opinion on the nature of the conflict, as the war progressed, a diverse range of individuals began to regard it in increasingly nationalistic terms.²⁴ These included such unlikely bedfellows as the Chairman of the Third Communist International (*Comintern*), Grigorii Evseevich

²⁰ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 114.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321. Here, however, Lenin misread the situation. Throughout the conflict, the Poles were guided by Piłsudski who consistently acted on his own initiative, with little regard for Allied wishes.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 112. See, *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 18, p. 40.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 320-324; *Pravda*, 9 & 10 October 1920. Degras dated this meeting 8 October 1920, J. Degras, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. 1, (London, 1951), pp. 217-218.

²⁴ Historians who view the conflict as a national war, not an integral element of the Russian Civil War include: Norman Davies, who wrote that, "...the Polish-Soviet War was different", N. Davies, *White Eagle*, p. 21; Beryl Williams argued that, "The Russo-Polish War was a separate affair", B. Williams, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1921*, (Oxford, 1987), p. 69, whilst Richard Pipes viewed the conflict as, "...a conventional war between two sovereign states over territory", R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, 1917-1924*, (London, 1994), p. 7.

Zinoviev; prominent Polish Communists such as Karol Radek and Pavel Lapiński; former Russian Tsarist officers, including Aleksei Alekseevich Brusilov; and foreign statesmen, such as the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George.²⁵ Indeed, disagreements over the complexion of the war were to have serious implications for RKP(b) ideology as its leaders were forced to acknowledge the potential support which could be gained by playing the national card.

As Marxists, the Russian and Polish communists had no respect for patriotic sentiment and were fervently anti-nationalist. However, Piłsudski's offensive towards Ukraine in April 1920, and resultant occupation of Kiev on 6-7 May, had a dramatic impact on the Russian population. Previously, the war had been fought on territory far from ethnic Russian lands, but with the deep advance of the Polish Army eastwards towards the Russian border, Russians of all political persuasions were stirred to action. According to one British observer,

...partly despair and disillusionment in their hope of peace, and partly the traditional enmity which has grown up between the Russians and the Poles, were responsible for a sudden ebullience of Russian national feeling in what was regarded as a war against unprovoked aggression.²⁶

This Russian national component of the war was also recognised by foreign statesmen. On 29 February 1920, for instance, the Czechoslovak Minister for Foreign Affairs, F.A. Beneš, observed that, "...the Bolshevik Government was now taking a national line... and a war against Poland would undoubtedly be popular in Russia".²⁷ Speaking of the Poles' April offensive into Ukraine, Lloyd George remarked,

...the action of the Poles had consolidated Russian nationalism.... Russians of all classes were joining hands to defend Russian territory. They might fight between themselves concerning the way in which Russia should be governed, but were united in opposition to foreign aggression with the object of annexing Russian territory.²⁸

Many Russians, including former Whites who had fought against the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War, opposed the reestablishment of Polish independence, and regarded the war as a traditional conflict between two opposing states.²⁹ As a result, numerous former

²⁵ See, *Biographical Notes*.

²⁶ National Archives of Scotland, GD193/327/64, p. 52, (hereafter NAS).

²⁷ The National Archives, FO 417/8, no. 27, p. 33, (hereafter TNA). See also, NAS, GD193/327/64, p. 52.

²⁸ G. Riddell, *Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-1923*, (London, 1933), p. 199.

²⁹ These included A.I. Denikin, head of the anti-Communist forces in Southern Russia during the civil war, who fought for the reestablishment of an indivisible Russia, see A.I. Denikin, *Tragediia beloi armii: kto spas sovetskuiu vlast' ot gibeli*, (Moscow, 1991), pp. 3-12.

tsarist officers joined the ranks of the Red Army, including most famously, A.A. Brusilov, who wrote on 1 May 1920, that the, “...first measure [of the Soviet regime] must be agitation of national patriotism, without which an army cannot be strong and battleworthy”.³⁰

Unable to suppress this Russian nationalist outpouring, the Bolshevik leaders decided to harness it to their war effort and for the first time invoked the defence of the Russian nation. Lenin, himself, was forced to acknowledge the impact of this national movement, when he informed a conference of workers and Red Army men in Moscow, on 13 May 1920, that, “Even former Tsarist generals consider that Poland’s claims are unjust and are helping us”.³¹ This temporary ideological shift from actively pursuing internationalism to promoting the rising tide of Russian nationalism can be clearly observed in an appeal issued by Trotsky fifteen days later, which read, “Volunteers are needed... Russian officers, who have understood that the *Red Army is saving the Freedom and Independence of the Russian nation!* The Western Front calls you all!”³² In the same vein, Radek wrote in July 1920, “We preach that this is a war... not primarily to defend the Soviet Government and communism, but to defend the independence of Russia”.³³ Ironically, Zinoviev, Chairman of the *Comintern*, the organisation established by the RKP(b) to direct the worldwide socialist revolution, also advocated the utilisation of Russian patriotic sentiment for the Soviet cause in July 1920. In an address to Russian nationalists, he stated,

The war is becoming national. Not only the advanced sections of the peasant population but even the wealthy peasants are hostile to the advance of the Polish landowners... we Communists must be at the head of this nationalist movement, which will gain the support of the entire population and which daily grows stronger.³⁴

This remarkable statement graphically demonstrates just how far the Soviet leadership was willing to bend its ideological beliefs during the war, in the very short-term, to achieve the vital long-term goal of securing the world’s first socialist state.

2.2 Polish Interpretation

For the majority of Poles, the war with Soviet Russia in 1919-1921 was overwhelmingly perceived as a national, not a class, conflict. A long history of traditional

³⁰ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 44, p. 75.

³¹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 121; *Kommunistichesky Trud*, no. 44, 14 May 1920.

³² K. Radek, “O kharakter voini s beloi Pol’shei”, in *Pravda*, 12 May 1920.

³³ K. Radek, “The War with Poland”, in *Freiheit*, 27 July 1920 & 7 August 1920.

³⁴ *Pravda*, 18 May 1920.

hostilities between the two neighbouring states, Polish identification of Soviet objectives as a continuation of Tsarist imperialism, and an upsurge in patriotic sentiment after the Red Army crossed Poland's eastern ethnographic frontier in July 1920, promoted this interpretation. Consequently, as noted by a Western diplomat residing in Warsaw during the war,

...there would not appear to be any newly-created bond of sympathy between the working classes in the two countries strong enough to do away with the contempt and hatred which 99 per cent of the Polish race feels for all Muscovites.³⁵

Although exhausted by four years fighting in the Great War, much of which had been waged in Eastern Europe on Polish territory, when hostilities broke out between Poland and Soviet Russia in early 1919, the vast majority of Poles rallied to defend the newly established Polish state. For centuries, antagonism and disaffection had scarred Polish-Russian relations, culminating in the eighteenth century partitions of the Polish nation by Russia, Prussia and Austria.³⁶ This resulted in a strengthened and steadfast Polish patriotism, the primary objective of which was the reestablishment and defence of the Polish state. As Aleksandra Piłsudska recollected in her memoirs, throughout the Polish lands there was an, "...atmosphere of secret rebellion... the flames of resistance... were always there because never for a moment in our daily lives were we allowed to forget the Russian yoke".³⁷

This Russian repression was a reality for many Poles, whether their eastern neighbour was the Tsarist Empire or a Soviet-led regime.³⁸ Vladimir Lenin was regarded as the successor of Tsar Nikolai II, albeit in a different political form, and his objective of subjugating and occupying the Polish lands was viewed as a continuation of the Russian imperialist tradition. As noted by the Polish diplomat, Roman Debicki, during the war many Poles felt that, although, "Revolutionary Russia had recognised Poland's independence in principle... it was soon evident that the old Czarist imperialism had merely been transformed into a new one, with revolutionary slogans".³⁹ Piłsudska concurred, and argued that, "Whatever government Russia has, becomes an imperialist government because she herself is essentially imperialistic. She has only exchanged the imperialism of

³⁵ TNA, FO 417/7, no. 14, p. 31, report by Douglas Savery, a diplomat accredited to the British diplomatic corps in Poland during the war, to the Foreign Office, December 1919.

³⁶ See, *Chapter 1: Historical Conflict and the Great War, 1914-1918*, for further details.

³⁷ A. Piłsudska, *Piłsudski: a biography by his wife*, (New York, 1941), p. 81. For further details see, Archives of the Institute of Józef Piłsudski, Kolekcja 2, (hereafter Piłsudski Institute).

³⁸ TNA, FO 417/7, no. 8, p. 23.

³⁹ R. Debicki, *Foreign Policy of Poland, 1919-1939: from the rebirth of the Polish Republic to World War II*, (London, 1963), p. 14.

the Czars for the Red imperialism of the Soviets”.⁴⁰ Even Julian Marchlewski, a leading Polish communist and one of Lenin’s closest advisers during the war, was forced to concede that due to the tradition of conflict which existed between the two countries, many Poles inevitably continued to regard all Russians, regardless of their political persuasion, with deep-seated hatred.⁴¹

Polish suspicion of Soviet intentions heightened considerably when the Red Army crossed the ethnographic Polish border in July 1920. This was of decisive importance in encouraging the majority of Poles to view the conflict as a war for the defence of their homeland.⁴² The Polish newspaper, *Kurjer Poranny*, on 22 August 1920, succinctly reported the impact of the offensive, when it stated,

The Bolshevik Muscovites have entered into a compromise with Tsarist methods, and so, by overstepping Poland’s frontiers they have overstepped the culminating point of their strength and their success. The Bolshevik Muscovites have betrayed the idea of Communism.⁴³

Indeed, the inability of the RKP(b) to win Polish support for the Red Army advance was central to their failure to spread socialist revolution to Poland.⁴⁴ The Polish Socialist Party (PPS), for instance, rejecting outright the notion that the conflict was a class war, actively presented the hostilities as a national war, fought against a foreign adversary. On 15 July 1920, a party manifesto denounced the Russian advance as being driven by Russian racial hatred, whilst on 5 August, it spoke of,

....the Imperialism of the Soviets... the Red Army is not only a safeguard of the Russian revolution, but is also destined to ruin the independence of the neighbouring nations.... Who would dare reproach Polish socialists for wishing to save the independence of their country? The revolutionary mask of the invader cannot possibly prevent them from doing their duty towards Poland.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ A. Piłsudski, p. 308.

⁴¹ J. Marchlewski, *Pol’sha pod inozemnym igom*, (Moscow, 1920), p. 24; M.N. Chernykh, *Iulian Markhlevskii o Sovetsko-Pol’skikh otnosheniakh v 1918-1921 gg.*, (Moscow, 1990), p. 28.

⁴² Even the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), which had previously called for an end to hostilities, advocated the staunch defence of the Polish nation after July 1920. The only Polish political party which unequivocally supported Lenin’s view of the war as a class conflict was the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland (KPRP).

⁴³ *Kurjer Poranny*, 22 August 1920.

⁴⁴ For a detailed examination of the Soviet attempt to encourage and implement this revolution see, *Chapter 4: The Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee*.

⁴⁵ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 9, pp. 30-31, (hereafter Polish Institute); Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 24, pp. 177-178.

2.3 Conclusion

The Polish-Soviet War was, therefore, interpreted by its participants in very different ways. The understanding of the conflict by the sides involved was largely dependent upon their nationality, political affiliations and ideological beliefs. Two predominant and opposing schools of thought developed: an international, class-based interpretation and a national diagnosis. Absolute consensus on the nature of the war failed, however, to be reached in either Poland or Soviet Russia, and dissenting voices from the dominant interpretation continued to be raised throughout the conflict.

3. When did the Polish–Soviet War begin?

This ambiguity continues when examining the onset of the Polish-Soviet War. The failure of either the Polish Government or the Soviet regime to issue a formal declaration of war against their neighbouring state in 1919 or 1920 makes it extremely difficult to accurately date the outbreak of the war. This unplanned conflict developed and escalated as both sides were able to field increasingly larger armies with the progression of time and as the hostilities became of greater importance to the safety of the two regimes.⁴⁶ Traditionally, Poles have dated the conflict from November 1918, January 1919 or February 1919, whilst Soviet and Russian accounts of the war cite April 1920 as the date for the commencement of hostilities. The reasons for these divergent interpretations are numerous and varied. The terms of the German Armistice in November 1918, which ended the Great War, and the subsequent withdrawal from the *Ober-Ost* by German troops, were of crucial importance for Polish-Soviet relations.⁴⁷ Action taken by the local populations in the borderlands lying between Poland and Russia was also decisive in promoting military action between the two states in 1919, as was the simultaneous advance, supported by their respective governments, of both the Soviet and Polish armies.

3.1 Polish Interpretation

The Armistice between Germany and the Allied Powers, signed on 11 November 1918, succeeded in ending four years of fighting in the Great War. It failed, however, to bring peace to Eastern Europe. Fear that Bolshevism would find fertile soil for growth in the volatile, unstable regions of Eastern Europe, led the Allied statesmen to insert Article 12

⁴⁶ A. Zamoycki, p. 2.

⁴⁷ The *Ober-Ost* was the land occupied in Eastern Europe by the German Army during the Great War.

into the Armistice, requiring that the German Army remain in these territories until further orders were issued.⁴⁸ This proved to be impossible, however, after news of a revolution in Germany reached the army and the soldiers began to surrender their positions. As one of the three Regents in German-occupied Poland, Prince Zdislas Lubomirski, recounted,

...on the morning of November 11 everything was quiet at Warsaw and the Germans were patrolling the streets as usual. About one o'clock news came of the revolution, which had broken out in Berlin. The garrison at once proceeded to disarm its officers and to form soldiers' committees. The Poles on their side disarmed the Germans.⁴⁹

On 14 November, the newly appointed Polish Head-of-State, Józef Piłsudski, agreed to the German Army's evacuation of Polish territory and the *Ober-Ost*.⁵⁰ As the German forces had gained control of much of Eastern Europe by November 1918, including Poland, Ukraine, Belorussia and the Baltic States, their withdrawal from the region resulted in a complete redrawing of the map of Eastern Europe. The resultant political and military vacuum in the borderlands between Poland and Russia (the *kresy*) led to the first clashes between the Polish Army and the Red Army as each side quickly attempted to advance and fill the gap created.⁵¹

As a result, many Poles date the Polish-Soviet War from November 1918, including Piłsudski, who believed that, "The beginning of the war of Poland against the Soviets was in 1918 the very year when Poland had... begun to live an independent life".⁵² In contrast, the Polish Legation in London dated it from the onset of the Soviet advance, reporting that, "The war between Poland and Soviet Russia was thrust upon Poland in January 1919", whilst a British Foreign Office *Memorandum on Polish Foreign Relations* recorded,

The conflict in Polish-Russian relations practically dates from the signature of the armistice with Germany on 11 November 1918. The evacuation of the German forces... began in December 1918, and was continued throughout the following January and February (1919).⁵³

⁴⁸ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the US: the Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, vol. 2, (Washington, 1942), p. 4.

⁴⁹ TNA, FO 688/1/6, p. 560, conversation reported by Stephen Tallents, British Commissioner for the Baltic Provinces.

⁵⁰ J. Karski, *The Great Powers and Poland, 1919-1945*, (Lanham, MD., 1985), p. 31.

⁵¹ The *kresy* were the borderlands lying between Poland and Russia.

⁵² J. Piłsudski, *Rok 1920*, (London, 1987), p. 147. See also, S. Grabski, *The Polish-Soviet Front*, (London, 1943), p. 7; P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, pp. 67 & 90; J. Karski, *The Great Powers and Poland, 1919-1945*, (Lanham, MD., 1985), p. 26.

⁵³ TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 37; TNA, FO 417/9, no. 35, pp. 49-50. See also, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 4, pp. 15-17. Davies argued, "By any stretch of the imagination, the Polish-Soviet War cannot be said to have been in progress before [February 1919]", N. Davies, "The Genesis of the Polish-Soviet War," in *European Studies Review*, vol. 5, no. 1. (1975), pp. 54-55.

There was, nevertheless, little divergence of opinion in Poland as to the cause of the outbreak of war with Soviet Russia. With the exception of the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (KPRP) and the PPS-Left, almost all Poles and many Western observers, pointed to the advance of the Red Army into the *Ober-Ost* as the trigger for the commencement of hostilities between the two recently established states.⁵⁴ According to Jan Ciechanowski, the Polish *Chargé d'Affaires* to Britain,

This war was simply the result of the fact that the Germans carried out their evacuation of Lithuania and of the Eastern confines of Poland on purpose in such a way as to vacate the territory starting from the Russian side first, and evacuating the parts bordering on Poland at the end of their occupation. This resulted in the occupation by the Bolsheviks of these territories and their gradual approach to and even partial occupation of ethnographical Polish territories.⁵⁵

A British Foreign Office *Memorandum on Polish Foreign Relations* agreed, observing that, "As the Germans retired, the Bolshevik troops stepped into their place and by March had penetrated well into ethnographic Poland as far as Bialostok".⁵⁶ Within a short time, the Soviet Western Army, created on 16 November 1918, occupied large areas of Lithuania, Belorussia, Latvia and Estonia, and moved into lands which had belonged to the Polish nation before the partitions. These included the important population centres of Minsk, Wilno, Grodno, Brest-Litovsk and Białystok.⁵⁷

The Soviet military advance, entitled *Target Vistula* (*Tsel' Visla*), did not however, represent the launch of a general offensive against Poland, despite propaganda statements that the collapse of the German occupation presented Soviet Russia with the opportunity of "liberating" the Baltic territories.⁵⁸ Instead, it was a gentle probe, aimed at testing the ground for the spread of communism to the borderlands.⁵⁹ This operation had originally been outlined in October 1918 when the German *Ober-Ost* was still in existence, and before the reestablishment of the Polish state, but the directives issued used very cautious

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 5, p. 19, *Memorandum* delivered by Colonel Willey at a British Parliamentary debate *On the Polish-Bolshevik War*, 26 May 1920; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 1, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/3, doc. 11, p. 35; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 2, p. 5; Polish Institute A.12.p.3/5, doc. 4, p. 15; TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 37.

⁵⁶ TNA, FO 417/9, no. 35, pp. 49-50. See also, Piłsudski Institute, Kolekcja 2, 2/7/2a/1/1, p. 3.

⁵⁷ TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 37; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 4, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁸ *Pravda*, 14 January 1919.

⁵⁹ S. Blank, "Soviet Nationality Policy and Soviet Foreign Policy: the Polish case 1917-1921" in *The International History Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, (1985), p. 118.

language and Soviet Western Army action was restricted by the small numbers of troops at its disposal.⁶⁰

Moreover, Polish reporting of the war frequently stressed that Piłsudski and the Polish Army had embarked upon an offensive eastwards in self-defence and in response to appeals for help by the local populations of the borderlands recently occupied by the Soviets. One Polish Foreign Ministry report asserted that,

...the population... of these districts [Wilno, Grodno, Brest-Litovsk and Białystok] sent dramatic appeals to the Polish Government, the Chief-of-State, and begged for Polish intervention and liberation from Bolshevik oppression.... The Polish Government had no choice but that of forming an army, at the time composed mainly of volunteers... and of sending it to liberate the population suffering from Bolshevik tyranny.⁶¹

It is essential, however, to stress that, be this as it may, Piłsudski's prime motivation for launching an eastward advance at the end of 1918, was to secure the recently established Polish state, establish her eastern frontier with Russia and defend the country against the Soviet menace.⁶² After the Bolsheviks' annulment of the eighteenth century Partition Treaties, on 29 August 1918, the majority of Poles believed that they were simply reestablishing control over territory which had belonged to Poland prior to the illegal partitions.⁶³ Piłsudski was initially hindered in this objective, however, by the German Army's refusal to allow the Polish Army to cross into the *Ober-Ost* at Białystok until 5 February 1919.⁶⁴

On which date, then, did the two sides militarily clash for the first time? A front between the Polish Army and the Soviet Red Army developed only gradually. A report issued by the Polish Army General Headquarters stated that, at 4pm on 1 January 1919, Wilno was partly evacuated by German troops, who withdrew to the suburbs of Pohulanka and Komuny, resulting in the peaceful establishment of a demarcation line between the German and Polish troops in the city.⁶⁵ It continued,

⁶⁰ *Direktyvy komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi Armii (1917-1920). Sbornik dokumentov*, vol. 4, no. 13, (Moscow, 1969), p. 51 (hereafter *DKFKA*); N. Davies, "Genesis", p. 55.

⁶¹ TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 37; Polish Institute A.12.P.3/5, doc. 4, pp. 16-17. For an expansion of this theme see, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 11, p. 35; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 2, p. 5. A further Polish Foreign Ministry report stated that, "The patriotic sympathies of the whole nation responded. The Polish authorities had no choice. A policy of non-interference would have caused immediate revolution. No hesitation was possible. It was a case of rescuing Polish nationals from certain doom", Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 1, p. 3.

⁶² See, *Chapter 1*, for an assessment of his aims.

⁶³ P. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies, 1919-1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno*, (Westport, Conn., 1974), p. 120.

⁶⁴ *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 68, pp. 84-88.

⁶⁵ Polish Institute, A.12.P.1/3, doc. 2, p. 5.

During the night of the 3rd January the Germans left the city which was immediately attacked by the Bolsheviks, acting evidently in full accord with the Germans.... Polish troops resisted until their munitions were completely exhausted.⁶⁶

Similar scenes were reenacted throughout the borderlands as the Germans withdrew and the Soviets advanced.

An extremely important document was issued by the Polish Army General HQ on 20 March 1919. This official account dated the outbreak of fighting between Poland and Soviet Russia to the beginning of the previous month, by which time Polish troops had crossed the eastern frontiers of the former Kingdom of Poland and advanced in two separate directions: White Ruthenia and Volhynia. This report, dispatched to the Polish Government and Polish Foreign Ministry (*MSZ*), stated that on the White-Ruthenian [Belorussian] front,

The first encounter with small detachments of Bolshevik troops was near Purzany on February 2nd. Cavalry Captain Dabrowski at the head of the Wilno Volunteers occupied after victorious fighting, the town of Pruzany... and occupied Liskowa and Zabinka (district Kobryn).⁶⁷

The Polish Army advanced, occupying the important population centres of Brest-Litovsk (9 February), Białystok (19 February) and Antopol and Drohiczyn. On 21 February, they encountered Bolshevik forces at Dąbrowa, before reaching the line Dąbrowa, Szczucin and Zaludek on 23 February.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, on the Volhynia Front, the Polish Army General Staff reported that their troops, under the command of General Rydz-Śmigły, had occupied the important railway junction of Kowel, evacuated by the Germans on 5 February 1919. They then advanced on Kowel, Poworsk and Holoby, before engaging the Bolsheviks on 18 February at Maniewicz.⁶⁹ By 25 February, Polish troops held the line Słonin, Pińsk and Łuck.⁷⁰

It is, therefore, certain that by the outset of February 1919, hostilities had begun.⁷¹ Although no formal state of war existed between Poland and Soviet Russia, over the following twelve months the Polish Army extended its front more than 250 miles east of

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Polish Institute, A.12.P.1/3, doc. 3, p. 6. In contrast, Davies dated the outbreak of fighting between Soviet Russia and Poland to 14 February 1919, at Bereza Kartuska in Belorussia, N. Davies, *Genesis*, p. 54.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 7, "Taking 52 guns, 3 trains (one armoured) and immense stores of war material".

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ The majority of contemporary Polish observers and historians and many Western accounts date the conflict to various dates in February. See, M.K. Dzięwanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland: an outline history*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), p. 82; P. Wandycz, *France*, p. 120; P. Stachura, *Poland between the Wars, 1918-1939*, (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 44; R. Pipes, pp. 178-179.

the ethnographic Polish border, before halting at the River Berezina. The conflict thereafter developed into a war on a much larger scale and was fought with increasing numbers of troops and resources, as both Poland and Soviet Russia sought to establish control of the borderland territories necessary to secure their infant regimes.

3.2 Soviet Interpretation

For communists, politicians, military leaders and official historians of Soviet Russia, the starting date for the war with Poland was consistently given as April 1920. Although military engagements between the Polish Army and Soviet troops, throughout 1919, were of crucial importance for the security and development of the Polish state, these manoeuvres were largely conducted on territories which had belonged to pre-partition Poland and did not, therefore, directly threaten Soviet Russia. Indeed, until April 1919, the Soviet authorities asserted that the fighting was not between Poland and Soviet Russia at all, but was fought by Poland and the Lithuanian-Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (*LitBel SSSR*).⁷²

It was only with the Polish offensive towards Kiev, under the leadership of Piłsudski, and the occupation of the city on 6-7 May 1920, that the Soviet regime considered itself to be at war with Poland. If the Polish advance had continued, they would soon have approached ethnographic Russian territory and Russia itself would have been endangered. The Soviet Government even went so far, on occasion, as to claim that this Polish offensive had resulted in the actual invasion of Russia.⁷³ It is significant that by this date the Red Army had secured victory in the Russian Civil War over their White opponents: N.N. Iudenich (October 1919); A.V. Kolchak (November 1919) and A.I. Denikin (April 1920), with only Baron Wrangel remaining in opposition to them in the Crimea. Consequently, by April 1920, the Soviet regime was, for the first time, in a position both politically and militarily, to turn much of its attention towards Poland.

An examination of the speeches and writings of the Soviet leadership in both the political and military spheres, demonstrates that the outset of the war was, indeed, regarded

⁷² This interpretation was mirrored by Soviet historiography, see M.N. Chernykh, p. 4; V.I. Semenenko, "The Soviet-Polish War of 1920, the Idea of World Revolution and the Position of L.D. Trotsky", in *Journal of Trotsky Studies*, p. 59. The Soviet regime, however, provided the *Lit-Bel SSSR* with their XVI Western Army for this task.

⁷³ Prior to this they were keen to stress that Kiev was part of Soviet Ukraine, *DVP*, vol. 2, doc. 329, pp. 492-495.

as being April 1920. There is no mention of the conflict with Poland in the collected works of Vladimir Lenin, Soviet Russia's chief policy maker, between late 1918 and the end of 1919.⁷⁴ In fact, on 27 February 1920, he still rejected the idea that a state of war existed between the two nations, writing to Trotsky, "...we must put out a call *to prepare* for war with Poland".⁷⁵ As Commissar for War, Trotsky was directly responsible for Red Army engagements, and on 28 January 1920, warned of the possibility of an imminent Polish attack along the entire front.⁷⁶ Indeed, as late as 29 April 1920, he acknowledged that although the struggle on the Western Front was taking on extensive dimensions, he believed war with Poland still lay in the future for the Soviet regime.⁷⁷

Soviet Western Front Commander, from 29 April 1920, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, fully endorsed this interpretation, informing the Red Army Military Academy in 1923, that war between the two nations had commenced only, "...at the moment when the Poles developed their attack on our South-Western Front and occupied Kiev".⁷⁸ Dating the outbreak of war to Piłsudski's advance on Kiev in April 1920 allowed the Soviet authorities to present the war as a direct result of Poland's aggressive, expansionist designs. For instance, in his autobiography, Trotsky portrayed Russian involvement as entirely defensive, asserting,

The Polish Government... consciously and determinedly began the war in spite of our indefatigable efforts to preserve peace, efforts that made our foreign policy a combination of patience and pedagogical persistence. We sincerely wanted peace. Piłsudski imposed war on us.⁷⁹

It would have been extremely difficult for Soviet Russia to evade its share of responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities if it had acknowledged the conflict as beginning with the German withdrawal from the *Ober-Ost* after November 1918 and its orders to the Red Army to immediately advance westwards at that time.

This official line was, unsurprisingly, continued and promoted by historians from the Soviet period. For instance, Kalenichenko wrote,

It is true that a... clique of Polish landowners and capitalists... carried out hostile policies in their relations with the Soviet state.... This aggressive

⁷⁴ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vols. 37-40.

⁷⁵ J. Meijer (ed.), *The Trotsky Papers, 1917-1922*, vol. 2, (The Hague, 1971), doc. 443, p. 21. In reply, Trotsky concurred, "...it is essential to make open preparations... for the war with Poland which is threatening us", *ibid*, doc. 485, p. 81.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, vol. 2, doc. 443, p. 21.

⁷⁷ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc 42, p. 70.

⁷⁸ M.N. Tukhachevsky, "Pokhod za Vislu", p. 114. He also stated, "...in the spring of 1920 we were able to throw almost all our armed forces on to the Western Front, and thus enter upon an arduous struggle with Polish "White" forces", *ibid*, p. 115; *DKFKA*, vol. 4, p. 529.

⁷⁹ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn': opyt avtobiografii*, vol. 2, (Berlin, 1990), p. 190.

character was seen in the war by the reactionary Polish government against the Soviet state, beginning on 25 April 1920.⁸⁰

As late as 1990, Chernykh advocated that responsibility lay with the Polish Army, “...which began the Polish-Soviet War in 1920”.⁸¹ Much Western historiography shared this interpretation, placing blame solely on the Polish nation for the outbreak of hostilities in April 1920. For example, Benedict Sumner wrote of, “the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, begun by Piłsudski”, whilst Louis Fischer regarded the war as commencing on 26 April 1920 with the Polish advance into Ukraine.⁸²

4. Conclusion

Soviet Russia and Poland, therefore, failed to reach a consensus with regard to either the nature of the Polish-Soviet War or its date of commencement. The divergent schools of thought which had emerged during the conflict, continued to be promulgated both by the belligerents and subsequent historians, and the questions raised have failed to be satisfactorily resolved in the years since its conclusion. The conflict was undoubtedly complex and multi-dimensional in character. In an attempt to shed light on the debates, these themes will be expanded upon in the following chapters. In Chapter 2, the role of historical disputes, national identity and territorial and religious disagreements will be examined, as will the role played by the Great War and, in particular, the statesmen at the Paris Peace Conference, for the development of Polish-Soviet relations at the start of the twentieth century.

⁸⁰ P. Kalenichenko, “O deiatel’nosti Polskogo Vremennogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta” in A. Manusevich (ed.), *Oktiabr’skaia revoliutsiia i zarubezhnye slavianskie narody*, (Moscow, 1957), p. 150.

⁸¹ M.N. Chernykh, p. 4.

⁸² B. Sumner, *Survey of Russian History*, (London, 1944), p. 198; L. Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs: a history of the relations between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world, 1917-1929*, vol. 1, (Princeton, N. J., 1951), p. 259. See also, H. Nicolson, *Curzon: the last phase, 1919-1925, a study in post-war diplomacy*, (London, 1934), p. 203.

Chapter 1: Background

The Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920 cannot be viewed as an historically isolated event. Historical relations between the two protagonists were to prove decisive in determining the outbreak, development and eventual settlement of the conflict at the beginning of the twentieth century. For over one thousand years, a deep estrangement and persistent hostility had marred relations between Poland and Russia, a resentment sustained, throughout the nineteenth century, by the emergence of the “Polish Question” in Europe. Interest in this question gained momentum during the Great War of 1914-1918 as numerous manifestos and proclamations were issued to the Poles by the belligerents. With the establishment of the world’s first socialist state in Russia in October 1917, and the reestablishment of Polish independence thirteen months later, the foundations were laid for a resumption of the centuries’ old hostilities in a war which would engulf both states for two years.

Ideology was of paramount importance for the actions of both Soviet Russia and Poland during the war. In Russia, the ideological beliefs of three men shaped the development and direction of the new socialist regime above all others: Karl Marx, Vladimir Il’ich Ul’ianov (Lenin) and Leon Davidovich Bronstein (Trotsky). Were their ideologies uniform, or did they contain distinguishing features? For example, how compatible was Lenin’s advocacy of national self-determination with the central Marxist doctrine of international socialist revolution? How did ideology impact upon their objectives towards Poland? These questions have received little attention from historians of the conflict but are of vital importance to our understanding of it.

Although the Polish dimension has been researched by historians,¹ it is essential to provide a brief analysis of Polish ideological beliefs and aims, particularly those of the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief, Józef Piłsudski, and his chief National Democratic opponent, Roman Dmowski, in order to understand the fundamental motivation of both states during the war. The differing Soviet and Polish ideologies were, moreover, to have serious implications for negotiations of the Paris Peace Conference, which ultimately proved either powerless or unwilling to affect the outcome of the Polish-Soviet War.²

¹ Notably, Piotr Wandycz, Norman Davies, Titus Komarnicki and Adam Zamoyski.

² A detailed examination of Paris peace-makers’ role on the development of Polish-Soviet relations has been largely overlooked by historians.

1. Historical Conflict and the Great War, 1914-1918

At the height of the Polish-Soviet War in July 1920, the Polish Legation in London correctly observed that, “The entire past history of Europe shows Poland’s role as that of a bulwark between east and west”.³ Territorial conflict between Poland and Russia frequently characterised their interaction from the tenth century onwards as both states struggled for control of the *kresy*: the borderlands situated between the two nations. Russia’s most blatant and destructive intervention occurred in 1772, 1793 and 1795 when, in conjunction with Prussia and Austria, Polish state territory was divided, resulting in the loss of Polish independence at the final partition.⁴ This paradoxically served to strengthen the Polish nation and a growth of Polish nationalism, as society, culture and language continued to promote a bond between Poles in the three occupied zones.⁵ A further, most significant consequence arising from the partitions of Poland was a tentative expansion of the Polish question from being an inter-Slav concern to a matter of interest for the wider international community.⁶

It was during the Great War, however, that the Polish question underwent a remarkable evolution. The international community’s initial reticence at openly declaring sympathy for the Polish cause dramatically shifted as the Great War progressed from its outbreak on 28 June 1914 to its conclusion on 11 November 1918. Indeed, the warring powers were soon falling over themselves in a bid to outdo their opponents’ concessions to the Poles.⁷ This was, primarily, guided by military necessity. Both the Allied and Central Powers needed to win and maintain Polish support for their respective war efforts. The territory inhabited by the Poles was strategically important, lying at the centre of the European continent, and the frontline moved back and forth across this land throughout the conflict. As a result of the eighteenth-century carving up of their country, the Poles found themselves on both sides of the fighting lines and, consequently, appeals to Polish sympathies were forthcoming from both armed camps. This inevitably advanced the Polish cause and added a strong international dimension to the Polish question. To this, Russia was strenuously and resolutely opposed.

³ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 1, p. 2, (hereafter Polish Institute). During the tenth century, Poland converted to the Roman Catholic Church, whilst Russia adopted as its religion the Orthodox Church of Byzantium, thereby directing their sympathies West and East respectively.

⁴ Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 1, p. 2.

⁵ Polish Institute, KOL 180, p. 6.

⁶ Western archival collections attest to its rising importance in the nineteenth century. See, for example, National Archives of Scotland, GD 371/14/21, (hereafter NAS); Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 1, p. 1.

⁷ See, Polish Institute, KOL 82/1/3-5.

Tsarist Russia argued that the Polish issue was, and must remain, a domestic question to be resolved by Russia alone. Sergei Sazonov adamantly defended this position throughout his tenure as Russian Foreign Minister and on 17 April 1916, asserted that,

To deny the importance of the Polish question would mean closing your eyes to the reality. But by acknowledging this it by no means follows that its solution must be handed over to Europe and to an international conference. I believe that Russia must not allow formal international arranging of the Polish question and is obliged by its past and for the sake of its future to solve it itself.⁸

What then was Tsarist Russia's Polish policy during the Great War?

As almost three-quarters of ethnic Polish lands were incorporated within the Russian Empire in 1914, on 14 August of that year, a *Manifesto to the Poles* was issued by Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, uncle to the Tsar. This declared, "Poles!... May the frontiers which have divided the Polish people be united *under the sceptre of the Russian Emperor*. Under this sceptre Poland will come together, free in faith, in language and in self-government".⁹ Its publication by a military authority prevented the *Manifesto* from having any constitutional power, however, and the unwillingness of either the Tsar or the Russian Government to sign it, ultimately made it little more than a propaganda manoeuvre. It failed to offer even nominal Polish independence, left her future borders undefined and continued to tie the Polish question solely to a Russian solution. Furthermore, its implementation was dependent upon a Russian victory over the Central Powers, and retreat by the Russian Army on the battlefield in 1915 forestalled any attempt to enforce its proposals.

Tsarist policy was further marred by divided counsel and failure to pursue a coherent and structured programme. On 29 June 1916, Sazonov composed a draft bill aimed at the establishment of Polish autonomy, but although approved by the Tsar, it was decisively rejected by the Council of Ministers.¹⁰ The final order of Nikolai II to the Russian Army, delivered on 25 December 1916, called at last for, "...the restoration of a free Poland, composed of her three portions".¹¹ However, the boundaries, government and international status of this envisaged Poland remained undefined and within ten weeks the Romanov dynasty itself was irrevocably overthrown. Ultimately, therefore, Tsarist Russia's Polish

⁸ M.G. Valetskii & N.M. Lapinskii (eds.), *Russko-Pol'skie otnosheniia v period mirovoi voiny*, (Moscow, 1926), doc. 15, p. 87.

⁹ K. Jaworski & K. Blaszczyński (eds.), *Zmartwychstanie Polski w świetle dokumentów*, (Poznań, 1928), pp. 6-7; *Gazeta Warszawska*, 16 August 1914. Author's italics.

¹⁰ S. Sazonov, *Fateful Years, 1909-1916: the reminiscences of Serge Sazonov*, (London, 1928), pp. 312-313.

¹¹ M. Paléologue, *An Ambassador's Memoirs*, (London, 1923), p. 725.

policy failed on two counts: it did not develop a concise programme for the Polish lands, and it was unable to resolve the Polish question by itself.

The subsequent internationalisation of the question, to which the Russian monarchy had been so vigorously opposed, was clearly demonstrated by the numerous appeals issued to the Polish people by both the Central Powers and the Western Allies. The first such proclamation was a *Manifesto of the Austro-Hungarian and German Supreme Commands*, on 10 August 1914, which entreated, “Poles trust our protection willingly and with full confidence and support us and our struggle wholeheartedly”.¹² Then, on 5 November 1916, the German Emperor William II and Franz-Joseph, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, issued a joint declaration, announcing the creation of, “...an independent State with a hereditary monarchy and a constitutional government... the Kingdom of Poland”.¹³ Crucially, the envisaged state was to be autonomous, not independent, and was to comprise only the territory of Russian Poland. Furthermore, “...united in friendship and interests”, with the Central Powers, the armed forces of this state were to be regulated by mutual agreement in, “...organisation, training and command”.¹⁴ The declaration did succeed, however, in enhancing the international status of the Polish question, being the first document to be signed by the heads of state of two of Europe’s leading Empires.

This renewed interest in the Polish situation was, in turn, greatly encouraged by events taking place within the Russian Empire in early 1917. Many Russians and Poles enthusiastically welcomed the overthrow and abdication of Tsar Nikolai II, on 3 March, as a direct result of the liberal, democratic revolution the previous month. Their common enemy – Tsarism – had been removed. A new dual system of rule was established in Russia, as both the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government struggled to secure the reins of power and both bodies quickly issued declarations on “Polish independence” in an attempt to win support.

The Petrograd Soviet acted first and issued an appeal *To the Polish Nation* on 14 March 1917, in which it announced that,

...Russian democracy stands for the recognition of national-political self-determination of peoples, and proclaims that Poland has the right to complete independence in national and international affairs.... We... wish it

¹² S. Horak (ed.), *Poland's International Affairs, 1919-1960: a calendar of treaties, agreements, conventions and other international acts*, (Bloomington, 1964), p. 212.

¹³ K. Kumaniecki, *Odbudowa Państwowości Polskiej, najważniejsze dokumenty, 1912-styczeń 1924*, (Warsaw, Kraków, 1924), p. 48.

¹⁴ Ibid.

success in the forthcoming struggle for the establishment of a democratic, republican order in independent Poland.¹⁵

The Soviet, however, rested on a precarious power base at this time and had no real opportunity to further its support for Polish independence, given that Germany and Austria-Hungary still retained control over Polish territory.

Two days later, the Provisional Government issued a *Declaration to the Polish Nation*, drafted by the Russian Cadet Party leader, Paul Miliukov, which stated,

The Russian Provisional Government considers that the creation of an independent Polish state from all territories where the Polish people constitute a majority is a certain guarantee of durable peace in a future unified Empire.¹⁶

Like all pronouncements on Poland made by the belligerent nations during the war, this document contained important qualifications. Unwilling to preside over the decomposition of the multi-national Russian Empire, the Provisional Government advocated the creation of a state federation of which Poland would be a member. Consequently, “United to Russia by a free military alliance, the Polish State will become a strong bulwark against the pressure of the Central Powers on Slavism”, although it would remain for the Russian Constituent Assembly to ratify the new alliance.¹⁷ This effectively enabled the Provisional Government to delay taking any concrete action in support of Polish independence.

Until this date, out of respect for their Russian Tsarist ally, the Western Allies had refrained from commenting upon what Russia considered a domestic matter. However, the Provisional Government *Declaration* facilitated open international discussion on the Polish question. The United States of America had been the first Allied nation to directly support Polish independence claims, when on 22 January 1917, Woodrow Wilson declared before the US Senate, “I take it for granted... that statesmen everywhere agree that there should be a united, independent and autonomous Poland”.¹⁸ In reality, no such agreement had been reached by the Western Allies, but this assertion by the President of the USA created a huge impression. Wilson’s programme for restructuring the post-war world, his Fourteen Points, issued in January 1918, drew further attention to the plight of the Poles. His

¹⁵ *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-pol'skikh otnoshenii*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1963) doc. 5, p. 26 (hereafter, *D & M*). Davies incorrectly labeled this a “...Bolshevik initiative”, N. Davies, *God's Playground: a history of Poland: 1795 to the present*, vol. 2, (Oxford, 1981), p. 387. It was, in fact, drafted by N.D. Sokolov, a member of the Menshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). In March 1917, the Bolsheviks played only a minor role in the Petrograd Soviet.

¹⁶ *D & M*, vol. 1, doc. 13, p. 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁸ *US Congress, Senate, Congressional Record*, (Washington, 1918), LVI, Part 1, p. 681.

thirteenth point not only provided an international guarantee of Poland's independence, but also announced that,

An independent Polish State should be erected which should *include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations*... assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.¹⁹

Finally, on 3 June 1918, at an Inter-Allied Conference, Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Orlando issued a joint declaration which confirmed that, "The creation of a united and independent Polish State, with free access to the sea, continues to be one of the conditions for a just and durable peace and of the rule of right in Europe".²⁰

The ability of the Petrograd Soviet, Provisional Government or the Western Allies to resolve the Polish question was, however, dramatically forestalled by domestic events within Russia. On 25 October 1917, the left-wing Bolshevik faction of the RSDLP, under Vladimir Lenin, staged a *coup d'état*, seizing political power in the country. This had tremendous implications for the Polish cause and led, ultimately, to the onset of war between the two neighbouring states in 1919. Driven by the ideological objective of removing Russia from the Great War, one of the first acts of the newly established Soviet regime was to issue a *Decree on Peace*, in which they proposed,

...to all belligerent peoples and their Governments the immediate opening of negotiations of a just and democratic peace... without annexations (ie. without seizure of foreign territory, without the forcible annexation of foreign nationalities) and without indemnities.²¹

This appeared to many Poles as encouragement for the reestablishment of their independent state, especially as the *Decree* defined "annexations" as,

...the incorporation into a large or powerful state of a small or weak nationality, without the definitely, clearly and voluntarily expressed consent and desire of this nationality, *regardless of when this forcible incorporation took place*.²²

Within six weeks, negotiations between Soviet Russia and the Central Powers began at Brest-Litovsk. The Poles were denied any representation, and when the final Treaty was signed on 3 March 1918, Soviet Russia renounced all claims to sovereignty over Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Ukraine.²³ The majority of Poles were outraged at this further partitioning of their territory, but the Brest-Litovsk Peace was to have no

¹⁹ Ibid. Author's italics. Ambiguously, it did not delineate Poland's borders.

²⁰ T. Komarnicki, *Rebirth of the Polish Republic: a study in the diplomatic history of Europe, 1914-1920*, (London, 1957), p. 141. See, *Biographical Notes*.

²¹ *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1957), doc. 2, pp. 11-14, (hereafter *DVP*).

²² Ibid, p. 12.

²³ For the full text, see *DVP*, vol. 1, doc. 78, pp. 119-166.

lasting influence on the geography of Eastern Europe. Its boundaries were soon erased by Point 15 of the November 1918 Armistice, which forced the Germans to renounce all gains made by the Treaty and two days later, a Soviet decree announced that, “The toiling masses of... Poland... are now called upon to decide their own fate”.²⁴

Surprisingly, although during the Polish-Soviet War, the Soviet regime quickly became adept at utilising diplomacy and agitation-propaganda, their first official proclamation on the Polish question was not issued until ten months after they came to power. On 29 August 1918, *Sovnarkom* proclaimed that,

All agreements and acts concluded by the Government of the former Russian Empire with the Governments of the Kingdom of Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in connection with the partitions of Poland, in view of their being contrary to the principle of self-determination of nations and the revolutionary legal conception of the Russian nation, which recognises the Polish nation’s inalienable right to independence and unity, are hereby repealed irrevocably.²⁵

Many Poles subsequently assumed this to mean not only that Russia no longer recognised German and Austro-Hungarian interests in Poland, but that the Soviet regime accepted the independence of Poland, comprising the Polish lands prior to the first partition of 1772.²⁶ This, however, was certainly not the Soviet’s intention and throughout the period of the Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1920, the regime refused to renounce their interest in the borderlands. As international treaties cannot be repealed by one of the contracting parties alone, in reality, the annulment decree had no legal foundation.²⁷ It was, instead, a tactical manoeuvre aimed at gaining support for the Soviet state, both from the Polish population and the international community.²⁸ As a direct consequence of the Bolsheviks’ dual annulment of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the partition treaties, however, a new territorial settlement was urgently required in Central and Eastern Europe. This would be achieved domestically and internationally, firstly by the reestablishment of an independent Polish state, secondly by the work of the Paris Peace Conference and the resultant Treaty of Versailles, and thirdly, and ultimately, by the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920.

²⁴ *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 4, p. 16.

²⁵ *Sobranie zakonov i razporiazhenii pravitel'stva SSSR, 1917-1918*, (Moscow, 1933-1940), no. 64, p. 775; *Izvestiia*, 5 September 1918.

²⁶ Umiastowski mistakenly argued that the 29 August Decree, “...quite clearly shows that the Bolsheviks considered the Polish Republic as the Poland of the 1772 frontiers”, R. Umiastowski, *Russia and the Polish Republic 1918-1941*, (London, 1945), p. 79.

²⁷ A. Korzyński, “From a Triple Yoke to Independence”, in *The Polish Review*, vol. 14, no. 4, (1969), pp. 11-13.

²⁸ Lenin wrote on 28 December 1919, “It is by recognising the independence of the Polish... state that we are slowly but steadily winning the confidence of the labouring masses of the neighbouring small states”, V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 40, p. 44, (hereafter *PSS*); *Pravda*, 4 January 1920.

2. Reestablishment of Polish Independence

In spring 1914, Józef Piłsudski declared that the European situation was, “...infinitely rich in possibilities... Poland’s hour of destiny is approaching and we must be ready for it”.²⁹ This proved to be the reality in November 1918. Domestically, the Poles were ready and willing to demand the reestablishment of an independent Polish state. A strongly united community, joined together by language, culture, outlook and historical ties, this reserve of strength was drawn upon by the Poles at the end of 1918.³⁰ Politically and diplomatically, the action of Poles during the Great War had increased international awareness of their cause, canvassing their demands to Allied statesmen and refusing to accept a Russian, German or Austrian solution to the Polish problem.³¹ This was of decisive importance for the reestablishment of their independent state. If Polish national sentiment had collapsed after 1795, the Polish nation would not have been restored in 1918.³²

Domestic readiness combined with a favourable international situation to realise the establishment of Poland as a European nation once again. The Great War resulted in the abdication of the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian monarchs and destroyed the partitioning powers’ unity in their treatment of Poland. It was, therefore, with relative ease that Poland reconstructed itself within the ensuing power vacuum and was declared to be an independent state by Józef Piłsudski on 14 November 1918.³³ The Allied Governments played no direct role in this assumption of power.³⁴ Instead, like Lenin the previous year, Piłsudski grasped authority in his hands, becoming the Republic’s Head of State, Commander-in-Chief and Poland’s first independent ruler since the eighteenth century. According to one contemporary Polish diplomat, “...his prestige as creator and commander

²⁹ A. Piłsudska, *Piłsudski: a biography by his wife*, (New York, 1941), p. 211.

³⁰ Archives of the Institute of Józef Piłsudski, Kolekcja No. 2, 2/7/2a/1/1, p. 1, (hereafter Piłsudski Institute).

³¹ These included Dmowski in Britain and France, and Ignacy Paderewski in the USA, Polish Institute, KOL 82/1/3.

³² It cannot, therefore, be argued that, “...the wishes and actions of the Polish population were to the very last moment, largely irrelevant”, N. Davies, *Gods Playground*, p. 392. For Polish attempts to secure their country’s independence before November 1918, see NAS, GD 40/17/873/1-2; NAS, GD 40/17/877.

³³ A Regency Council, established by the Central Powers to administer the Poles during the Great War, invited Piłsudski to form a National Government and take over organisation of the army, Piłsudski Institute, Kolekcja no. 2, 2/7/2a/1/1, p. 4.

³⁴ A *Minorities Treaty* of 28 June 1919, declared, “... the Allied and Associated Powers have by the success of their aims restored to the Polish nation the independence of which it had been unjustly deprived”, The National Archives, FO 93/129/1, doc. 1, p. 3 (hereafter, TNA); TNA, FO 418/53, p. 229.

of the Polish Legions, his links with the strong and popular Polish Socialist Party and his outstanding personality singled him out for the role of leader”.³⁵

On 16 November 1918, Piłsudski notified the Allied Powers and Germany that the Polish state had been restored on a democratic basis and defined the country's territory.³⁶ In response, the Allies sent official diplomatic recognition of Polish independence by February 1919.³⁷ On 25 February 1919, for example, Arthur Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, informed his diplomatic colleague in Poland, Sir Esme Howard, that,

H.M.G. has decided to recognise the independence of Poland. Please offer General Piłsudski congratulations of H.M.G.... inform Mr Paderewski that His Majesty's Government henceforward recognise his Government as the official Polish Government... as soon as practical arrangements are possible they will be happy to enter into formal diplomatic relations.³⁸

This Allied response did not, however, ensure an easy or unhampered birth for the renewed Polish state.

3. The Paris Peace Conference

The first year of the Polish-Soviet War was dominated on the international scene by the Peace Conference, which met in Paris from January 1919. Motivated by the necessity of concluding a peace treaty with Germany after the Allied victory in the Great War, the discussions, debates and negotiations conducted in the French capital were to have lasting ramifications for both Poland and Russia, and their ensuing military conflict.

The decision-making process adopted by the peacemakers played a crucial role for both the Polish and Russian questions and for Allied involvement in the Polish-Soviet War itself. The resolution of Polish ideological differences and subsequent presentation of claims by the Polish delegation, under the chairmanship of Roman Dmowski was vitally important to the work of the Commission of Polish Affairs. Allied failure to allow Russian representation in Paris as a result of their abhorrence of Soviet ideology, and the

³⁵ R. Debicki, *Foreign Policy of Poland, 1919-39: from the rebirth of the Polish Republic to World War II*, (London, 1963), p. 9. See also, Piłsudski Institute, Kolekcja no. 2, 2/7/2a/1/1/, p.1.

³⁶ Piłsudski Institute, Kolekcja no. 2, 2/7/2a/1/1/, p. 4.

³⁷ The USA on 30 January 1919, France on 24 February, Great Britain on 25 February and Italy on 27 February 1919. Germany recognised Polish independence *de facto* on 21 November 1918 and *de jure* on 18 May 1919.

³⁸ TNA, FO 688/1/755, p. 385. See also, TNA, FO 93/129/1, no. 1, pp. 17-18; NAS, GD 40/17/879/1-2. Until 1929, Polish diplomatic representation in Britain was awarded only Legation status, Polish Institute, A.42/112a. In contrast, Allied recognition of Soviet Russia was withheld during the Polish-Soviet War, NAS, GD 40/810/1-2; NAS, GD 193/330, p. 20.

conflicting policies pursued by the peacemakers towards their former ally, similarly intensified difficulties for Russia in the international arena. The resultant Treaty of Versailles, signed on 28 June 1919, reflected both the insurmountable problems experienced by the Conference in its treatment of Poland and Russia, and its absolute inability to influence the escalation of hostilities between the neighbouring states.

3.1 Decision-Making in Paris

Paris, in 1919, was the centre of world government.³⁹ The decision-making process rested initially with the Supreme Council of the five principal Allied and Associated Powers: France; Great Britain; the United States of America; Italy and Japan, the delegations of which were headed by Georges Clemenceau, David Lloyd George, Woodrow Wilson, Vittorio Orlando and Saionji Kimmochi respectively.⁴⁰ In reality, the peacemaking process came to be directed by the leading statesmen of France, the USA and Britain, in a Council of Three.⁴¹ The Conference was presided over by the French Premier, Clemenceau, but an assassination attempt upon his life in February 1919 lessened his grip on proceedings.⁴² Wilson, supported by the political and military power of the USA, played a crucial role in defining the peace programme based on his Fourteen Points, but his participation in the Conference was his first visit to Europe, of which he had no first-hand experience. Decisive influence was, therefore, frequently exercised by Lloyd George.⁴³ Suspicion of the statesmen's motives was intensified by their conduct of secret negotiation which largely freed them from domestic control over policy and ensured that the delegations outwith the Big Three, often received little information before decisions were made.⁴⁴

This distribution of authority had a tremendous impact upon both the Russian and Polish questions at the Conference. The Russians were denied any official representation. The smaller states, including Poland, were sidelined and limited to a restricted role, often only being invited to attend the Plenary Sessions of the Conference, held infrequently. Indeed, the principal role of the smaller countries was simply to sanction the decisions of

³⁹ Over 30 countries were represented at the Conference, M. MacMillan, *Peacemakers: the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and its attempt to end war*, (London, 2003), p. 5.

⁴⁰ J. Man, *The War To End Wars, 1914-18*, (London, 1998), p. 139.

⁴¹ H. Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, (London, 1963), pp. 200-201.

⁴² The wife of Arthur James Balfour, recorded that this had, "... a weakening effect on the Old Tiger...he [was] not the man he was", NAS, GD 433/2/136, p. 17.

⁴³ According to Arthur Balfour, "Clemenceau is not the same since his wound; and the only man who did anything was Lloyd George", NAS, GD 433/2/363, pp. 40-41. See, *Biographical Notes*.

⁴⁴ NAS, GD 433/2/18 (restricted), p. 52.

the Supreme Council, thereby denying them any real role in the decision-making process.⁴⁵ The Poles were allowed to participate in discussions concerning their territories in two ways: their delegates could submit written reports outlining the concessions desired and they were, very occasionally, invited to verbally state their claims before the Council.⁴⁶ Roman Dmowski, Poland's principal delegate, complained however that although the Conference, "...asked the Polish delegation to submit its demands with regard to the eastern frontier, it did not undertake any discussion with us about these demands".⁴⁷ This lack of consultation inevitably produced Polish claims far in excess of their real expectations.

The peacemakers, themselves, faced a number of important obstacles at Paris. Firstly, they faced enormous expectations, not only from many Poles and Russians, but also from their own public, and as a result, there was a great and very real risk of disappointment from the outset. Time was also of the essence: the Conference was constantly fighting to address and resolve issues as quickly as possible. After four years of bitter fighting, there was little patience throughout the world for a lengthy peace process and events frequently outstripped the Paris statesmen. The decisive position afforded to the leaders of Britain, France and the USA allowed the views and prejudices of individuals to shape the peace and their failure to consult technical experts led to poor decisions being taken.⁴⁸ Each delegation had its own agenda, inevitably leading to a clash of interest between the victorious powers. Nowhere can this divergence in aims be seen more clearly than in the Paris Peace Conference's Polish and Russian policies.

3.2 Poland and the Paris Peace Conference

When the Polish State was reestablished in November 1918, one of the most pressing problems it faced was the delineation, establishment and protection of its frontiers. This proved to be one of the most complex issues to resolve in the post-war period and it was not until 1921, with victory secured over Russia, that Poland's boundaries were finally drawn. When the Peace Conference held its inaugural session on 18 January 1919, the Polish state was already in existence. War broke out with Russia the following month.⁴⁹ It

⁴⁵ H. Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, p. 201.

⁴⁶ H. Nicolson, *Peacemaking*, p. 94.

⁴⁷ R. Dmowski, *Polityka Polska i odbudowanie państwa: z dodaniem memorialu "Zagadnienia środkowo- i wschodnio-europejskie" i innych dokumentów polityki polskiej z lat 1914-1919*, vol. 2, (Hanover, 1947), p. 404.

⁴⁸ NAS, GD 1/839/1, p. 7.

⁴⁹ A situation further complicated by the Polish-Ukrainian War, November 1918-July 1919.

was against this background that the Conference attempted to resolve the question of Poland's eastern borders.⁵⁰

What did the Poles hope to achieve at Paris and to what extent was this driven by ideological motivation? As Polish Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, Piłsudski was largely responsible for determining Polish policy in the war with Soviet Russia, whilst Dmowski was appointed head of the Polish delegation at Paris. Consequently, an examination of the ideological motivation of both men is necessary if Polish conduct is to be understood.

For Piłsudski, a co-founder of the patriotic Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the practical implementation of socialism was unthinkable, without the establishment of national freedom and his overriding concern was not class struggle, but the attainment of Polish independence. He chiefly viewed socialism as a medium to be utilised in the fight for Polish independence, in exactly the same way as Lenin viewed national self-determination as a vehicle for the establishment of worldwide socialist revolution.⁵¹ A PPS Conference resolved on 29 October 1919 that,

The party... is desirous that the eastern frontier should be settled on the basis of... self-determination.... The party welcomes a union between Poland, the Ukraine, Lithuania, White Russia, the Baltic States and Finland as being of the greatest importance for the development of international socialism in Eastern Europe.⁵²

This formed the basis of Piłsudski's federalist ideology.⁵³

What did this programme hope to achieve? The independent states of Lithuania, Belorussia and Ukraine, and possibly also Latvia, Estonia and Finland, would voluntarily unite with Poland in a democratic alliance.⁵⁴ This would safeguard Polish independence, provide an essential buffer between Poland and her much larger Russian neighbour and resolve the traditional Polish-Russian competition for control of the borderlands. By

⁵⁰ This difficulty was compounded by Poland's lack of a natural, geographic frontier and by the extremely complex ethnographic composition of the *kresy*. Indeed, Lord Derby acknowledged, "...nobody has the least idea of what territory should be included in Poland", NAS, GD 433/2/18, p. 65.

⁵¹ He informed a group of Communists, "Gentlemen we both took a ride on the same red tram, but while I got off at the stop marked *Polish Independence*, you wish to travel on to the station *Socialism*," A. Zamoycki, *Paderewski*, (London, 1982), p. 178.

⁵² TNA, FO 417/7, no. 4, p. 8.

⁵³ Leon Wassilewski outlined Polish foreign policy as, "...a programme for the establishment of a treaty of alliance between the border states from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea", *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1920, p. 1. See, *Biographical Notes*.

⁵⁴ Lithuania, Belorussia and Ukraine had formed part of the pre-partition Polish Commonwealth.

removing political and economic barriers between the smaller states, their future development would be assured. As Piłsudski argued,

Poland cannot be really free as long as nations around her are subjected to terror imposed on them from outside. Having regained the most precious thing on earth, her freedom, Poland... decided to push away from her frontiers anything that threatens that freedom.⁵⁵

Thus, the confinement of ethnographic Russia, whether Tsarist, White or Red, behind a federation of secure border states was deemed vital for Poland's survival: the expansionist aims of all three regimes imperiled Polish independence and as such, it was Russia itself, which was a vital consideration for Piłsudski's plans. He confirmed this at a secret conference of *Diet* members on 5 November 1919, when,

The question of the eastern frontier, stated General Piłsudski, was *de facto* the Russian question.... The object of the war was the defence of Poland and the freeing of her neighbours from the Bolsheviks, with a view to giving the latter the possibility of deciding about their future and their destiny.⁵⁶

The PPS planned to hold plebiscites in any remaining disputed borderlands occupied by Polish troops, allowing the inhabitants to choose which regime to belong to: communist Russia or democratic Poland.⁵⁷

Moreover, Piłsudski viewed the Russian communists as violators of socialism and condemned what he regarded as the destructive doctrine of Bolshevism. As noted by his wife,

He was too true a disciple of Socialism which lies at the root of all democracy to cherish any illusions regarding Bolshevism. When Lenin himself had expounded his creed to him, years before, he had rejected it. He stated... "Bolshevism is a disease which is peculiar to Russia. It will never grow deep roots in any countries, which are not entirely Russian. In those countries which formed part of the ancient Russia, but where the social organisation is not definitely Russian, such as Poland... Bolshevism may flourish for a while but it will never be master. The whole base of its teaching is class vengeance. The ideal of Socialism is complete equality in rights and in laws."⁵⁸

He feared and distrusted the Soviet regime, believing that it would destroy any state in which it took hold, and vigorously asserted that, "If... it was the will of Providence that the

⁵⁵ J. Piłsudski, *Year 1920 and its climax: Battle of Warsaw during the Polish-Soviet War*, (London, 1972), pp. 13-14.

⁵⁶ TNA, FO 417/7, no. 8, p. 23.

⁵⁷ TNA, FO 417/7, no. 5, p. 9.

⁵⁸ A. Piłsudska, p. 287. He, therefore, opposed both the Russia threat and the Bolshevik's violation of socialism.

world should try the Russian experiment, we Poles would be the last to try it”.⁵⁹ In his personal account of the Polish-Soviet War, *Rok 1920*, Piłsudski clearly defined his goals as follows,

As early as 1918, with no aid from outside, I had come to a clear conclusion about the objectives of our war against the soviets. Amongst other things, I had decided to make every possible effort to remove as far as possible from the place where the new national life was burgeoning and taking shape, any attempt that might be made or any snare that might be set with a view to imposing once more a foreign life upon us, a life not organised by ourselves.⁶⁰

As a result, in order to prevent the Soviet regime from imposing socialist revolution on Poland, through the use of military force, he sought to, “...interpose between Warsaw and the Soviets the greatest possible extent of territory”.⁶¹

Therefore, despite Soviet claims to the contrary, Piłsudski was driven by a federalist agenda, not desire for the imperialist conquest of Russia. Although in early April 1920, the Polish Army was in a position to march into Russia, he refused to issue this order for two reasons: firstly, he did not know what he would do with any Russian territory occupied by the Poles, as his federalist plans did not include Russian lands; secondly, such action would arouse Allied condemnation as being militaristic and imperialistic, an outcome he was keen to avoid.⁶² A Polish invasion of ethnographic Russia would, moreover, have stretched the infant Polish Government, economy and administrative structure to breaking point.

Polish support for federalism was mixed, but was the most popular programme for the solution of the *kresy* question for a time. It was advocated by the PPS, the left wing of the Peasant Party, the centre parties and a number of conservative groups, and the Polish *Diet*, on 16 May 1919, unanimously resolved that Poland support a voluntary union with Lithuania, based on self-determination.⁶³ Staff of the Polish Foreign Ministry (*MSZ*) also endorsed it, reporting that the Poles,

...had to push the Bolshevik forces as far as the Dvina and Dnieper, and help in forming a system of smaller states which linking on to Lithuania, Latvia and Finland in the North, and Ukraine and Rumania in the South, would constitute a temporary safety belt, which would consolidate the Polish-

⁵⁹ J. Piłsudski, *Rok 1920*, (London, 1987), p. 205; TNA, FO 688/1/746, p. 484; TNA, FO 688/1/746, p. 479. Piłsudski's mistrust of the Soviet regime compelled him to regard negotiations with it as extremely tenuous throughout the conflict see, TNA, FO 418, part 2, no. 6; TNA, FO 418, part 2, p. 30; TNA, FO 417/7, no. 5, p. 9.

⁶⁰ J. Piłsudski, *Rok 1920*, p. 147.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 200 & 203.

⁶² TNA, FO 417/8, no. 46, p. 64.

⁶³ TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 38.

Bolshevik barrier. This policy was in no way hostile to the idea of a regenerated Russia. These states were to arise on the basis of self-determination, and in the course of events could either remain independent, or federate with Poland or Russia.⁶⁴

However, this concept for the restructuring of Eastern Europe led Piłsudski into open conflict with a number of opponents at the Paris Conference, including notably the Polish National Democratic leader, Roman Dmowski, and the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George.

Dmowski, leader of the National Democratic Party, Chairman of the Polish National Committee and chief Polish delegate at Paris was, according to the Polish diplomat, Henryk Sokolnicki, "...the principal Polish figure in Western Europe and our spokesman with the British and French Governments".⁶⁵ As a result, his ideology was of great importance for the promotion of Polish foreign policy at the Conference and to Polish-Soviet relations. He fully agreed with Piłsudski on the need for the establishment of a strong Polish state between the two much larger German and Russian nations, but the two men differed on how best to achieve Polish stability and on how far east the Polish border should lie.

Dmowski regarded Germany as Poland's chief international opponent and argued that cordial Polish-Soviet relations were vital to ensure the prevention of German-Russian cooperation against Poland.⁶⁶ Consequently, he believed that federalism would inevitably create Polish-Russian tension, threatening the security of the Polish state. A devoted Polish patriot and nationalist, he instead advocated the incorporation of the western *kresy* into Poland but, to appease Russia, was willing to allow for a Russian sphere of influence in the eastern borderlands.⁶⁷ However, the National Democratic Party official programme still specifically aimed at the inclusion into Poland of those regions, which had belonged to the country prior to the partition of 1772 and which retained a Polish cultural influence, centred round a sizeable Polish minority.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 11, p. 38; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 2, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁵ Polish Institute, KOL 180, p. 48.

⁶⁶ See, R. Dmowski, *Niemcy, Rosja i Kwestija*, (Lwów, 1908).

⁶⁷ Ibid; see also R. Dmowski, *Polityka Polska*; R. Dmowski, *Wybór Pism*, (Warsaw, 1990), for a further examination of his objectives.

⁶⁸ P. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies, 1919-1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno*, (Westport, Conn, 1974), p. 121, the remaining inhabitants of these areas were to be Polish.

Incorporation was supported by many Poles and the Polish Government itself on occasion advocated this programme. For instance, on 2 May 1919, the *Sejm* declared that Belorussia, "...belongs to Poland and is an inalienable part of the Polish state", contradicting Piłsudski's proclamation to the inhabitants of Minsk issued the previous month, and further demanded the annexation of the Grodno, Wilno and Minsk provinces to Poland.⁶⁹ Opponents denounced the policy as nationalist, annexationist and imperialist, as its implementation would have incorporated a large non-Polish population within the Polish state boundaries. Piłsudski viewed the National Democratic programme with distrust and suspicion and believed, as Hugh Gibson, America's Minister to Poland recalled that,

...an ethnographical Poland with a homogenous population would be a much stronger element than one which straddled over the border territories, and such a Poland would in the course of time exert a far greater force of attraction on any border states. The problems which Poland had to face both as regards administration and reconstruction were already grave enough, and he had no desire to see them aggravated.⁷⁰

Rumbold also expressed concern of possible, "...trouble with Russia in the future if Poland attempted to include in her boundaries large areas inhabited by Russians".⁷¹

To enable Polish claims to be presented at the Peace Conference a unified Polish policy was urgently required. As Major Julian Coolidge, the USA's Chief Officer with the Polish National Army reported on 11 December 1918, "It is realised by all intelligent Poles that, unless unity of action can be found, the Peace Congress will deem Poland incapable of self-government and will be little disposed to aid the Polish cause".⁷² A comprehensive programme of Poland's territorial aspirations had to be drawn up, presented and defended. The existence of two parallel Polish authorities – Piłsudski's government in Warsaw and Dmowski's National Committee in Paris – would unnecessarily complicate the Polish cause.⁷³ A compromise was reached. Piłsudski would remain in Poland to concentrate on the domestic problems facing the new state. In return, he conceded that, "...the country's sole official representatives at the conference... should be Dmowski and Paderewski".⁷⁴ Both Dmowski and Ignacy Paderewski, a world renowned pianist and the Polish Prime

⁶⁹ *Zhizn' natsionalnostei*, no. 13, 16 February 1919, p. 3.

⁷⁰ TNA, FO 417/8, no. 46, pp. 64-65.

⁷¹ TNA, FO 688/3, p. 13.

⁷² *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919: the Paris Peace Conference*, (Washington, 1942), vol. 2, p. 415.

⁷³ That rivalry existed between the supporters of each at the Conference, can be seen in a humorous comment made by Dmowski's secretary, when he recorded, "I also met Piłsudski's agent, Dr. Moc, a man of radical views and an expert on venereal diseases", Polish Institute, KOL 180, p. 52.

⁷⁴ Polish Institute, KOL 180, p. 50.

Minister and Foreign Minister from 16 January 1919, had crucially been awarded diplomatic recognition by the Allied Powers during the Great War.⁷⁵

Dmowski's annexationist policy was officially adopted by the Polish delegation at the Peace Conference on 2 March 1919 and despite acknowledging that he was not a diplomat by temperament or inclination, Dmowski successfully maintained a tight grip on the work of the Polish delegation.⁷⁶ As his secretary, Sokolnicki, recorded at Paris, he himself, "...had little to do, as Dmowski had an excellent memory and drafted all his own speeches and notes in Polish.... Dmowski's memorandum on Polish demands, was prepared... in the course of a single morning".⁷⁷

From March 1919 onwards, however, Ignacy Paderewski assumed an increasingly dominant role within the Polish delegation.⁷⁸ As one delegate observed, "Dmowski was formally head of the delegation, but Paderewski shone by his eloquence in four languages and was a friend of President Wilson's".⁷⁹ At a meeting of the Commission on Polish Affairs on 12 April 1919, Paderewski set out his own position when he stated, "Poland today is the country most capable of assuming order in Eastern Europe".⁸⁰

Although Poland was later regarded by many as the linchpin of the Versailles Treaty, the Polish delegation soon realised that they had few pro-active supporters seated around the negotiating table in Paris.⁸¹ Of primary concern for the leading statesmen of Europe was the restoration of peace and stability throughout the continent and this consideration greatly motivated their decisions on Poland. Maintenance of the balance of power was paramount and British policy, in particular, was guided by a desire to limit French hegemony in Europe.⁸² A conviction that the traditional friendship between France and Poland would once again result in Poland being subsumed by French influence encouraged Britain to limit Polish claims. Lloyd George was concerned that an extensive Polish state would hinder the economic revival of Germany, necessary for the recovery of the continent

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 52-53; Polish Institute, KOL 82/2.

⁷⁶ D. Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, vol. 1, (New Haven, 1939), p. 313; vol. 2, pp. 972-976; R. Dmowski, *Polityka Polska*, vol. 1, p. 106.

⁷⁷ Polish Institute, KOL 180, p. 51.

⁷⁸ Dmowski fell ill in November 1919 and withdrew from politics for a time.

⁷⁹ Polish Institute, KOL 180, p. 50.

⁸⁰ TNA, FO 374/7, p. 111.

⁸¹ For active opposition to Polish claims by the Jewish lobby see, M. Levene, "Nationalism and its alternatives in the International Arena: the Jewish Question at Paris, 1919", in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 28, no. 3, (1993), pp. 511-531.

⁸² Polish Institute, A.11.49/SOW/20, p. 5.

as a whole.⁸³ The British Government was further suspicious of both Piłsudski's Government in Warsaw and Dmowski's representatives in Paris, regarding the former as a radical who had fought against the Allies in the war and the latter as a right-wing, anti-Semite.⁸⁴

To help formulate Britain's Polish policy, Lloyd George turned to randomly selected "experts", including diplomats who had served in Russia and whose knowledge of Polish affairs, gained through Russian contacts, was inevitably one-sided.⁸⁵ According to the British Prime Minister, all departments, including the Foreign Office, "...were fully represented in Paris during the whole of the negotiations by their ablest officials, whose assistance and guidance the peace negotiators constantly sought".⁸⁶ In reality, he relied heavily, not upon the trained staff of the Foreign Office, but upon his own personal secretariat, including Sir Maurice Hankey and Philip Kerr, for which he was criticised by professional diplomats, who were increasingly sidelined during the Conference.⁸⁷

This situation had dramatic consequences for discussions on both Poland and Russia at the Conference, and was not restricted to the British delegation.⁸⁸ The opinions and prejudices of Lloyd George himself were also decisive. Having, "...never been guilty of pro-Polish sentiments", Lloyd George argued against Dmowski's demands at Paris, modifying reports by the territorial commissions to the detriment of Poland.⁸⁹ As he informed the House of Commons on 3 July 1919, it was not easy to determine the borders of the new Polish State, given the fluctuation of her historic borders over the years.⁹⁰ In the pre-partition era, Poland had included large areas of Lithuania, Belorussia and Ukraine up to the Dnieper River but by 1919, ethnic Poland was situated hundreds of miles westwards.⁹¹

⁸³ A. Micewski, "Polish Foreign policy: historical perspectives", in A. Bromke & J. Strong (eds.), *Gierek's Poland*, (New York; London, 1973), p. 185.

⁸⁴ D. Lloyd George, *Peace*, vol. 1, p. 204.

⁸⁵ Polish Institute, A.11.49/SOW/20, p. 6, including J.M. Keynes and E.H. Carr.

⁸⁶ D. Lloyd George, *Peace*, vol. 1, p. 132.

⁸⁷ NAS, GD 433/2/136, p. 17. See, for example, C. Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy: the reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penshurst*, (London, 1947), p. 229; *Biographical Notes*.

⁸⁸ On 26 January 1919, Nicolson cautioned, "The Big Ten, or the Big 5... seldom take the trouble to notice the facts and arguments prepared for them by their staffs. Sooner or later this disregard for technical opinion, will lead to a smash", H. Nicolson, *Peacemaking, 1919*, (London, 1945), pp. 203-204.

⁸⁹ H. Nicolson, *Curzon: the last phase, 1919-1925, a study in post-war diplomacy*, (London, 1934), p. 203; insisting on holding plebiscites in Eastern Prussia and Upper Silesia, and withholding Danzig and Eastern Galicia from the Poles.

⁹⁰ D. Lloyd George, *Peace*, vol. 2, p. 631.

⁹¹ NAS, GD 40/17/897/1-3; NAS, GD 433/2/24, p. 145 & files 51-70; NAS, GD 40/17/898; *Kurjer Warszawski*, 5 & 6 May 1919.

A Memorandum by the British Delegation on the Former Russian Empire reported on 20 January 1919, that, “Poland has hardly anywhere clear frontiers, ethnological or natural”.⁹² It continued,

...the first necessity appears to be the creation of a strong and compact Poland, which should include all indisputably Polish territory, but from which should be excluded, as far as possible, large alien minorities, which can only tend to weaken and render impossible the position of the new Polish State.⁹³

If Poland was to receive large numbers of Ukrainians, Belorussians, Lithuanians, Germans and Jews, Britain feared that this multi-national state would face both domestic unrest from discontented minority groups, and an external threat from surrounding enemies who would await any opportunity to reclaim their fellow countrymen.⁹⁴ Crucially, these enemies included two of the great European powers: Russia and Germany. Suspicion of Polish motives was rife in Britain, with Lloyd George arguing that, “When the Poles presented their case to the Conference their claims were by every canon of self-determination extravagant and inadmissible”.⁹⁵ He feared that excessive demands would lead to the outbreak of a new war, into which the Allies would be drawn. Consequently, the British delegation recommended in January 1919, that the new Polish state should be based upon Russian or Congress Poland, though not even all of this.⁹⁶

In turn, Clemenceau was motivated throughout the Peace Conference by the need to secure alliances and strengthen France’s position in Europe. He acknowledged, “There is an old system of alliances called the Balance of Power – this system of alliances, which I do not renounce, will be my guiding thought at the Peace Conference”.⁹⁷ Despite romantic attachment to the Polish cause, France initially called for Polish territory in the East to be restricted to her ethnographic borders.⁹⁸ It was hoped that this would avoid conflict with her former Russian ally. France fervently hoped that the Whites would gain victory over the Red Army in the Russian Civil War, restoring Russia to Great Power status and becoming a potential ally against Germany once more. As a result, the French delegation believed it expedient to limit concessions to the Poles, restricting active support to the Polish-German border debates.

⁹² TNA, FO 374/20, doc. 16, p. 71.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ This became a reality during the Polish-Soviet War after the Polish offensive towards Kiev in April 1920.

⁹⁵ D. Lloyd George, *Peace*, vol. 2, p. 631.

⁹⁶ TNA, FO 374/20, doc. 16, p. 71, Poland’s border, “...should leave the East-Prussian frontier just west of Suwalki, and pass north... to the Niemen... it will follow the old frontier along the Niemen past Grodno, then joining the Bug and following that river as far as the old frontier line between Poland and Galicia”.

⁹⁷ M. MacMillan, p. 31.

⁹⁸ H.W.V. Temperley (ed.), *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, vol. 6, (London, 1924), p. 238.

It was only on 23 December 1919, when it appeared that the Bolshevik regime may become permanent following victories in the civil war over Iudenich and Kolchak, that Clemenceau formulated his policy of *fil de fer barbelé*. This aimed at imposing a *cordon sanitaire* composed of all Russia's neighbours, including Poland, as a means of isolating Bolshevism.⁹⁹ Following the loss of her Russian ally and driven by fear of a revived, strengthened Germany on her eastern border, France viewed the creation of a large, secure Polish state as essential for the prevention of both German and Soviet expansion in the east.¹⁰⁰ Clemenceau argued that Poland, strategically positioned in the heart of Europe, was central to this new alliance system and as a result, the French delegation, in contrast with their British colleagues, consented to Eastern Galicia being given to Poland and was sympathetic to Poland's plans for the proposed Polish-Lithuanian federation.¹⁰¹

The United States of America, like France, had memories of strong historic ties with the Poles and it was hoped in American circles that a concrete decision on Poland's eastern borders could be reached at Paris.¹⁰² For instance, Major Coolidge argued in a *Memorandum* on 11 December 1918, "It is to be hoped that a solution will be quickly found as, otherwise, Poland is sure to become a seat of Bolshevik revolution".¹⁰³ Nevertheless, although Wilson was convinced that Russian or Congress Poland should form part of the reestablished Polish State, he did not pursue a clearly defined policy regarding her frontiers at Paris. Essentially, he wanted a Polish state, based on self-determination, to be confined within her ethnographic borders, although he was not entirely clear as to where these lay.¹⁰⁴

Finally, the two remaining principal Allied and Associated Powers, Italy and Japan, were convinced that although Poland should be reestablished along ethnographic principles, it would be inadvisable to go further in deciding the fate of a region in which Russia was so strongly concerned. Italy, especially, was interested in Poland's borders, given her geographical proximity to the region, and was favourably disposed towards supporting their incorporation of Eastern Galicia and the establishment of a direct frontier

⁹⁹ Polish Institute, A.11.49/SOW/20, p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² By 1914, Poles comprised the largest single group of immigrants from central Europe to the US, numbering around 4 million, M. MacMillan, p. 222.

¹⁰³ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 2, p. 415.

¹⁰⁴ J. Karski, *The Great Powers and Poland, 1919-1945*, (Lanham, MD., 1985), p. 38. His views were not fully representative of the American electorate and the US Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles after it had been signed and negotiated by the President.

with Rumania.¹⁰⁵ The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire threatened an expansion of Russian influence to Bohemia, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, which the Italians hoped to limit through the establishment of a strong Poland.

Consequently, the Peace Conference invited Poland's representatives to appear at its first session on 18 January and by doing so, gave formal recognition to the reestablished State.¹⁰⁶ The Supreme Council decided to establish a Commission on Polish Affairs the following month, with a remit to define Poland's borders.¹⁰⁷ Dmowski's *Memorandum* outlining Polish claims for her eastern borders, presented to the Commission on 3 March 1919, did not demand the borders of 1772.¹⁰⁸ Instead, he argued that the boundaries must reflect the changing ethnographic composition of the territories after that date. This required an expansion of Polish lands in the west but a reduction to the line of the second partition in the east.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, Dmowski maintained that the, "...eastern frontiers of Poland should be curtailed and a large portion remain under Russia".¹¹⁰ Wilno was to be handed over to Poland, comprising as it did a Polish majority, whilst the areas of Vitebsk, Mogilev, Kiev and Minsk had, over the years, been removed from the Polish sphere of influence and so were renounced by the Poles at Paris.¹¹¹

The Polish-Russian situation was discussed by the Commission on 20 March 1919 at which time a Sub-Commission of General Le Rond, as Chairman, (France); Dr. Lord (USA); Mr. H.J. Paton (British Empire); Marquis della Torretta (Italy), and K. Otchiai (Japan), was appointed to make a preliminary study of the question.¹¹² On 12 April, the full Commission again met to listen to a speech by Ignacy Paderewski, in which addressed the question of Poland's eastern frontier.¹¹³

There was no lack of information available for this body to consult on the question of Poland and the borderlands. Under the Historical Section of the British Foreign Office, Handbook 51, entitled *Russian Poland, Lithuania and White Russia*, had been prepared in

¹⁰⁵ Polish Institute, A.11.49/SOW/20, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ D. Lloyd George, *Peace*, vol. 2, p. 631.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, FO 374/21, doc. 20, pp. 147-153. This Commission held more meetings than any other at the Conference.

¹⁰⁸ R. Dmowski, *Polytika Polska*, vol. 2, pp. 166-168; Polish Institute, KOL 82/65.

¹⁰⁹ This left Russia with 120,000 square miles west of the 1772 frontier, whilst Poland would receive Borisów, Mozyr, Kamenets and Polotsk.

¹¹⁰ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 3, p. 782.

¹¹¹ For further details see, NAS, GD 40/17/874; NAS, GD 40/17/875/1-2; TNA, FO 374/7/1, p. 16; TNA, FO 374/7/2. Piłsudski's military advance into these areas in 1919 and 1920 directly opposed Dmowski's agenda.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 147. This Sub-Commission reported to the full Commission on 10 April.

¹¹³ *Ibid*.

April 1919.¹¹⁴ This 149 page document, available for consultation at the Conference, provided extensive details outlining the position of Russian Poland in Eastern Europe, her borders, surface area, race, language and population distribution and movement, fully supported by maps. It also contained details of Poland's history, contemporary social, political and cultural conditions, education, communication networks, industry, commerce and financial systems.¹¹⁵

The Commission on Polish Affairs unanimously agreed on 14 April, "...to propose the line defined in Appendix I of this Report as the Eastern Frontier of Poland".¹¹⁶ The line ran: Grodno, Vapovska, Nemirov, Brest-Litovsk, Dorogusk, Ustilug, east of Grubeshov, Krilov, west of Rawaruska, and east of Przemysl to the Carpathians, largely corresponding to the boundary of the Polish Congress Kingdom.¹¹⁷ To avoid antagonising Russia the Commission agreed that it would be guided by strictly ethnographical considerations as far as possible and declared that those districts, "...in which doubt arises as to the ethnographical character or wishes of the population cannot at present be assigned to the Polish State".¹¹⁸ These were to be subject to an enquiry, sent to Poland to examine the ethnological, linguistic and religious character of the region and the wishes of the inhabitants. However, crucially, the *Report* concluded that, "...a definite settlement of the question of the Eastern Frontier of Poland should be made as soon as a Russian Government is established, with which the Great Powers can deal".¹¹⁹ This enabled the Polish question to remain unresolved by the Allied statesmen for the remainder of the Peace Conference.

As a *Memorandum of Polish Foreign Relations*, issued by the British Foreign Office on 17 August 1920 recorded, "There is no record of this line having been formally notified to the Polish Government, although it became public knowledge in Poland and maps showing it were circulated".¹²⁰ This reticence in informing the Poles of their decision may have

¹¹⁴ TNA, FO 373/3/8; TNA, FO 417.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Similar handbooks were issued for Prussian Poland, TNA, FO 373/3/9, and Eastern Galicia, TNA, FO 373/3/10.

¹¹⁶ TNA, FO 373/3/8. For Appendix I see, TNA, FO 374/21, doc. 20, pp. 150-151. This was outlined in *Report No. 2 of the Commission on Polish Affairs: Eastern frontier of Poland*, TNA, FO 374/21, doc. 20, p. 147. This outlined the number of borderland people claimed by the Poles at Paris (18,153,000) and those assigned to Poland by the Commission (11,790,000). Of 5,489,000 Great, White and Little Russians claimed, only 749,000 were assigned to Poland; of 352,000 Lithuanians claimed, 40,000 were assigned, and of 28,000 Letts (Latvians) claimed, none were assigned, p. 149. Of 274,870 square kms claimed, the Poles were assigned 112,879 square kms, p. 151.

¹¹⁷ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 50.

¹¹⁸ TNA, FO 374/21, doc. 20, p. 148.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 50.

been due to their strong suspicion that it would be rejected by the Polish Government or because the Allies were awaiting the outcome of the Polish-Soviet War before suggesting concrete measures, or both. The frontier outlined by the Commission on Polish Affairs in April 1919 was, nevertheless, extremely important as it was later promoted by the Supreme Council, on 8 December 1919, as Poland's recognised eastern frontier.

Thus, the Paris Peace Conference ultimately failed to implement Poland's proposed eastern border as outlined by the Commission on Polish Affairs. Firstly, the Conference faced serious limitations on its power. It could attempt to enforce its proposals through promises or threats, but a lack of available, willing armed forces after the cessation of the Great War, committed to defending its resolutions, severely hampered its work. It was unable, therefore, to prevent Piłsudski's march eastwards in 1919 and could do little but protest, as he presented the Conference with a series of *fait accompli*.¹²¹ Secondly, its actions were severely hampered by the Russian situation. It was impossible to establish Poland's borders in the east whilst Russia was denied official representation at the Conference and the Russian Civil War continued to be fought in territory of the former Russian Empire. Only after the conclusion of this domestic conflict, could the Conference have potentially recognised a Russian Government with which to negotiate the question.¹²²

3.3 Russia and the Paris Peace Conference

Despite the absence of official Russian representation at the Peace Conference, the role of Russia in Europe and the peacemakers' fear of Bolshevism, greatly influenced decision-making in Paris in 1919. According to Woodrow Wilson,

The effect of the Russian problem on the Paris Conference... was profound: Paris cannot be understood without Moscow. Without ever being represented at Paris at all, the Bolsheviki and Bolshevism were profound elements at every turn. Russia played a more vital part at Paris than Prussia.¹²³

The Soviet regime's removal of their country from the Great War had forfeited any opportunity for Russia to participate in the Conference. She could neither be classed as a victorious power, nor as a liberated nation. Having concluded a peace treaty with

¹²¹ It could do nothing about the Polish occupation of Minsk, Wilno and Kiev, NAS, GD 40/17/898. Allied reaction was tempered by fear that if Poland was dealt with too harshly over her military victories, there was a real danger of Bolshevism spreading westwards.

¹²² The Allied Powers sincerely hoped that the Whites would be victorious and that they could treat with a government headed by Kolchak or Denikin.

¹²³ R. Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement: written from his unpublished and personal material*, vol. 2, (London, 1923), p. 64.

Germany, whilst her former Allies continued to fight, Russia's name did not appear on the list of victors after the war. Neither, however, had she been defeated by the Allied Powers and so did not appear on the list of losers. The November 1918 Armistice, at one stroke, annulled the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between Soviet Russia and Germany, but nothing had replaced it. In the international arena, Russia was in limbo, cut off and removed from the system of alliances.

This isolation was underlined and compounded by the ideological gulf between the Allies and the Soviet regime, as Western democracy and Russian Marxism battled it out during the Polish-Soviet War. Karl Marx was one of the 19th century's most influential philosophers and economic critics, although his economic, political and social theories made no immediate impact on the workers' movement until after his death in 1883. The coming to power of the Bolshevik Party in Russia in October 1917 provided the first practical implementation of his principles and as such, the importance of his writings for the Soviet regime cannot be underestimated.

Marx provided no detailed model for the establishment of a future socialist or communist society. Instead, his life's work provided a critical analysis of the capitalist economic system.¹²⁴ According to Marx, the fundamental aim of capitalism was profit, based on the ownership of private property and achieved through the exploitation of the proletariat's labour. His alternative to this system was socialism.¹²⁵ This aimed at the equal distribution of wealth through the total abolition of private property and overthrow of the ruling classes by a bourgeois revolution, in turn itself to be replaced by an international socialist revolution. Although it was the responsibility of communists to guide and direct this process, Marx argued that "...the emancipation of the working classes must be achieved by the working classes themselves".¹²⁶ Only when social classes ceased to exist and common ownership was established, could the ultimate objective of communism be achieved.

Internationalism is central to Marxist ideology. He believed that socialism could become a movement capable of destroying national boundaries and nation-states. As they

¹²⁴ See, K. Marx, *Das Kapital*, (Moscow, 1957).

¹²⁵ With his close collaborator, Friedrich Engels, Marx published *The Communist Manifesto*, in 1847, outlining a theoretical programme for the development of socialist systems and establishment of communist parties.

¹²⁶ K. Marx & F. Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, (London, 1967), pp. 78, 95-96 & 121. The Soviet regime overlooked this fundamental Marxist dictum when they tried to impose revolution on Poland from outside in July 1920, for which they paid the price of defeat.

did not own property and thus, had no loyalty to the state, the proletariat would welcome the demise of nationalism.¹²⁷ Crucially, this doctrine failed to recognise that conflicts can and do take place, not only between classes, but also between the working classes, as occurred in both the Great War and the Polish-Soviet War.¹²⁸

Marx believed that assisting “historic” nations, including Poland, against autocratic oppression would benefit the proletarian revolution in the long term as, “...the restoration of Poland means... the thwarting of Russia’s bid to dominate the world”.¹²⁹ Consequently, both Marx and Engels demanded the reestablishment of an independent Polish state. In the second Polish edition of *Manifest Komunistyczny*, published in 1892, Engels reiterated the basic Marxist tenet that the emancipation of the Polish working class was the responsibility of the Polish workers themselves, stating,

Polish independence... is a necessity for the harmonious collaboration of the European nations. It can be gained only by the young Polish proletariat, and in its hands it is secure. For the workers of all the rest of Europe need the independence of Poland just as much as the Polish workers themselves.¹³⁰

Initially, Marx dismissed Tsarist Russia as a backward, repressive country, lacking the well-developed urban workforce deemed necessary to ensure a successful revolution. In 1882, he surmised that, “If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land *may* serve as the starting point for a communist development”.¹³¹ It was, however, left to Marx’s followers to assess the suitability of Russia for this socialist revolution.

In 1917, Vladimir Lenin became titular leader of the world’s first socialist state, the establishment of which he had unfailingly worked towards, planned for and more than any other contemporary was responsible for.¹³² How can Lenin’s ideology best be defined? What did he expect would happen? And were his expectations met? In order to answer these questions, it is essential first to stress the most well known, but equally the most significant, element of Lenin’s persona: he was a Marxist. His faith in Marxism as the only positive, progressive world doctrine remained unshaken throughout his life. He was

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 102, asserting, “The working men have no country”.

¹²⁸ K. Marx & F. Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, (introduction by A. J. P. Taylor), p. 33.

¹²⁹ D. McLellan, *Karl Marx: his life and thought*, (St. Albans, 1976), pp. 361-362.

¹³⁰ K. Marx & F. Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 73.

¹³¹ K. Marx & F. Engels, “Marx to the Editorial Board of the *Otechestvenniye Zapiski*”, in K. Marx & F. Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, (Moscow, 1955), p. 377.

¹³² See, *Biographical Notes*.

fiercely, passionately and zealously devoted to the credo of Karl Marx, arguing that, "...the Marxist world outlook is the only true expression of the interests, the viewpoint, and the culture of the revolutionary proletariat".¹³³ In keeping with the central Marxist demand for continual critical analysis of changing world circumstances, Lenin was not, however, afraid to rework and reevaluate Marxist ideology to take into account current circumstances.

Through revolutionary means, Lenin sought the overthrow of the Tsarist dynasty, its replacement by a socialist regime, the removal of social classes and their substitution by a classless society, the abolition of religion, and the establishment of the common ownership of all property. The ultimate historic stage for Lenin, as for all Marxists, was the establishment of a communist system, under which the dictatorship of the proletariat and the existence of the state would wither away. This would leave individuals as equals, free from exploitation, working towards the good of all and taking joint responsibility for their social, cultural, economic and political development.¹³⁴

As with Marx, internationalism lay at the very foundation of Lenin's ideological beliefs.¹³⁵ The complete victory of socialist revolution was deemed impossible, if confined to one country. During the Polish-Soviet War, he consistently stressed that the Soviet regime could be secured only with the support of the formerly oppressed peoples of the Russian Empire, including the Poles. On 1 March 1920, for instance, he commented, "We have never made a secret of the fact that our revolution is only the beginning, that its victorious end will come only when we have lit up the whole world with these same fires of revolution [as in Russia]".¹³⁶ Following the initial establishment of a federation of soviet republics, his ultimate objective was the formation of a single worldwide Soviet Republic.¹³⁷ In theory, force was not to be used in this process. Instead, Lenin argued,

We want a *voluntary* union of nations – a union which precludes any coercion of one nation by another – a union founded on complete confidence, on a clear recognition of brotherly unity, on absolutely voluntary consent.¹³⁸

A hostile opponent of nationalism, Lenin's advocacy of a nation's right to self-determination was conditional upon and provisional until the eventual agreement of all

¹³³ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 337.

¹³⁴ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 33, pp. 1-120.

¹³⁵ This was an unchanging element of Lenin's writings. See, for example, V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 43.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* In reality, brute force was employed by Russia in an attempt to sovietise Poland in July and August 1920.

nations to unite within this Soviet federation.¹³⁹ The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) Programme in 1903, advocated, “The right of all nations in the state to self-determination”, on condition that each be evaluated, “...from the standpoint of the interests of overall social development and of the proletarian class struggle for socialism”.¹⁴⁰ Lenin concurred,

Our unreserved recognition of the struggle for freedom for self-determination does not in any way commit us to supporting every demand for national self-determination. As the Party of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party considers it to be its positive and principal task to further the self-determination of the proletariat in each nationality rather than that of peoples or nations.¹⁴¹

Although, in theory, Lenin supported the national demands of smaller nations, including Poland, against the domination of larger, oppressive nations, this was a clever tactical manoeuvre aimed at utilising the strong nationalist sentiments, existing throughout Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, for the socialist cause. Regarding national self-determination as a revolutionary dynamic, he advocated a three-stage process: the separation of nations into independent states; the establishment of a revolution within each, encouraged by local communists, and their voluntary reunification into the Soviet Socialist Republic, driven by economic necessity and the international solidarity of the working class.¹⁴² As a result, in 1917, the looming collapse of Russia as a multinational empire encouraged the Bolsheviks to state their support for, “...the right of all nationalities which are now part of the Russian state freely to separate and to form independent states”.¹⁴³

How then did Lenin view the specific question of Polish national self-determination, which was to prove central to Soviet policy during the war with Poland? The Polish question had been of interest to Lenin for many years, given its position as a formerly independent state, suppressed and partitioned by three great autocratic nations. The Poles, he regarded, as providing an excellent opportunity to utilise national sentiment for the socialist cause, a central theme of his 1903 article, *The National Question in our*

¹³⁹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 27, pp. 252-266.

¹⁴⁰ “Vtoroi s’ezd RSDRP” in *Vsesoiuznaia kommunisticheskaia partiia (b) v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh s’ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1936), p. 22.

¹⁴¹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 7, p. 233-234, rhetorically questioning, “Does recognition of the *right* of nations to self-determination really imply *support* of any demand of every nation for self-determination?”

¹⁴² V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 20, p. 338.

¹⁴³ Ibid. On 2 November 1917, the Soviet *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* announced the right of the former oppressed peoples of Russia to self-determination, up to secession and the formation of independent states, *D & M*, vol. 1, doc. 80, pp. 163-164.

Programme.¹⁴⁴ Quoting Karl Kautsky, Lenin observed that, “Once the proletariat tackles the Polish question it cannot but take a stand in favour of Poland’s independence”.¹⁴⁵ Crucially though, he did not seek to *actively* fight for Polish independence, arguing,

Russian Social-Democracy does not in the least intend to tie its own hands. In including in its programme recognition of the right of nations to self-determination, it takes into account *all* possible, and even all *conceivable*, combinations. That programme in no way precludes the adoption by the Polish proletariat of the slogan of a free and independent Polish republic, even though the probability of it becoming a reality before socialism is introduced is infinitesimal.¹⁴⁶

The article concluded with reiteration of the Marxist principle that only alliance of the Russian and Polish proletariats could guarantee the successful restoration of Polish independence.

Lenin continued to formulate his ideas on the Polish question between 1912 and 1914, when he lived in Kraków.¹⁴⁷ He believed that Polish hostility towards the Russian, Austrian and Prussian autocracies had made them politically conscious and as a result, he was willing to accept Polish national aspirations, fully convinced that once their independence was assured, the development of class consciousness would lead to reunification with Soviet Russia. Consequently, he argued, “In Russia we must stress the right of separation for the subject nations, while in Poland we must stress the right of such nations to unite”.¹⁴⁸ The slogan “national self-determination” was to be used as a propaganda tool, aimed at securing Polish support for the socialist cause, while Polish communists would simultaneously demand reunification with the Russian Soviet Republic. This was regarded by Lenin as essential not only for the development of the Polish revolutionary movement, but also for the safety of the socialist regime in Russia during the Polish-Soviet War.

One of the most important documents setting out the Soviet leader’s Polish aims during the conflict was published for the first time in 1992.¹⁴⁹ At the 9th All-Russian Conference

¹⁴⁴ *Iskra*, No. 44, 15 July 1930.

¹⁴⁵ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 7, p. 236. See, *Biographical Notes*.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 239. Polish independence was, of course, established without the assistance of socialist revolution in November 1918.

¹⁴⁷ Although he spoke English, French and German fluently, he failed to learn Polish, communicating with Polish communists through German and Russian.

¹⁴⁸ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 20, p. 312.

¹⁴⁹ *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, vol. 1, (1992), pp. 14-29, reprinted and translated in R. Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin: from the secret archive*, (New Haven, 1996), doc. 59, pp. 95-115. Pipes is inconsistent in dating this speech, stating in *Unknown Lenin* that it was made on 20 September 1920, pp. 94-95, but dating it 22 September 1920, in R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik regime, 1919-1924*, (London, 1994), p. 181. The latter is the correct date.

of the RKP(b), convened in Moscow on 22-25 September 1920, Lenin's conclusion to his political report provided an excellent insight into his real aspirations and objectives in the war with Poland. This secret speech, delivered to a closed session of the conference, examined Soviet conduct in the war and provided lucid explanations for the Red Army's overwhelming military defeat at Warsaw in August 1920. Given its highly sensitive nature, Lenin requested that it not be published, ordering the stenographer, "Please take fewer notes. This should not get into the press".¹⁵⁰ As a result, he spoke without reserve.

Indeed, the document remained hidden from public scrutiny in the Russian State Archive of Social-Political History (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii* (RGASPI)) for over 70 years as it blatantly contradicted the official Soviet interpretation of events. During the speech, Lenin acknowledged the need for deception, remarking,

When the Comintern Congress convened in July [1920] in Moscow, we were settling the question in the CC. We could not raise the question at the Comintern Congress because that congress had to proceed openly – that was its enormous revolutionary, global political significance.¹⁵¹

He further admitted that because a number of congress delegates, including German Independents, opposed the forceful sovietisation of Poland as un-Marxist, "...this question was deliberately not raised at the Congress".¹⁵² As noted, Marx argued that socialist revolution must be the responsibility of the proletariat of each country and could not be imposed from outside through the use of military force. The Red Army should, at most, assist the efforts of the working class of the given country. It should not be used as a decisive instrument in bringing about this change. Soviet plans to use the Red Army to spread revolution to Poland, therefore, had to be kept secret.¹⁵³

Even more importantly, for the first time, Lenin acknowledged that the Red Army offensive into Poland in July 1920 aimed not only at the sovietisation of Poland, but also at taking the military campaign further westwards, in particular, to Germany and England.¹⁵⁴ This intention was unknown to earlier historians working on the subject.¹⁵⁵ Lenin believed that the Red Army offensive would ignite the spark of revolution across Europe, as it

¹⁵⁰ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, doc. 59, p. 98; *Pravda*, 29 September 1920, published a concise version.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 99.

¹⁵² *Ibid*.

¹⁵³ Lenin criticised delegates at the *Comintern* Congress for their pacifist tendencies, *ibid*.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 100.

¹⁵⁵ For example, Davies argued, "The political purpose of the Red Army's advance was not to conquer Europe directly. The Red Army of 1920 could hardly be sent with 36 divisions to achieve what the Tsarist Army of 1914-1917 had failed to achieve with 150. Its purpose was to provide a social revolution", N. Davies, "The Soviet Command and the Battle of Warsaw", in *Soviet Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, (1972), p. 576.

advanced, drawing fresh recruits into its ranks, as it had during the Russian Civil War.¹⁵⁶ In this way, the Polish-Soviet War could be used as the initial engagement in a war against the capitalist Allied states, for the overthrow of the Versailles settlement, admitting,

This was a most important turning point not only in the politics of Soviet Russia but also in world politics... now we said we have become stronger, and we will respond with a counterattack to each of your attempts at attack... you risk that each of your attacks will expand the territory of the Soviet Republic.¹⁵⁷

Lenin clearly acknowledged in the speech that he had advocated and supported the use of the Red Army to take the revolution to Poland by force and would not have hesitated to employ this measure in the rest of Europe, admitting, “We used every opportunity to go from the defence to the offence”.¹⁵⁸ Warsaw represented the heart of the international imperialist system and the Polish-Soviet War was viewed by the Russian communists as a unique opportunity to influence politics not only in Poland, but also in Germany, Britain and all of Western Europe.¹⁵⁹

Marxist ideology was further developed in Soviet Russia during the Polish conflict by Leon Trotsky, through his development of the theory of “Permanent Revolution”.¹⁶⁰ This doctrine was intimately connected with the Marxist goal of international revolution, as for Trotsky,

The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable.... The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.¹⁶¹

He believed that the class unrest steadily intensifying in Western Europe could lead the international workers, in a fraternal union, to defend the revolution and argued that,

The dictatorship of the Russian working class will be able to finally entrench itself and to develop into a genuine, all-sided socialist construction only from the hour when the European working class frees us from the economic yoke and especially the military yoke of the European

¹⁵⁶ He was out of touch with the reality of the situation, drastically exaggerating the revolutionary potential of the working class in Germany and England, which he compared favourably with Russia in 1917.

¹⁵⁷ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, doc. 59, p. 99. He admitted, “We in the Central Committee knew that this was a new, fundamental question, that we stood at the turning point of the entire policy of the Soviet power”, p. 97.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 95.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 100.

¹⁶⁰ See, B. Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, (Oxford, 1978), pp. 108-174; I. Thatcher, *Trotsky*, (London, 2003), pp. 36-42.

¹⁶¹ L.D. Trotsky, *Permanentnaia revoliutsia*, (Berlin, 1930), p. 167.

bourgeoisie, and, having overthrown the latter, comes to our assistance with its organization and technology.¹⁶²

The retention of Soviet power in Russia and the future of socialism were reliant upon European working class support. For Trotsky, as for Marx and Lenin, the confinement of socialism to one country was impossible.

In contrast with Lenin, however, Trotsky was very little concerned with the national question prior to the war, and the plight of national minorities, including the Poles, lacked interest for him.¹⁶³ He was convinced that the nationality question would become redundant with the establishment of an internationalist socialist movement and the advancement of an increasingly developed proletariat. It is, therefore, somewhat ironic that it was Trotsky, not Lenin, who correctly appreciated the importance of Polish nationalist sentiment throughout the conflict, taking this into consideration when arguing against a Soviet military advance into ethnographic Poland in July 1920.¹⁶⁴

As Commissar for War and active participant in the conflict, Trotsky was the Russian communist leader who wrote most extensively on the war.¹⁶⁵ For him, as for the RKP(b), Poland was not a pressing priority in 1919.¹⁶⁶ Portraying himself as a reluctant participant in the Polish-Soviet War, Trotsky recorded, “I did not want this war, because I realised only too clearly how difficult it would be to prosecute it after 3 years of continuous civil war”.¹⁶⁷ Trotsky is disingenuous here. Even if he did not actively seek war, he believed that revolutionary war with Poland was possible by 1920.¹⁶⁸ He fully believed that after the Polish proletariat had become masters of their country, a fraternal alliance between Soviet Russia and Soviet Poland would be forged. Trotsky was willing to use the Red Army machinery, over which he presided, but crucially only in tandem with the wishes of the Polish population.¹⁶⁹ On 2 May 1920, he acknowledged,

¹⁶² L.D. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, vol. 1, (London, 1973), pp. 86-87; *Izvestiia*, Nos. 90 & 92, 29 April-1 May 1919.

¹⁶³ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn': opyt avtobiografii*, vol. 2, (Moscow, 1990), p. 63.

¹⁶⁴ Trotsky did not believe that revolution could be created abroad by the Soviet military authorities. Instead, true to the teaching of Marx, he argued that the task of the regime was simply to support the European revolutionary movement as it developed.

¹⁶⁵ L.D. Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed: the military writings and speeches of Leon Trotsky*, vol. 3, (London, 1981), pp. 127-243, contains his articles, essays, telegrams, orders, appeals, speeches and theses on the conflict.

¹⁶⁶ L.D. Trotsky, *First Five Years*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁷ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, vol. 2, pp. 189-190.

¹⁶⁸ Writing, “War... is the continuation of politics by other means”, as originally stated by the Prussian general, Karl von Clausewitz, L.D. Trotsky, *First Five Years*, p. 56.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

We must inflict a thorough military defeat upon the armed forces of White-Guard Poland, so as to make politically and psychologically inevitable the revolutionary defeat of the Polish bourgeoisie. *This second task must be wholly carried out by the Polish proletariat.* Our duty is only to facilitate this task.¹⁷⁰

This endorsement of Marxist ideology by the RKP(b) meant that the Soviet leadership failed to acknowledge the authority of the Peace Conference and prevented the regime from seeking diplomatic representation at Paris in 1919. The Conference, in turn, reflecting the Allies fear of Bolshevism, refused to recognise the Soviet Government, either *de facto* or *de jure*, or have any official dealings with the regime. The absence of Russia was striking and made it impossible to resolve any issues relating to the country. This has been condemned as one of the Conference's greatest failings.¹⁷¹

The Conference did have unofficial contact with representatives of non-Bolshevik groups, who had united in January 1919, to form the Russian Political Conference. Headed by Sergei Sazonov, and including Prince Georgii Lvov, Paul Miliukov, Boris Savinkov and Basil Maklakov, this body was not officially invited to participate in proceedings. However, it met daily, discussed current matters and sent numerous notes to the Supreme Council, presenting their requests.¹⁷² Savinkov informed *Gazeta Poranna*, on 1 July 1920, that,

The fate of Europe and of peace depends entirely on the way in which the future Russo-Polish relations are going to be arranged. Should an alliance between Poland and Russia be frustrated we shall be confronted by an ominous Russo-German alliance. It is therefore clear that the policy of the Allied Powers should work for a Russo-Polish rapprochement.¹⁷³

They recognized the right of Poland to independent existence within its ethnographic borders west of the River Bug, but disputed all Polish claims to territories further east. The border, established in 1795 by the Third Partition, was deemed the rightful Polish-Russian frontier.¹⁷⁴ The Political Conference also reserved for the Russian people the final decision on the composition of the border states.¹⁷⁵ Its lack of official status at Paris prevented its members from submitting authoritative demands, however, and Russia suffered from having no representative who could speak for the country as a whole. The former Russian *Chargé d'Affaires* to Britain, Konstantin Nabokoff, decried this situation and argued, "I am

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*, p. 144. Author's italics.

¹⁷¹ J. Man, p. 143, as was the absence of Germany.

¹⁷² Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 10, p. 22. They had only limited support from the rival governments of Denikin and Kolchak.

¹⁷³ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 10, p. 22.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*; NAS, GD 40/17/777/1-2.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

firmly convinced that since the Peace Conference met in Paris, the influence of Russian politicians, diplomats and casual advisers upon the policy of the Entente was reduced to naught".¹⁷⁶ As a result, the Russian case at Paris was badly promoted and only partially understood.

Moreover, in 1919 there was still much confusion and disagreement amongst the Allied Powers as how best to deal with Soviet Russia. The long-term impact of the Russian Revolution on the world stage remained unclear and there was a severe shortage of accurate, reliable information on Russia available to the peacemakers.¹⁷⁷ The Allies desperately needed to formulate a coherent, consistent and coordinated Russian policy, but were unable to do so. They neither established relations with *Sovnarkom*, nor declared war on the Soviet state. They wanted, paradoxically, to develop relations with the Russian nation whilst simultaneously fighting Bolshevik ideology.

The most vehement opposition to Russian representation at the Paris Conference was expressed by Clemenceau.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, he went so far as to threaten, with the unanimous backing of his Government and Cabinet, to resign his post as President of the Conference if Russia was admitted to the negotiations.¹⁷⁹ France had entered the Great War in support of her Russian ally and as a result, regarded the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as an unpardonable betrayal.¹⁸⁰ Woodrow Wilson, in turn, supported a Soviet Russian policy of non-recognition and non-intervention.¹⁸¹

British policy was first defined in a *Memorandum by the British Delegation on the Former Russian Empire*, issued on 20 January 1919, which stated,

...until some state of order and established Government is evolved in Russia, it would seem useless to lay down any settled policy as regards the country as a whole. We must wait on events, and see how they shape.... it would be impossible, for a long time to come, to establish definitely the Western frontiers of Russia.¹⁸²

An astounding naivety was displayed by the British delegation's assertion that they would consider entering into, "...semi-official relations" with the Soviet Russia on condition,

¹⁷⁶ K.D. Nabokoff, *The Ordeal of a Diplomat*, (London, 1921), pp. 304-305.

¹⁷⁷ The Allies had withdrawn their diplomats from Russia in the summer of 1918 and almost all Western newspaper correspondents had departed by the time the Paris Peace Conference convened.

¹⁷⁸ D. Lloyd George, *Peace*, vol. 1, p. 211.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 227.

¹⁸⁰ On 30 November 1915, France, Britain, Italy, Japan and Russia had signed a pact, agreeing not to conclude a separate peace during the Great War, NAS, GD 193/327/6.

¹⁸¹ M. MacMillan, p. 79.

¹⁸² TNA, FO 374/20, doc. 16, pp. 64-65.

“That we cannot in any circumstances have dealings with Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, and possibly some others, who are responsible for the crimes committed by the Bolsheviks”.¹⁸³ These *were* the leading Bolsheviks with whom it *would* be necessary to deal if relations were to be established.

Lloyd George played an important role in the Russian question at Paris, as he did the Polish question, and came into conflict with his fellow statesmen as a result of the policy he advocated.¹⁸⁴ In his opinion, if Poland, which had claims on Russian territory, was invited to Paris, then Russia ought also to have been officially represented and consulted. He recorded,

I was becoming more and more convinced that world peace was unattainable as long as that immense country was left outside the Covenant of Nations. I acted upon that conviction up to the end of my Premiership.... The affairs of nearly 200 million people could not be settled without hearing them.¹⁸⁵

On 16 January 1919, he outlined the Supreme Council's Russian policy choices: fight to destroy Bolshevism; isolate it from the rest of the world, or invite Russians, including the Bolsheviks, to the Conference.¹⁸⁶ Lloyd George argued that the first two measures – Allied Intervention and Allied Blockade – had made only limited gains, and consequently, he strenuously called for adoption of the third option.¹⁸⁷ An invitation was dispatched inviting Russia to send representatives of all political persuasions to the Princes Islands in the Sea of Marmora, to discuss bringing, “...peace to Russia and a good understanding between Russia and the rest of the world”.¹⁸⁸ The Whites refused to attend and the idea was shelved. The shooting and wounding of Clemenceau on 19 February 1919, the very day discussion on Russia was due to resume in the Supreme Council, postponed any decision on the Russian question indefinitely.¹⁸⁹

Thus, ideology was of crucial importance in the formulation of Polish and Soviet objectives in 1919, and in determining the treatment of both states at Paris. Failure to deal decisively with either regime was one of the most important missed opportunities of the

¹⁸³ Ibid, pp. 65-66.

¹⁸⁴ D. Lloyd George, *Peace*, vol. 1, p. 86, notably George Curzon, British Foreign Secretary, and Winston Churchill, British Minister for War.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 207-211.

¹⁸⁶ *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, 1st Series, vol. 2, (London, 1946), pp. 744-748, (hereafter *DBFP*).

¹⁸⁷ The Allies released the blockade on 18 June 1919, NAS, GD 193/327/40. Lloyd George believed that by ensuring Russia's economic recovery, the appeal of Bolshevism in Europe would diminish, NAS, GD 193/327/14-21.

¹⁸⁸ NAS, GD 752-767; NAS, GD 754/40/17.

¹⁸⁹ M. MacMillan, p. 86.

Peace Conference and procrastination, thereafter, became the defining characteristic of Western policy for the duration of the Polish-Soviet War. For Soviet Russia, Marxism remained the guiding tenet throughout the conflict, although its leaders were not afraid to adapt the ideas of Marx as and when circumstances dictated. Thus, directed by Lenin, the Soviet regime cleverly promoted a policy of national self-determination as a short-term propaganda move, in order to strengthen their long-term aim of establishing worldwide socialist revolution. Ideological motivation also largely determined the aims of the Polish state and in pursuit of their objectives the Poles were guided by two distinct, incompatible ideological agendas: federalism and annexation. Both schools of thought were to play a crucial role in the development of Polish-Soviet diplomatic, political and military relations during the critical years 1919-1921.

3.4 The Treaty of Versailles and the Outcome of the Paris Peace Conference

After five months of deliberation, negotiation and debate, the Treaty of Versailles was formally signed on 28 June 1919, signalling the conclusion of the Great War between the Allied Powers and Germany.¹⁹⁰ Whilst Poland's sovereignty was assured by the Treaty and the reestablished state was welcomed into the international community, recognition of the Russian state, *de facto* and *de jure*, was denied. In the difficult matter of establishing new state borders in Central and Eastern Europe, the Versailles settlement had mixed success. Poland's western frontier received detailed attention.¹⁹¹ Her eastern border, however, proved too contentious an issue for the peacemakers, who were unwilling or unable to resolve the question.¹⁹² Any frontier drawn by the Peace Conference would not have been recognised by either the Russian or Polish States, which were, at that time, embroiled in a military conflict to resolve the question themselves. Instead, the Polish-Soviet frontier was referred to only once in the 200-page document, with Article 87 stating that, "The boundaries of Poland not laid down in the present Treaty will be subsequently determined by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers".¹⁹³ This clearly demonstrated to both the Poles and Russians that the Allied Powers lacked any real authority to enforce their wishes on the Polish-Soviet War and its outcome.

¹⁹⁰ Twenty-seven nations were signatories to the Peace Treaty in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, J. Man, pp. 139-142.

¹⁹¹ Plebiscites were ordered in Upper Silesia and Teschen, whilst Danzig was established as a free city and Poland was guaranteed access to the sea, NAS, GD 433/2/18, pp. 41-43; NAS, GD 433/2/18, file 64.

¹⁹² If agreement failed to be reached by Poland and Russia, the Allies planned to refer it for League of Nations arbitration, TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 26, enclosure 1, p. 32.

¹⁹³ Ibid. Kutrzeba incorrectly argued that the Treaty made no mention of the Polish-Russian border, S. Kutrzeba, "The Struggle for the Frontiers, 1919-1923", in W. Reddaway, *Marshal Pilsudski*, (London, 1939), p. 512.

Although the Paris Peace Conference and the Versailles settlement largely defined the world order for the rest of the twentieth century, it also left many problems unresolved. The Europe which emerged in June 1919 was dramatically different from the pre-war order: the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires had disappeared entirely; Russia and Germany had been significantly reduced in size and strength; and nine new independent European states were born. It proved to be much easier to break-up the multi-national empires than it did to replace them with ethnically homogenous states.¹⁹⁴ Much remained unresolved when the Paris Peace Conference wound up on 21 January 1920.¹⁹⁵

Nevertheless, one of the most striking outcomes of the Peace Conference was the reemergence of the Polish State, more than a century after its partition. For Poles, despite having many grievances over the terms of the Peace Treaty, the most important factor contained within the settlement was the international community's recognition of Poland as an independent state. As the Prime Minister, Paderewski, acknowledged to the Polish Diet on 12 November 1919,

Today we are a free nation, one of the largest in Europe. We gained a victory at the Peace Conference, for even though we did not obtain all we desired, still we received very much. We have our own sea coast... through Danzig... Lemberg [Lwów] is out of danger; Galicia, except for the temporary solving of the problem, is not menaced; Vilno [Wilno] and Minsk are freed from the enemy.¹⁹⁶

Versailles, however, also left the new state to face enormous domestic problems and potentially life-threatening border disputes.

For the Russian communists, the Treaty of Versailles embodied Allied policy of erecting an insurmountable barrier between Soviet Russia and the West. At the heart of this programme lay Poland. On 15 October 1920, Lenin asserted, "It has come to pass that the Peace of Versailles now hinges on Poland".¹⁹⁷ This interpretation of events inevitably led to an escalation of hostilities between Poland and her eastern neighbour. Indeed, the failure of the Paris Conference to define the Polish-Russian border left the issue to be resolved by two methods: Polish-Soviet diplomatic negotiation and direct military action.

¹⁹⁴ The Conference was criticised as, "...one of the 'might have been's' of history", by Philip Kerr's secretary in Paris, NAS, GD 1/839/1, p. 7.

¹⁹⁵ Its executive functions were entrusted to The Ambassadors' Conference, represented by the five Allied and Associated Powers, NAS, GD 433/2/18, p. 49. The first official involvement of this body in Polish-Soviet relations was to ratify the Treaty of Riga in 1923, two years after it was signed.

¹⁹⁶ TNA, FO 417/7, no. 18, pp. 18-19.

¹⁹⁷ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 353.

4. The Path to War

The difficulties facing the infant Polish and Soviet regimes early in 1919 were, however, enormous and very similar. Neither country entered the Polish-Soviet conflict from a position of strength. Indeed, the war was to exert such a tremendous strain on the belligerents, that by October 1920, both nations faced serious domestic crises, which threatened the survival of their respective regimes. Poland and Russia had suffered huge losses as a result of the Great War, in terms of human casualties and destruction of their country's infrastructure.

Piłsudski remarked upon the enormous problems facing the Poles in a *Decree to the Polish People*, issued on 14 November 1920, in which he stated, "Upon my release from the German prison, I was confronted with the most chaotic internal and external conditions".¹⁹⁸ Indeed, according to the Polish Head of State, "[Poland's] far fields were laid waste, her cities were in ruins, her people worn down and wearied by war... which had left them with neither the exaltation of the victor nor the claim to pity of the vanquished".¹⁹⁹ Isolation compounded these difficulties. Enemies surrounded Poland on all sides and the incorporation of a large number of resentful ethnic minorities into the new state created much domestic unrest. There was a severe shortage of financial reserves and eight different currencies were in circulation. The economic base of the reestablished country was predominantly agricultural and Poland had only a small industrial heartland. The new state lacked a coherent administrative structure and education system.²⁰⁰ An army had to be created from Polish units, which had earlier formed part of the divergent Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian armies, in order to protect her long and, as yet, undefined frontiers. Crucially, the Poles first had to establish a government and a political system, before they could even begin to deal with the problems facing the country, the most threatening of which at the beginning of 1919, was the war looming with Soviet Russia.²⁰¹

Like Poland, Russia in 1919 remained predominantly an industrially undeveloped, poor, agricultural state. The peasant majority was largely uneducated and illiteracy was extremely high. The aftermath of the Great War and the two revolutions of 1917 had created severe disruption within the former Russian Empire. Desperate shortages of food,

¹⁹⁸ *Dziennik Praw Państwa Polskiego*, (Warsaw, 1918-1919), doc. 17, p. 40.

¹⁹⁹ Piłsudski Institute, Kolekcja no. 2, 2/7/2a/41/1, p. 3.

²⁰⁰ Polish Institute, KOL 180, p.10.

²⁰¹ Polish Institute, KOL 82/1/5.

raw materials and consumer goods were experienced by Russians and minority populations alike. At the time of Poland's reemergence in November 1918, Russia was embroiled in a violent civil war, facing both Allied intervention and a blockade. War weariness and discontent was rife, and diplomatic isolation from the international community compounded the country's difficulties.²⁰² The Soviet regime had no experience as rulers and no clear blueprint to follow in order to deal with the crises it faced. Both Poland and Russia were, thus, seriously unprepared for the war which broke out between them the following month.

²⁰² Trotsky argued that, at the beginning of 1919, "Europe resembles a mad-house... even its inmates do not know for one half-hour at a time whom they are going to butcher and with whom they will fraternise", *Pravda*, 26 January 1919.

Chapter 2: Polish-Soviet Diplomacy, 1919

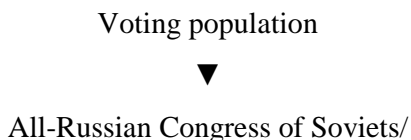
Diplomatic negotiation was a continuous feature of the Polish-Soviet War, from its outbreak in February 1919, until the Treaty of Riga was signed in March 1921. Employed by the statesmen of Poland and Soviet Russia, in conjunction with military directives, diplomacy reflected both the nature and development of the conflict. The term “diplomacy” has a number of connotations, including: the conduct of relations between states by peaceful means; the business or art of the professional diplomatist; skill in the management of international relations, and tact in mediation, negotiation and representation.¹ An assessment of Polish-Soviet diplomacy must, therefore, necessarily include an examination of the diplomatic correspondence between the two states. However, “diplomacy” can also be used as a synonym for foreign policy or to describe a division of the Foreign Office, the aim of which is to create international confidence and attain national objectives. The formulation of this policy by statesmen and its execution by diplomats are interdependent, and both dimensions must be examined to fully understand Polish-Soviet relations in the period 1918-1921.

1. Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

1.1 Soviet Russia

The decision-making process employed by the Soviet regime was of crucial importance to its Polish policy during the war. Which bodies determined the course pursued by Soviet politicians, diplomats and military leaders? Was the programme state or party-controlled? The answers to these questions provide much insight into the direction pursued by the Soviet regime but have previously been overlooked by historians of the conflict.

As demonstrated by the following diagram, the distribution of state authority in Soviet Russia in 1919-1921 was based on three crucial organisations.²



¹ *Collins English Dictionary* (Glasgow, 1991). Lord Robert Cecil informed the House of Commons on 31 July 1918, “...we have passed the day when diplomacy is merely concerned with international duties – with peace and war and things of that kind. It has to do with a great deal more than that”, National Archives of Scotland, GD193/115/9, 1-43, p. 26, (hereafter NAS).

² Diagram modified from D. McLellan, *Karl Marx: the legacy*, (London, 1983), p. 87.

All-Russian Central Executive Committee



Council of Peoples' Commissars (*Sovnarkom*)



Commissariats

▼ – elections

Article 12 of the Soviet Constitution of 1918 decreed that supreme authority in the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) was vested in the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, and during the periods between Congresses, in the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (CEC).³ These two institutions were responsible for setting general policy and had wide-ranging powers which affected Soviet conduct in the war.⁴ These included: the direction of foreign and domestic policy; the establishment and alteration of frontiers; the right to declare war, conclude and ratify peace, and the appointment and dismissal of *Sovnarkom*, its chairman and members.

Soviet policy was then studied and elaborated in *Sovnarkom*, under the chairmanship of Lenin, before being passed to the individual commissariats for implementation.⁵ Commissars were, in turn, responsible to *Sovnarkom* and the All-Russian CEC. Of the sixteen commissariats in 1919, the most critically important for the war were the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, led by G.V. Chicherin and his deputy, L.M. Karakhan, and the Commissariat for War, under Trotsky and his second in command, E.M. Sklianskii. In theory, therefore, the formulation, elaboration and implementation of foreign and diplomatic policy rested with state organisations. The reality, however, proved somewhat different.

Throughout the conflict, Soviet policy was in fact governed almost exclusively by the Russian Communist Party (RKP(b)). The following diagram demonstrates the decision-making process adopted.⁶

Regional, provincial and local RKP(b) organisations



³ National Archives of Scotland GD193/327/64, p. 27, (hereafter NAS). The Congress of Soviets comprised representatives of Russian provinces and towns with more than 25,000 inhabitants.

⁴ However, as the All-Russian Congress of Soviets met irregularly, and for only short periods, the All-Russian CEC made the majority of state policy decisions, *ibid*, p. 23.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 27.

⁶ Diagram modified from D. McLellan, p. 87.

Congress of Russian Communist Party



Central Committee (CC RKP(b))



Political Bureau (*Politburo*)

▼ – elections

After the October Revolution of 1917, RKP(b) rule increasingly became equated with Russian state authority as the party ceased to function as a distinct organisation, appropriating to itself all important decision-making. The resulting deliberative apparatus was invested within the Central Committee and, ultimately, within the Political Bureau.⁷ As the leading figures in the Congress of Soviets and *Sovnarkom* were also the leading lights of the CC RKP(b) and *Politburo*, this proved to be a relatively straightforward process.

The CC RKP(b) in January 1920, mid-point in the war, had 18 members, including, Lenin, Trotsky, J.V. Stalin, G.E. Zinoviev, L.B. Kamenev, and two Poles, Feliks Dzierżyński and Karol Radek.⁸ It was these party members who held Soviet decision-making largely in their hands. As Trotsky observed on 26 July 1920,

...now that we have received an offer of peace from the Polish Government, who decides the question?... We have our Council of Peoples' Commissars, of course, but that, too, must be under a certain control. Whose control? The control of the working class as a formless chaotic mass? No. The Central Committee of the Party is called together to discuss and decide the question. And when we have to wage war... to whom do we turn? To the Party, to the CC.⁹

The large Central Committee proved too unmanageable when rapid decisions were required, however, and as a result, one month after the Polish-Soviet War broke out in February 1919, a 5-man Political Bureau (*Politburo*) was created to guide and direct Soviet policy between CC sessions.¹⁰ This body soon became the most powerful decision-making

⁷ As the only officially recognised party in Russia during the conflict, RKP(b) members dominated state institutions.

⁸ NAS, GD193/327/64, p. 30.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 127-128.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 27, consisting of Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Krestinsky, and Menzhinsky.

institution in the country. As Lenin conceded on 29 March 1920, “The Political Bureau adopted decisions on all questions of foreign and domestic policy”.¹¹

Western statesmen and diplomats correctly identified Lenin and Trotsky as the two leading Russian communists during the war.¹² As a member of the CC RKP(b), *Politburo* and *Sovnarkom*; Commissar for Foreign Affairs until March 1918, and thereafter Commissar for War and Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council, Trotsky played an important role in determining Soviet policy. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that, in this, he faced limitations as,

The Civil war [and the Polish-Soviet War] kept me away from the work in the Council of Commissars. I lived now in a railway-carriage or in an automobile. After weeks and months of such traveling, I got so completely out of touch with the current business that I could not pick up the threads again in my brief visits to Moscow.¹³

As a result, he confessed that his involvement in decision-making was largely confined to military matters during the war.¹⁴ Indeed, during these turbulent years, the frequent absence of leading communists, required on the various fronts, prevented the *Politburo* from meeting regularly in Moscow.¹⁵

Consequently, it was possible for Lenin, the one communist who remained in the capital, at the centre of party and governmental work, to assume the role of Soviet Russia’s chief policy maker. As recognised leader of the RKP(b), titular head of the *Politburo* and chairman of *Sovnarkom*, he concerned himself with policy-making’s elaboration and execution at all levels.¹⁶ With a primary support base in the RKP(b) and in particular, the *Politburo*, he directed the Soviet agenda, adeptly coordinating both individuals and institutions in pursuit of his objectives. This facilitated a flexible policy, which could shift rapidly to meet existing conditions.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 31. V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobraniie sochinenii*, vol. 40, (Moscow, 1956-1965), p. 238 (hereafter PSS); a fact clearly recognised by contemporaries see, The National Archives, FO 418, part 2, doc. 41, p. 128, (hereafter TNA).

¹² NAS, GD 433/2/18. A number incorrectly accorded Trotsky a more senior role than Lenin, including Sir Hugh MacKinder M.P. who reported to the British Foreign Office in December 1920, “Trotsky now overshadows Lenin”, TNA, FO 418, part 2, doc. 6, p. 23.

¹³ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn’: opyt avtobiografii*, vol. 2, (Berlin, 1990), pp. 84-85.

¹⁴ Ibid. George Kidston misunderstood the situation when he reported on 4 October 1920 that, “He [Trotsky] speaks almost exclusively on military questions. *He is afraid of contradicting Lenin and is therefore, reserved in all political matters*”, TNA, FO 418, part 2, doc. 41, p. 128.

¹⁵ TNA, FO 418, part 2, doc. 41, p. 130.

¹⁶ He also chaired the Council of Workers’ and Peasants’ Defence, organising the war effort from July 1920.

According to the British diplomat, George Kidston, with the exception of Lenin and Trotsky, other Communists at *Politburo* sessions, “...have so little influence that they are only allowed to appear, but scarcely ever offer an opinion”.¹⁷ The available evidence does not support this assertion. Indeed, Lenin’s writings demonstrate that he was in constant contact with all his *Politburo* colleagues during the war, requesting not only information, but seeking their opinions and advice on current issues.¹⁸ In this way, he not only gathered all available information before deciding policy, but also kept his colleagues involved, preventing their isolation from the process. This crucially allowed Lenin to deflect criticism by sharing responsibility for decisions taken.

Although following the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917, Lenin had questioned the need for foreign policy, asking Trotsky, “What foreign policy will we have now?”, under his guidance the conduct of Soviet foreign policy during the conflict became a well-defined process.¹⁹ *Politburo* directives were transmitted to *Sovnarkom* for development into specific policies, before being handed over to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (*Narodnyi komissariat po inostrannym delam (NKID)*) for implementation. Diplomats of the *NKID*, in turn, provided the *Politburo* with crucial first-hand information from abroad, including the Polish communist, Julian Marchlewski, who was frequently consulted by Lenin during the war, heading Soviet diplomatic negotiations with the Poles in both July and autumn 1919.²⁰

In turn, Marxist theory provided no clear indication of the role diplomacy would play in a socialist society and consequently, the Soviet leadership had no diplomatic blueprint to follow after the October Revolution. Initially, the regime believed that diplomacy – a hated tenet of capitalist society – would become obsolete following the establishment of worldwide socialist revolution. Lenin’s suspicion of the diplomatic medium was observed by Trotsky, who commented that,

When Lenin... listens over the radio to a parliamentary speech by one of the imperialist politicians, or to a text of a diplomatic note of immediate interest... he looks like a shrewd muzhik not to be taken in by smooth words and fooled by polite phrases.²¹

¹⁷ TNA, FO 418, part 2, doc. 41, p. 129, report to George Curzon, 4 October 1920.

¹⁸ *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 1-23 (hereafter *RGASPI*). Lenin recorded, “...the questions were so numerous that they frequently had to be decided under conditions of extreme haste, and it was only because members of the [*Politburo*]... were so well acquainted with each other... and had confidence in each other, that this work could have been done at all”, V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 239.

¹⁹ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, vol. 2, p. 63.

²⁰ See, *Biographical Notes*.

²¹ L.D. Trotsky, *On Lenin: notes towards a biography*, (London, 1971), p. 146.

As a result, one of the first acts of the new regime, the publication of a *Decree on Peace* on 26 October 1917, effectively removed Russia from the traditional European diplomatic system. If world revolution proved imminent, the Bolsheviks would have no inducement to negotiate with their ideological opponents.

The signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 demonstrated, however, that this objective was not immediately attainable, and the subsequent deterioration of relations with the West heightened Soviet diplomatic isolation.²² Priority was thereafter given to the consolidation of the infant socialist state, and it was to diplomacy that the RKP(b) turned in an attempt to regulate relations with the outside world. Throughout the Polish-Soviet War, contrary to initial expectation, the Soviet regime relied heavily upon tactical diplomatic negotiation to pursue its objectives in a capitalist, largely hostile world.

To facilitate this, the *NKID* was quickly established, under the direction of Trotsky.²³ The latter hoped that this appointment would allow him to concentrate attention on domestic affairs, famously declaring, “I will issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the peoples of the world, and then shut up shop”.²⁴ He was not attracted to diplomacy by temperament or outlook, and failed initially to recognise the important role it would play in the consolidation of the Soviet state. For Trotsky, as for all communists, diplomatic negotiation was regarded as a temporary expedient necessary only until the international revolution negated the need for inter-state diplomacy. Consequently, he did not find it a “gratifying field” in which to be involved and confessed, “I absolutely cannot understand revolutionaries who willingly accept posts as ambassadors and feel like fish in water in their surroundings”.²⁵ He further admitted, “I used to leave the running of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs entirely to Comrades Markin and Zalkin. I limited myself to producing a few notes of a propagandist character and receiving a small number of visitors”.²⁶

Nevertheless, Trotsky was forced to concede that, “The business [of diplomacy] proved a bit more complicated than I had expected”.²⁷ To develop an almost entirely new

²² The Allies withdrew their diplomatic corps from Russia following the signing of this Treaty, K.D. Nabokoff, *The Ordeal of a Diplomat*, (London, 1921), p. 230.

²³ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, vol. 2, p. 63.

²⁴ Ibid. He later argued that he had intentionally exaggerated his viewpoint as he had, “...wanted to emphasise the fact that the centre of gravity was not in diplomacy at that time”, I. Zalkin, “Iz pervykh mesatsev narodnogo komiteta po inostrannym delam”, in *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, (Moscow, 1922), no. 15, pp. 55-61.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 88.

²⁶ L.D. Trotsky, *On Lenin*, p. 117.

²⁷ Ibid.

diplomatic service, he employed exiled revolutionaries who, having lived abroad before 1917, had knowledge both of foreign languages and the political situation in various European states.²⁸ This ensured that by the end of 1917, the *NKID*, with a staff of 126, was the first commissariat to become fully operational.²⁹

Crucial for the future development of the Soviet diplomatic profession, Georgii Vasil'evich Chicherin, a revolutionary much more suited by both experience and temperament, took over the role of Soviet Russia's leading diplomat, on 8 March 1918.³⁰ A former tsarist foreign office employee and member of a family long involved in the diplomatic profession, Chicherin's extensive knowledge of international diplomacy, first-hand experience of negotiation, and contacts with foreign diplomats, combined with his abilities as an excellent linguist, prompted Lenin to appoint him as Trotsky's replacement.³¹ This was a clever move as Chicherin's tact in dealing with the outside world was well recognised and appreciated by contemporaries. Lord Derby, a British diplomat posted to Germany, deemed him to be, for instance, "... an agreeable and intelligent Russian with no special sign of fanaticism nor anything to suggest the Machiavelli he is supposed to be".³²

Despite being one of Europe's leading diplomats and Soviet Russia's chief negotiator in the war with Poland, Chicherin was, nevertheless, admitted only a limited role in the decision-making process. Communist distrust of diplomacy and, consequently, of diplomats, was reflected in his inferior status within the RKP(b) and a number of *NKID* officials outranked him in party status, including Litvinov, Ioffe and Krestinskii.³³ Instead, he loyally implemented the foreign policy formulated in the *Politburo*, renouncing independent initiatives to follow the guidance of Lenin.³⁴ He did, succeed, however, in raising the prestige of Soviet diplomacy and was its eloquent spokesman, conducting skilful negotiations with the Poles and the West during the conflict.

²⁸ For example, M. Litvinov, residing in Britain prior to the revolution, was appointed Soviet *Chargé d'Affaires* in London. The British Government withheld official recognition of his appointment.

²⁹ T. O'Conner, *Diplomacy and Revolution: G.V. Chicherin and Soviet foreign affairs, 1918-1930*, (Ames, 1987), p. 55.

³⁰ See *Biographical Notes*. Trotsky noted that after his release from British prison on 3 January, Chicherin, "...arrived in Moscow at the most opportune moment, and with a sigh of relief, I handed the diplomatic helm over to him. I was not appearing at the ministry at all then", L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, vol. 2, p. 72.

³¹ Noting, "Chicherin is an excellent, conscientious, intelligent, knowledgeable worker. It is necessary to value such people", V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 50, p. 111.

³² NAS, GD 433/2/18.

³³ Chicherin did not become a CC RKP(b) member until 1925 and he was never admitted to the *Politburo*.

³⁴ G.V. Chicherin, *Sbornik statei*, p. 3.

Prior to the outbreak of the Great War, secret diplomacy, unaccountable to the general public, was accepted international practice.³⁵ However, worldwide condemnation of this system as one of the principal reasons for the outbreak of the First World War gained momentum, with the Russian socialist newspaper *Izvestiia* arguing, on 18 March 1917,

Secret diplomacy is the natural offspring of autocracy. It is afraid of light and prefers to hatch its dirty ploys in darkness, carefully protecting itself from public control... because such diplomacy has only the interests of the ruling class in mind and is always directed against the people.³⁶

The subsequent demand for open, easily scrutinised diplomacy gained impetus following the overthrow of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian monarchies in 1917-1918, and accelerated a move towards a more democratic, popularly controlled foreign policy on an international scale. Indeed, the first of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points in January 1918 demanded the establishment of, "Open covenants of peace openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view".³⁷

The Soviet regime was, in fact, the first government to announce its intention of actively practising open diplomacy, when it unambiguously stated in its *Decree on Peace*, "The Government abolishes secret diplomacy and on its part expresses the firm intention to conduct all negotiations absolutely openly before the entire people".³⁸ Support for this diplomatic genre intensified during the Polish-Soviet War, when the RKP(b), as excellent tacticians, realised the benefits to be gained by utilising open diplomacy for propaganda purposes. Indeed, for much of the war, Soviet diplomacy and propaganda were virtually synonymous.

Consequently, revolutionary appeals, proclamations and peace proposals were addressed directly to the Polish working class through open radio transmissions. This provided the Soviet regime with a new, unorthodox, high-profile and widely disseminated political weapon against which the Poles were unable to defend themselves. As Lenin acknowledged, "We must immediately appeal to the Polish people and explain the real

³⁵ "In the days of the old diplomacy it would have been an act of unthinkable vulgarity to appeal to the common people upon any issue of international policy", H. Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, p. 168.

³⁶ *Izvestiia*, 18 March 1917, pp. 1-2.

³⁷ S. Horak, (ed.) *Poland's International Affairs, 1919-1960: a calendar of treaties, agreements, conventions and other international acts*, (Bloomington, 1964), p. 222.

³⁸ *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1957), p. 13, (hereafter *DVP*). Trotsky argued, "The abolition of secret diplomacy is the primary condition for an honest, popular, truly democratic foreign policy", L.D. Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed: the military writings and speeches of Leon Trotsky*, vol. 1, (London, 1981), p. 164.

state of affairs. We know full well that this method of ours has a most positive effect in tending to disrupt the ranks of our enemy”.³⁹

It is no coincidence that throughout the war, Soviet propaganda and revolutionary diplomatic initiatives regularly coincided with intensified Red Army activity. In response to Piłsudski's Kiev offensive in April 1920, for instance, the CC RKP(b) issued a *Manifesto to the Polish People* on 7 May 1920 and a number of revolutionary proclamations to the *Entente* populations.⁴⁰ In one such *Appeal to the Workers of the Allied Countries*, on 18 April 1919, Chicherin protested,

...your rulers have created and are supporting a savagely reactionary regime in Poland, where thanks to them, Polish workers are being shot down en masse, and the Polish workers' and peasants' movement is being suppressed with the utmost ferocity.⁴¹

In this way, the Soviet regime attempted to influence Polish and *Entente* public opinion, foster revolution, prevent military action against Russia and reduce support in Poland for the war effort. As Chicherin remarked,

...the basic feature of our foreign policy was the revolutionary offensive. It took its bearings from the immediate prospect of the world revolution, for which the Russian revolution was to serve as the signal. It was directed, over the heads of Governments, to the revolutionary proletariat of all countries, and both in its actions, sharply opposed to the entire nature of existing capitalist Governments, and in its words, its strongly agitational offensives were calculated to stir up the revolutionary proletariat of all countries to an international revolutionary struggle against imperialism, against the capitalist system.⁴²

The international community observed the development of this new diplomacy with increasing concern. As Lenin remarked,

...the fact that our new diplomacy is entirely unconventional, unanticipated and unprecedented in the history of the monarchical and bourgeois states, it can in no way as yet be accepted by the other countries. When the Bolsheviks make straightforward statements, literally no one in a single country is capable of understanding that we are really conducting diplomacy on the basis of open statements and methods of special diplomacy.⁴³

³⁹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 97.

⁴⁰ *DVP*, vol. 2, doc. 339, pp. 507-509.

⁴¹ V. Kluchnikov & A. Sabanin, vol. 2, p. 238. On 28 May, the Central Committee again appealed to the, “Allied peoples to protest against Polish action in Russia”, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 May 1920.

⁴² *Izvestiia*, 5 July 1918. Soviet appeals also targeted the Russian population to increase domestic support for the war, see *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-pol'skikh otnoshenii*, vol. 3, (Moscow, 1965), doc. 98, pp. 173-177. For Polish Government propaganda manifestos to inhabitants in Poland and the Polish Army see, Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, A.12.P.3/4, docs 17-22 & 26, (hereafter Polish Institute).

⁴³ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, doc. 59, pp. 95-96. International suspicion of Soviet motives was, indeed, rife.

Nevertheless, to the communists' surprise the conduct of traditional diplomacy proved increasingly important as the war progressed. As Chicherin informed the 5th All-Russian Congress of Soviets on 4 July 1918, Russia's foreign policy required to shift from the revolutionary offensive to the defensive, both to secure the Soviet regime, politically, economically and militarily, and to allow the international revolution time to develop.⁴⁴ By establishing cordial relations with Russia's western neighbours – Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Finland – he hoped that a buffer would be created against the West, whilst the regime simultaneously worked to separate the *Entente* states.⁴⁵

In 1919-1921, Chicherin's aim, first and foremost, was to consolidate Soviet power within Russia, and alleviate Russian isolation in the international sphere fell. As his own position was dependent upon his ability to maintain relations with the outside world, it was essential that he present Soviet policy as conciliatory and throughout the war, he consistently asserted that, "The policies of Soviet Russia in their relations with Poland, as in their relations with the other nations, was and is a peaceful policy".⁴⁶ As he noted in the latter stages of the war in September 1920,

Since in America and in many other countries the working masses have not conquered power... the Russian Government deems it necessary to establish and faithfully to maintain peaceful and friendly relations with the existing governments of these countries.⁴⁷

Consequently, he was extremely wary of declaring Soviet intentions outright.⁴⁸

By embroiling Poland in a carefully constructed diplomatic offensive, whilst concurrently pursuing concrete military objectives, the Soviet authorities hoped to forestall a Polish attack on Russia, alienate the Poles from the *Entente* and remove Poland as an obstacle to the sovietisation of Eastern Europe and Germany. Their efforts to diplomatically play the British and French Governments against one another sought to divide *Entente* support for Poland during the war. Soviet communications with the Western Governments thus alternated in tone from appeasement and cooperation to overt hostility and opposition. As Lenin acknowledged to the closed session of the 9th All-Russian Conference of the Communist Party on 20 September 1920, "We merely tried to exploit as

⁴⁴ *Izvestiia*, 5 July 1918.

⁴⁵ The Treaty of Tartu with Estonia, 2 February 1920, ended Soviet diplomatic isolation, and it was on this foundation that Chicherin wished to build.

⁴⁶ G.V. Chicherin, *Krasnaia kniga: sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov o Russko-Pol'skikh otnosheniakh c 1918 po 1920gg.* (Moscow, 1920), p 7.

⁴⁷ V. Kluchnikov & A. Sabanin, vol. 3, part. 1, p. 56.

⁴⁸ See, for example, I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 19, p. 41.

broadly as possible the splits emerging between the various countries of the Entente, in order to defend ourselves".⁴⁹

Thus, in its relations with Poland, alongside revolutionary diplomacy, the *NKID* endorsed the traditional diplomatic medium: formal negotiation and the exchange of diplomatic notes, as circumstance dictated. Moreover, despite claims to the contrary, Russia occasionally reverted to negotiating with the Poles in the strictest secrecy. The Marchlewski-Boerner discussions, for instance, held in autumn 1919, used the Red Cross Societies of Russia and Poland as a cover for the real peace negotiations taking place. It has also recently come to light that Chicherin expressed concern to Lenin on 21 August 1920, that secret Soviet diplomatic codes were in danger of being deciphered by the enemy, reporting,

I have always regarded our codes with skepticism, have not reported the most secret things at all, and several times have cautioned others against making such reports.... The most secret reports should not be conveyed other than through special couriers.⁵⁰

The theory and practice of Soviet diplomacy were often very different.

These two apparently divergent methods of conducting Soviet foreign policy were ultimately embodied in the establishment of the *NKID* and the Third Communist International (*Comintern*): whilst the former frequently pursued a traditional diplomatic approach, the latter represented the institutionalisation of revolutionary *agit-prop* on an international scale. The *Comintern*, dominated by the RKP(b), chaired by Zinoviev, and rigorously controlled by Lenin, proved a second powerful instrument in the implementation of Soviet foreign policy.⁵¹ How easily, then, did these two bodies coexist during the Polish-Soviet War?

On paper, the aims of the *NKID* and *Comintern* differed greatly: the latter's ultimate objective was to incite revolution abroad by any means necessary, and to overthrow the capitalist governments with whom the former attempted to establish traditional diplomatic relations. The agitational work of the *Comintern* further undermined *NKID* attempts to secure *de facto* and *de jure* recognition of Soviet Russia from the West. Indeed, so

⁴⁹ R. Pipes, (ed.) *The Unknown Lenin: from the secret archive*, (New Haven, 1996), doc. 59, p. 97.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 93. Lenin immediately responded, "I propose: 1) changing the system immediately, 2) changing the key [to the cipher] every day", *ibid*, doc. 57, p. 93.

⁵¹ L.D. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, vol. 1, (London, 1973), p. 36. Ironically, Chicherin protested to Curzon that it was not in any way identifiable with the Russian Government, TNA, FO 418/55, doc. 8, pp. 11-14.

concerned was Chicherin about its negative impact on the work of his Commissariat, that he requested both Lenin and Trotsky resign from the *Comintern* Executive Committee to improve Russia's relations with the Western Governments'.⁵² Moreover, the *NKID*, guided by Chicherin, appreciated the importance of subtlety and tact in negotiating with foreign diplomats, whilst *Comintern* representatives, as propagandists and agitators, had no time for such an approach.

Nevertheless, although the *NKID* remained unrepresented in the *Politburo* and the Party CC during the war, whilst a number of *Comintern* delegates were members of both, the *Politburo* remained the ultimate maker of Soviet foreign policy, mediating between the two organisations and utilising each as, and when, the situation demanded. Moreover, despite the different diplomatic methods employed by both, the *NKID* and *Comintern*, driven by Marxist ideology, ultimately sought identical objectives: the spread of revolution on an international scale, the protection and consolidation of Soviet Russia, and the need to divide Soviet Russia's enemies: the *Entente* from Poland, and Britain from France. These shared goals united the Soviet leadership and its many supporting organisations throughout the conflict.

1.2 Poland

The formulation of a coherent diplomatic agenda and a realistic foreign policy were also of vital importance to the infant Polish state after its rebirth in November 1918. As Chief of both the State and Army, Józef Piłsudski forged an inextricable link between Polish politics and the military, and throughout the period of the Polish-Soviet War, Polish foreign policy directly responded to the strategic moves of the country's armed forces.

An enlightening document, detailing Poland's principal foreign policy objectives in the war with Soviet Russia, entitled *The Polish-Bolshevist War*, was written by the Polish *Chargé d'Affaires* to Britain, Jan Ciechanowski, on 18 July 1920.⁵³ As such it deserves closer examination than it has previously received. From the outset, Ciechanowski declared that, "The Polish-Bolshevik War was not undertaken by Poland in the name of imperialistic aims", and he listed a number of convincing arguments to support this

⁵² V.I. Lenin, *Leninskii sbornik*, vol. 36, pp. 338-339.

⁵³ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 11, pp. 54-55. See, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 2, for a second copy of this report. A further analysis by Ciechanowski, *Poland and the Soviets*, penned on 14 August 1920, contains similar, and in parts, identical observations, TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 38.

assertion.⁵⁴ The Polish nation was already engaged in combat with other neighbouring states, including Germans in Posnania, Czechs in Teschen, Ruthenians in Eastern Galicia, and was faced with local unrest in Upper Silesia. To contend with these multifarious opponents, Poland could only rely upon a small army of approximately 30,000 men, which was hampered by a serious lack of equipment and resources. Furthermore, her boundaries were as yet unsettled and her industrial and financial infrastructures were in ruins after the partitions and the destruction of the Great War. As a result, “Under these existing circumstances, there was and could be no question on the part of Poland of waging an imperialistic war on a powerful neighbour”.⁵⁵

If Polish aims in the war with Soviet Russia were not guided by imperialist ambitions, what factors were decisive in encouraging the Polish state to militarily engage with its eastern neighbour? Poland’s first and chief objective in the campaign was the liberation and protection of her inhabitants from the impending Bolshevik advance.⁵⁶ The pressing need to secure their eastern frontier made it absolutely essential that a settlement be reached in the borderlands. As Ciechanowski observed,

Owing to Poland’s geographical position, her inadequate military resources, the hesitating attitude of the Allies... and to the ever-growing Bolshevik propaganda, conducted in Poland by Germany and the Soviets, Poland had to aim at pushing the Bolsheviks as far eastwards as was possible and to obtain territorial guarantees for her future safety.⁵⁷

By securing her eastern frontier, Poland hoped to safeguard her independence and facilitate her economic reconstruction.⁵⁸ Her geo-strategic position, sandwiched between the much larger German and Russian states, was vital in determining her foreign policy, which aimed at rendering a Bolshevik-German rapprochement impossible. As Piłsudska commented,

We had never had any illusions as to the perils of Poland’s position since her geographic situation made her a barrier to the expansion of both Germany and Russia. Under my husband’s guidance all our foreign policy had been directed towards maintaining a balance between these two powers.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 11, p. 54; TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 38. Lloyd George, in particular, believed that to be a dominant objective of the Poles.

⁵⁵ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 11, pp. 35-36; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 2, pp. 5-6; TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 38.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, pp. 38-39. The only natural strategical line of defence which may secure Poland from the threat of Bolshevik aggression was the line of the rivers Dvina, Beresina and Dnieper.

⁵⁸ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 11, pp. 38-39; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 2, p.10; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 5, p. 8; TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 39.

⁵⁹ A. Piłsudska, *Piłsudski: a biography by his wife*, (New York, 1941), p. 15.

All state resources were directed, in its first years, towards Poland's consolidation, geographically, politically, economically, militarily and internationally. To achieve this, the Polish leadership turned increasingly to diplomacy during 1919-1920, in an attempt to secure relations with its powerful eastern neighbour and ideological opponent, Soviet Russia.

Despite Piłsudski's inherent distrust of diplomatic channels, preferring to endorse military solutions wherever possible, diplomacy proved especially important in providing a breathing space for the Poles, as they struggled to formulate a clearly-defined foreign policy after the emergence of their state onto a volatile world arena.⁶⁰ Piłsudski remained unshaken in his belief that Soviet diplomacy was inherently untrustworthy, and consequently remained deeply suspicious of all *NKID* diplomatic proposals received during the war years.⁶¹ Soviet Russia's revolutionary diplomatic practices, combined with their aggressive, widely-disseminated propaganda offensive, further convinced him of the insincerity of their diplomacy. However, as with Soviet Russia, it proved essential for the Poles that diplomacy be utilised as a means of securing both Poland's internal development and stability and her position within the wider international community.

In contrast with the Soviet regime, however, the important role of diplomacy was immediately recognised by Poles of many political persuasions. As a result, a Polish Diplomatic Service was created by the joint efforts of the Polish National Committee in Paris (*KNP*), the Provisional Council of the State (*TRS*) and the Supreme National Committee (*NKN*).⁶² Although the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych* (*MSZ*)) suffered initially from a severe shortage of qualified personnel, a network of foreign missions in Paris, London, Washington, Rome and other cities had already been established by the Polish National Committee.⁶³ Work progressed rapidly and prior to the outbreak of the conflict, in early January 1919, the *MSZ* employed 252 individuals.⁶⁴ On 15 August 1919, the *KNP* missions were transformed into Polish diplomatic legations, and foreign diplomatic missions were, in turn, sent to Warsaw.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ This process was greatly hampered by the numerous conflicting political parties which fought for control of Polish politics after November 1918 but was assisted by the appointment of Paderewski to lead a united government 16 January 1919, as a compromise between the positions of Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski.

⁶¹ See, for instance, his reaction to the Soviet proposals at Mikaszewicze and to the Soviet Note of 22 December 1919.

⁶² J. Sibora, "The Origins of the Polish Foreign Ministry, 11 November 1918-January 1919", in P. Latawski, (ed.), *The Reconstruction of Poland, 1914-1923*, (London, 1992), p. 179.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 190.

⁶⁴ J. Sibora, p. 185.

⁶⁵ It was no coincidence, given their traditional friendship, that a French delegation had already been dispatched to Warsaw in April 1919, W. Roszkowski, "The Reconstruction of the Government and State

Unlike the Soviet diplomatic service, party affiliation was no hindrance for those wishing to pursue diplomatic careers in Poland. Instead, a good knowledge of foreign languages, education and contacts with the outside world were regarded as essential qualifications by the *MSZ*.⁶⁶ The continued pressing need, during the war, for the training of professional diplomats was well recognised by the Polish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Ignacy Paderewski. Addressing the Polish Diet on 12 November 1919, on the topic of *Schools for Officials and Diplomats*, he argued, “We need great political schools to prepare a number of state officials for the Eastern and Western districts, where all spheres and classes can learn foreign languages preparatory to representing Poland abroad”.⁶⁷ Thus, like the Soviet regime, the Poles were well aware that the hostilities could not be resolved purely by military engagement: intermittent diplomacy was to prove central to the foreign policy of both from the outset and, increasingly, as the Polish-Soviet War developed and intensified.

2. Polish-Soviet Diplomacy, 1918

Poland faced great uncertainty from November 1918 until the war with Soviet Russia commenced in February 1919. Surrounded on all sides by potential enemies and with her borders as yet undefined, the political, economic, social and military structure of the state had to be built from scratch. These difficulties were compounded by the advance of the Soviet Red Army into the *kresy* in November 1918. The existence of the German *Ober-Ost* administration in the occupied lands prevented direct Polish-Soviet communication, with a basic radio system serving as the only link between the neighbouring states. Inevitably, this restricted the development of diplomatic relations, and heightened Polish and Russian isolation.

Nevertheless, attempts were made to foster relations. Even prior to the establishment of Polish independence, Chicherin had moved to establish diplomatic contact. On 29 October 1918, he addressed a note to the Polish Regency Council, offering that the Polish communist and *NKID* member, Julian Marchlewski, be appointed as the RSFSR’s diplomatic representative to Poland, and requesting that a Polish delegate be sent to

Apparatus in the Second Republic”, in P. Latawski, p. 165. A Polish legation was finally established in Moscow after the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet War in June 1921.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 164.

⁶⁷ TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 15, p. 21.

Moscow in return.⁶⁸ To this offer no immediate reply was forthcoming. The Poles had no wish to recognise the Soviet regime in Russia, which the establishment of formal diplomatic relations would have implied. The movement of Soviet troops westwards and arrest of the Regency Council's leader in Moscow, Alexander Lednicki, provided the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Leon Wasilewski, with a credible excuse for rejecting this proposal outright.⁶⁹

The following month witnessed an intensification of diplomatic correspondence between the two states. On 2 December, Chicherin wrote to Wasilewski regarding the establishment of safe conduct for Poles in Russia, and again on 12 and 15 December, he attempted to persuade the Poles to remove any existing obstacles to the 'normalisation' of relations.⁷⁰ Embroiled in a violent civil war, and facing both Allied intervention and an Allied blockade, Soviet isolation was complete. The regime, lacking any recognition by the international community, desperately needed to establish relations with her near-neighbour. As a result, on 24 December, Chicherin requested permission for Russia's diplomatic representative to enter Poland.⁷¹ Six days later, the *MSZ* issued an official note in which it refused to open diplomatic relations due to Russia's, "...aggressive and imperialist policy", demonstrated by the advance of Red Army troops into the borderlands of Lithuania and Belorussia, towards the Polish heartland.⁷² This was the final act in the theatre of Polish-Soviet diplomacy for 1918.

3. Polish-Soviet Diplomacy, 1919

3.1 January-March

Militarily, the year 1919 saw the Poles initiate and maintain a clear advantage over Soviet Russia.⁷³ Enmeshed in civil war, the Soviet regime remained absorbed by domestic concerns throughout the year, lacking both the time and resources to direct full attention on the Poles. In contrast, from the outset, Polish attention was trained on the defence of their former eastern territories. As Paderewski remarked to Colonel House at the beginning of January 1919,

⁶⁸ *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-pol'skikh otnoshenii*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1963), doc. 276, p. 460; *Izvestiia*, 29 October 1918.

⁶⁹ See, *Krasnaia kniga*, docs 6-15, pp. 22-29.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, doc. 6 & 12, pp. 22 & 27. See also, *DVP*, vol. 1, doc. 416, pp. 579-581; *D & M*, vol. 2, docs. 22 & 26, pp. 32-33 & 36-37.

⁷¹ *Krasnaia kniga*, doc. 16, p. 30.

⁷² *Ibid*, doc. 17, pp. 30-31; *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 37, pp. 48-49.

⁷³ See, U. Olech, *Wojna Polsko-Sowiecka 1919-1921: materialy do bibliografii*, (Warsaw, 1990), pp. 27-32.

...situation most critical. Bolshevist invasion of former Polish territory still in progress. Thousands of people tortured, murdered, many buried alive. Vilna, Minsk, even Grodno menaced.... If action is delayed our entire civilisation may cease to exist. The war may result in the establishment of barbarism all over Europe.⁷⁴

Initial military engagements witnessed both armed forces manoeuvring for position, until by March a 300-mile front was established.⁷⁵ The following month the first significant Polish gain was made, with the Polish army occupation of the strategically important city of Wilno. Immediately following this, there was little activity on the front as the Poles concentrated on the situations developing in Lwów, Cieszyn and Poznań, and the Soviets concentrated on their civil war opponents: Denikin, Yudenich and Kolchak.⁷⁶ Consequently, by July 1919 the troops engaged on the Polish-Soviet Front remained relatively limited in scope.⁷⁷ The three internal Polish conflicts in Lwów, Cieszyn and Poznań were, however, settled the following month, freeing Piłsudski to devote resources to the Russian front. An immediate result was achieved: the occupation of Minsk, on 8 August, by the Poles.⁷⁸

By the close of 1919 Polish forces had advanced into the Wilno region, Polesia, Volhynia, and Eastern Galicia and controlled almost all of Lithuania and Belorussia. As noted by Stanisław Grabski, a Polish diplomat and later Polish delegate at the Riga negotiations, during 1919 the Polish armies freed from Russia the entire area gained by Russia at the third partition in 1795.⁷⁹ As a result, at the close of the year, the Polish-Soviet border ran from the Latvian border on the River Dwina in the north to the Rumanian border on the River Dniester in the south.⁸⁰

However, tempting though the prospect of further military gains was, Piłsudski ordered a halt to his troops' movement at the end of the year. Denikin's forces were advancing against the Red Army and a White victory in the civil war threatened Polish independence

⁷⁴ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919: the Paris Peace Conference*, (Washington, D.C., 1942), pp. 424-425.

⁷⁵ N. Davies, *White Eagle*, p. 47.

⁷⁶ A. Zamoyski, *The Battle for the Marchlands*, (New York, 1981), p. 6.

⁷⁷ J. Piłsudski, *Year 1920*, p. 27. Polish forces were also engaged in military conflict at this time against Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia.

⁷⁸ A. Zamoyski, *Battle*, p. 6.

⁷⁹ S. Grabski, *The Polish-Soviet Front*, (London, 1943), p. 7.

⁸⁰ N. Davies, "The Genesis of the Polish-Soviet War", in *European Studies Review*, vol. 5, no. 1. (1975), p. 57.

even more than a Soviet success.⁸¹ It benefited the Poles, therefore, to await the outcome of the Russian Civil War before attempting to establish relations with her neighbour. Furthermore, it would have been extremely difficult for the Poles to inflict a decisive blow on the Red Army: the latter always had the option of retreating deep into Russia. A Polish advance over such a vast distance would have stretched the Polish economic and political systems to breaking point, whilst it would have been almost impossible for the military to defend and consolidate their gains.⁸² Nevertheless, 1919 was a year of great military success against Russia for both the Polish armed forces and their Commander-in-Chief. As Piłsudska remarked of her husband, “It was a year of triumph and fulfillment for him.... He faced the winter confidently”.⁸³

For Soviet Russia, the precedence accorded to domestic considerations in 1918 and 1919, allowed Polish military gains to be viewed as of secondary importance.⁸⁴ The resultant allocation of military resources to confront internal opponents, forced the Soviet regime to rely increasingly upon international diplomacy to secure the state in 1919. As noted by Trotsky, although initially sceptical of the role diplomacy could play in the new regime, “With patience and system which truly deserve the highest recognition, our diplomacy did not let a single opportunity go by, day after day, for stressing that peace was possible and necessary”.⁸⁵

The Soviet leadership had already decided in April 1918 that revolutionary agitation in Poland required to be directed by experienced propagandists and agitators.⁸⁶ This was first implemented under the cover of a Russian Red Cross Mission, the official objective of which was to secure the release of Russian prisoners of war interned in Poland during the Great War.⁸⁷ Led by the Polish communist, Wesołewski, the mission secretly entered Poland on 20 December 1918. Despite initial approval by the Polish Government for the visit, the mission failed to notify the authorities of its arrival and its members, accused of engaging in political agitation, were arrested the following day.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Mistrust of Denikin by Piłsudski is further discussed later in the chapter, p. 92. In reality, he regarded neither the Russian Reds nor Whites as reliable parties with whom the Poles could conduct serious negotiations.

⁸² N. Davies, *White Eagle*, p. 65.

⁸³ A. Piłsudska, p. 294.

⁸⁴ *Izvestiia*, 5 July 1918.

⁸⁵ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 151.

⁸⁶ M.K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland: an outline history*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), p. 80.

⁸⁷ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 151.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*; *D & M*, vol. 3, p. 558. Dziewanowski incorrectly argued that Marchlewski was its leader, M.K. Dziewanowski, p. 81.

On 29 December, the KPRP organised a demonstration to protest against the internment of the mission, during which the Polish military opened fire, killing 6 people and injuring 14.⁸⁹ Two days later, the *NKID* sent a note to Wasilewski, in which Chicherin strongly protested against the imprisonment of the Red Cross members.⁹⁰ An agreement was reached with the Polish Government for the release of the prisoners and assurances given for their safe return to Russia.⁹¹ However, on 2 January 1919, at Łapy station, the Polish *gendarmes* escorting the mission murdered four of its members: B. Wesołowski, M. Al'ter, M. Aivazova and L. Klotsman, and seriously wounded L. Al'ter.⁹² The perpetrators declared that they sought to avenge relatives murdered by the Soviet Secret Police, the *Cheka*.⁹³ Reaction was immediate. Trotsky condemned the killings as a, "...hateful and savage baiting of Soviet Russia".⁹⁴

A breakdown in Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations ensued.⁹⁵ The event signified the Soviet regime's first failed attempt to provide the Polish revolutionary movement with experienced leadership, a process which culminated in July 1920 with the establishment of the Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee in Białystok. On 16 January 1919, a new Polish Coalition Government, established under Paderewski,

...immediately informed the Soviet Government about their nomination of an investigation into the assassination of the Red Cross Mission and proposed that all current news be dispatched to Moscow through a special mission, under Ventskovsky.⁹⁶

The Soviet regime hoped that this would lead to the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Poles, for as Chicherin acknowledged,

The Soviet Government did not wish to confine agreement to routine, practical questions. It strove to a general, political agreement with Poland.... to cleanse the disputed area from the military of both sides and to allow workers to vote for the determination of the destiny of these regions. Time, however, passed – and from the Polish Government we did not receive a reply to the question of a general agreement.⁹⁷

⁸⁹ *D & M*, vol. 3, p. 558.

⁹⁰ *Krasnaia kniga*, doc. 18, p. 32; *DVP*, vol. 1, doc. 461, p. 636.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 151.

⁹³ *Ibid.*; M.K. Dziewanowski, p. 365.

⁹⁴ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 151. See also, J. Marchlewski, *Rosja Proletarjacka a Polska Burżuazyjna*, (Moscow, 1921), pp. 8-10. On 19 November 1920, Polish communist and head of the *Cheka*, Feliks Dzierżyński, ordered the erection of a memorial to those murdered, P. Kalenichenko, "O deiatel'nosti Polskogo Vremennogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta", in A. Manusevich, (ed.), *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i zarubezhnye slavianskie narody*, (Moscow, 1957), p. 185. The guards responsible for the murders were tried and imprisoned, but escaped capital punishment, P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, p. 86.

⁹⁵ *Izvestiia*, 11 January 1919.

⁹⁶ *Krasnaia kniga*, p. 5, the latter received on 7 February, "...a precautionary reception" in Moscow.

⁹⁷ *DVP*, vol. 2, doc. 50, pp. 68-70.

The *NKID* further aimed to exploit the situation by playing to the Allies. Chicherin sent a communication to the Governments of Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the USA, on 18 February 1919, in which he portrayed the Poles as entirely unreasonable. This propaganda document stressed Russia's desire for peace with Poland and highlighted Soviet Russia's interest in the disputed *kresy*, bound as it was to Soviet Lithuania and Soviet Belorussia, "...in firm and close friendship".⁹⁸ It included a veiled warning to the Allies to refrain from interference in the dispute and instead, presented itself as mediator stating,

As to the territorial questions, requiring negotiations with the Governments of the Lithuanian and White Russian Soviet Republics, the Russian Soviet Government expressed to the Government of the Polish Republic its readiness to offer its services in working out a peaceful solution to these questions.⁹⁹

This was the first step in Soviet Russia's diplomatic offensive: firstly, to isolate Poland internationally; and secondly, to remove *Entente* support for the Polish war effort. Tactically it was an astute move. In sharp contrast, and contrary to Allied wishes, Piłsudski continued to seek a military solution to Poland's perilous position in the spring of 1919.

3.2 Polish-Soviet Conflict, April-August

With the establishment of the Polish and Lithuanian states in 1918, both of which desperately needed to quickly establish their frontiers, conflict between the neighbouring states was inevitable. During the Polish-Soviet War, the strategically important city of Wilno was claimed as Polish, Russian and Lithuanian. Polish claims were founded on ethnographical and strategic factors, whilst Lithuania's challenge for control of the area rested on historical considerations.¹⁰⁰ The population of the city was predominantly Polish and control of Wilno would provide the Poles with a direct border with Latvia, strengthening the country's eastern border against Soviet Russia. For Piłsudski, on a personal level, the question of Wilno was especially important. He acknowledged, "One of the most lovely things in my life had been Wilno, my native city... that dear city, full of so many memories".¹⁰¹ Control of this city was pivotal if his ideological programme for a federation of the borderland states was to be achieved. In sharp contrast, for many

⁹⁸ V. Kluchnikov & A. Sabanin, p. 229.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ For further details of Lithuanian involvement in the Polish-Soviet War see, M.M. Drozdowski, *Międzynarodowe aspekty wojny polsko-bolszewickiej 1919-1920: antologia tekstów historycznych*, (Warsaw, 1996), pp. 131-138.

¹⁰¹ A. Piłsudska, pp. 46-47.

Lithuanians, Soviet rule of Wilno was preferable to Polish occupation: unlike Poland, the Soviet regime was unable to command support at the Paris Peace Conference. This, they hoped, would serve to strengthen their own claims on the city.¹⁰²

Whilst the statesmen at Paris deliberated over the issue, Piłsudski decided to take matters into his own hands. According to Piłsudska,

He considered that he had ample justification for his actions. The destinies of Poland and Lithuania had been linked together for centuries.... Polish influence and culture had always extended over Lithuania. Her educated classes spoke only Polish and lived according to Polish custom. The citizens of Wilno had considered themselves to be Poles for centuries.... of the inhabitants of the city less than one per cent were Lithuanians.¹⁰³

In mid-April 1919, he sent a Polish delegation to Kaunas, with a proposal to launch a joint Polish-Lithuanian military offensive against Soviet Russia, but this was rejected by the Lithuanians.¹⁰⁴ As a result, the Polish Army entered Wilno on 20 April.¹⁰⁵ That same day, the Polish Marshal issued a proclamation, *To the Inhabitants of the Ancient Grand Duchy of Lithuania*, in which he set out the Polish agenda, stating,

The Polish Army which came here under my command in order to expel violence and oppression, to abolish a government which opposes the will of the population, this army brings to you full independence and liberty... I want to give you the possibility of solving your internal national and religious questions according to your wishes without any constraint or pressure on the part of Poland.... I will not institute here a military Government, but a Civil Administration to which I shall call men of this country, born amongst you.¹⁰⁶

The administration was to organise and hold free elections on the basis of equal, direct, universal and secret suffrage; maintain order and peace; organise the food supply and work-force of the country, and aid all citizens, regardless of their nationality or religion.¹⁰⁷

This *fait accompli* met with a mixed response. Chicherin informed the MSZ on 25 April 1919 that Soviet Russia was immediately withdrawing from the current Polish-Soviet

¹⁰² A. Senn, p. 109. The Allies in turn, hoped that the Poles and Lithuanians could resolve the question themselves.

¹⁰³ A. Piłsudska, p. 293.

¹⁰⁴ A. Senn, p. 107.

¹⁰⁵ Gerson incorrectly dated the Wilno offensive to autumn 1919, L. Gerson, *Woodrow Wilson and the Rebirth of Poland, 1914-1920*, (New Haven, 1953), p. 36.

¹⁰⁶ Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 4, p. 21. For the full text see, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, pp. 42-43; *Monitor Polski*, 28 April 1919, no. 95. S. Horak, pp. 231-232, dated it 21 April, and N. Davies, *White Eagle*, p. 51, dated it 22 April. Jerzy Osmolowski headed the administration.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. On 6 August, the Polish Council for National Defence reported that following this declaration, "Piłsudski announced agrarian reforms for Lithuania and re-opened the University of Wilno", Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 22, p. 86.

diplomatic negotiations.¹⁰⁸ Lenin, in turn, demanded a prompt military response by the Red Army.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, the inhabitants of Wilno overwhelmingly welcomed the Polish forces. Even Piłsudski was surprised at the strength of the reception accorded to them, remarking to Paderewski, “I did not expect so warm and touching a welcome.... It surpassed anything one could have imagined. The people wept for joy... the only exceptions have been the Jews who under the rule of the Bolsheviks were the governing classes”.¹¹⁰

The Wilno campaign proved to be one of the most successful operations of Piłsudski’s career. It signaled the virtual end of communist rule in Lithuania for a time and demonstrated the failure of Soviet ideology to appeal to wide sections of the Lithuanian population. The diplomatic battle for the city was, however, just commencing. On 16 May, the Polish *Diet* unanimously resolved, “...that the Polish Republic has no intention of annexing the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but on the contrary the Diet desires the union with the nationalities of this country on the basis of self-determination”.¹¹¹ This was followed by the publication of an *Official Polish Military Communiqué* which stated that, “...the Polish Government has on July 6 recognised *de facto* the independence of Lithuania”.¹¹² Throughout the Polish-Soviet War, the Lithuanian question remained an area of constant discord between the Poles and Russians.¹¹³ In spring 1920, Marchlewski participated in Soviet Russian-Lithuanian negotiations, held in Moscow, and on 12 July, a treaty was signed between the two states.¹¹⁴ By this, Lithuania received the region and city of Wilno, in return for secretly allowing the Soviet Red Army to pass through Lithuanian territory unopposed.¹¹⁵

Two months later, Polish-Soviet communications resumed, when on 3 June 1919, Chicherin complained to Paderewski about the continued advance eastwards of Poland’s armed forces’.¹¹⁶ The hands of the Soviet regime were tied by continued domestic unrest in Russia, and once again it was to diplomatic negotiation that the Soviet leadership turned in

¹⁰⁸ *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 131, p. 221; *DVP*, vol. 2, doc.92, pp. 142-143.

¹⁰⁹ He acknowledged, “The loss of Vilna has strengthened the Entente still further. It is essential to ensure the maximum speed for recovery of Vilna in the shortest possible time”, T.F. Kariaeva, (ed.) *Direktivy Glavnogo Komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii, 1917-1920: sbornik dokumentov*, (Moscow, 1969), no. 316.

¹¹⁰ A. Piłsudska, p. 292.

¹¹¹ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, enclosure 3, p. 43; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 4, p. 18. Piłsudski’s *fait accompli* at Lwów and Minsk were likewise endorsed by the Polish Diet, in support of his federalist policy.

¹¹² Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25, p. 68.

¹¹³ See, Polish Institute, KOL 168.

¹¹⁴ M.N. Chernykh, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Polish Institute, KOL 104/3, pp. 207-208, despite Lithuania’s declared neutrality in the Polish-Soviet War.

¹¹⁶ *DVP*, vol. 2, doc. 121, pp. 180-185.

an attempt to stabilise relations with their Polish neighbour in mid-1919.¹¹⁷ The task of reopening discussions, which had halted in April, fell to Marchlewski. As a leading figure in the Polish communist movement and *NKID* employee from October 1918, he was familiar with the existing volatile diplomatic relations. Consequently, when he offered to initiate renewed, secret and unofficial negotiations, Lenin grasped the opportunity. Loyal to the Soviet regime and in full accord with its foreign policy aims, he was, “...empowered by Lenin to conduct far-reaching negotiations in the matter of peace”.¹¹⁸

Marchlewski departed Moscow for secret talks with Poland’s representatives, M. Kossakowski and A. Wencikowski, in the Białowieża forest, on 18 June 1919. His remit was to: establish diplomatic relations between Poland and Russia; gain Polish recognition of the Soviet Government; reach agreement to begin peace preliminaries, and recognise Polish territory within the boundaries of the Congress Kingdom.¹¹⁹ It was hoped that this would allow the Red Army to concentrate all its resources on the Russian White forces, by neutralising the Polish threat on her western border. The negotiations were, however, marred by mutual distrust, a consistent feature of Polish-Soviet diplomatic contact throughout the war. The Poles, guided by Piłsudski, were convinced that the talks were simply a delaying tactic, whereby the Red Army could regroup, before launching an offensive on Poland’s eastern territory, and so rejected participation in any official peace talks.¹²⁰ On 30 July, Marchlewski, disheartened and temporarily defeated, returned to Russia.¹²¹ It was not until the middle of October that face-to-face diplomatic negotiation between Poland and Russia resumed. In the intervening period attention turned, once more, to the battlefield.

The continued eastwards drive of the Polish Army in 1919 resulted in the occupation of the city of Minsk on 8 August.¹²² As with the movement of Polish troops into Wilno four months earlier, the offensive was accompanied by a declaration of Polish intentions, issued by Piłsudski on 13 August.¹²³ The *Declaration to the People of Minsk* immediately proclaimed the city to be Polish territory. This was of absolute necessity if his federalist programme was to succeed. Nevertheless, as with the earlier declaration to the Lithuanians,

¹¹⁷ *Krasnaia kniga*, doc. 52, pp. 67-68.

¹¹⁸ P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, p. 130.

¹¹⁹ N. Davies, *White Eagle*, pp. 71-72; M.N. Chernykh, p. 16.

¹²⁰ J. Marchlewski, *Voina i mir mezhduburzhuaiznoi Pol'shei i proletarskoi Rossiei*, (Moscow, 1921), p. 12.

¹²¹ *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 171, p. 282.

¹²² J. Piłsudski, *Year 1920*, p. 8.

¹²³ For full text see, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 4, pp. 24-25; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, enclosure 5, p. 44.

Piłsudski announced that the inhabitants of Minsk would be free to determine their own government, declaring,

At this moment when at the head of my army, I put my foot on this my native soil, I have proclaimed that nothing will here be imposed by violence, that this land will utter its free voice among the others, and that it will decide of its own accord how and under which laws to live. I shall be faithful to my words – confirmed by the highest authority – the Polish Sejm.¹²⁴

The Polish Army advance pushed the Red Army further eastwards until by the end of the month, Piłsudski ordered his troops to halt. By this time, the three vitally important cities for the implementation of his federation were under Polish control: Wilno, Lwów and Minsk. The military had had its day for the time being: secret diplomatic negotiation once again came to the fore to influence the development of Polish-Soviet relations.

3.3 Mikaszewicze Negotiations, October-December

Thus, two and a half months after the Marchlewski-Kossakowski discussions ended in the Białowieża forest, communications resumed. By autumn 1919, the Red Army was in danger of defeat at the hands of General Anton Denikin in the Donbass, whilst the Poles, lacking a solid military ally in the war against Russia, were experiencing serious difficulties in their relations with the *Entente*. The initiative was seized by the *NKID* on 12 August, when it outlined its readiness to open Russian-Polish Red Cross Society discussions.¹²⁵ Utilising a non-diplomatic agency enabled Soviet Russia to conceal discussion with the Polish Government, whilst simultaneously facilitating agitation and propaganda against the Polish authorities: this was the new Soviet “diplomacy” in action.

Officially, the exchange of hostages, civilian captives and refugees between the two countries was sought.¹²⁶ On this basis, on 3 September, the *MSZ* and the Polish Ministry of War instructed Michał Kossakowski, Chairman of the Polish Red Cross Society in Volhynia, to enter negotiations with its Russian counterpart.¹²⁷ The location chosen for the meeting was the railway station of Mikaszewicze, near Łuck in the Volhynia region and it was to here that the Polish and Soviet delegations, headed by Kossakowski and

¹²⁴ Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 4, p. 25.

¹²⁵ As Chicherin recorded, “...an attempt to renew negotiations... the Soviet Government... entrusted Comrade Marchlewski to establish contact with the Polish representatives and to elucidate the possibility of achieving agreement between the two republics”, *Krasnaia kniga*, p. 6.

¹²⁶ *D & M*, vol. 3, p. 561.

¹²⁷ *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 195, pp. 307-308; *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 196, p. 308; *Krasnaia kniga*, doc. 57, p. 71.

Marchlewski respectively, made their way in early October 1919.¹²⁸ The prolonged discussions which followed lasted from 11 October until 14 December. Although officially the talks aimed to secure the release of Polish and Russian hostages, in fact, according to Chicherin,

Comrade Marchlewski, during his repeated trips to the areas occupied by the Poles, simultaneously, with authorisation for the present political tasks, stood as a double representative... repeatedly striving to represent the aims of the Soviet Government – for the conclusion of a full agreement with Poland and to discontinue military activities between Poland and Russia.¹²⁹

Marchlewski's remit was to secure Polish neutrality in the Russian Civil War. To achieve this the Soviet regime was willing to recognise the existing frontline as the political boundary between the two states.¹³⁰

In turn, the Polish leadership hoped to exploit the recent victories of Denikin over the Red Army, to secure concessions from the Soviet regime. Piłsudski had failed to establish diplomatic negotiations with Denikin and greatly feared a White victory in the Russian Civil War as crucially, and in direct contrast with the Soviet regime, the White Generals refused to recognise Poland's right to independence. As a result, Piłsudski informed Marchlewski that, "Poland will not be the gendarme of Europe", and that the Polish Government would welcome peace negotiations.¹³¹ He gave a personal guarantee to Lenin that Polish troops would not cross the existing frontline until the defeat of Denikin by the Red Army was achieved if, in return, the Soviets halted their propaganda offensive amongst the Polish soldiers.¹³² Although he remained deeply suspicious of the Soviet authorities, he hoped that a *temporary* compromise could be reached. Piłsudski, therefore, allowed the lengthy negotiations at Mikaszewicze to take place, fully aware that this was of great military assistance to the Soviet regime.¹³³ The cessation of hostilities would free him to promote his federalist programme in the *kresy*, whilst leaving the Bolsheviks to consolidate their authority, unhampered, in Russia.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ J. Sieradzki, *Białowieża i Mikaszewicze: mity i prawdy. Do genezy wojny pomiędzy a RSFRR w 1920 r.*, (Warsaw, 1959).

¹²⁹ *Krasnaia kniga*, p. 6.

¹³⁰ Ibid. This line between Poland and Soviet *Litbel*, lay 250 miles east of the Curzon line and 100 miles east of the line eventually settled by the Treaty of Riga.

¹³¹ M.K. Dziewanowski, "Piłsudski's Federal Policy, 1919-1921", in *Journal of Central European Affairs*, vol. 10, no. 2, (1950), p. 124.

¹³² A. Zamoyski, *Battle*, p. 8.

¹³³ Allowing the Red Army to concentrate its forces on its domestic opponents and move Soviet troops from the Polish frontline.

¹³⁴ P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, p. 143.

Dual negotiations, therefore, proceeded: officially to resolve the hostage situation; unofficially to secure an armistice and peace settlement to end the Polish-Soviet War. The former took place openly, in full view of the public and in keeping with the spirit of the new diplomacy adopted by the international community, to varying degrees, after the Great War. In contrast, the latter were hidden from public view and *Entente* diplomats, resident in the Polish capital, remained oblivious to the real nature of the talks. Horace Rumbold, Britain's Minister to Poland, informed his Foreign Secretary, George Curzon, on 19 October 1919, that,

A mixed commission of representatives of the Polish Red Cross... has opened up negotiations with the representatives of the Soviet Government for the exchange of hostages. The number of Polish hostages in Russia amounts at present to several thousands, whose condition is reported to be lamentable. The Poles hold fewer, but as great stress is laid upon the release of some of them, it is hoped that the result of the negotiations will be satisfactory.¹³⁵

Positive results were achieved at Mikaszewicze. On 2 November 1919, an official agreement was concluded, by which Kossakowski secured the release of Polish hostages held within the RSFSR.¹³⁶ This was followed exactly one week later with the signing of an accord for the mutual exchange of civilian prisoners.¹³⁷ However, Polish-Soviet correspondence regarding implementation and violation of these agreements continued to be dispatched throughout the conflict. For instance, in a letter marked "strictly secret", Chicherin complained to Marchlewski, on 11 December 1919, about Polish obstacles to the exchange of both hostages and civilian prisoners, and on 3 January 1920, contacted the *MSZ* regarding Poland's failure to carry out the terms of the exchange.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, progress was made, and the following day Rumbold recorded,

The Polish Red Cross delegates... have... reported that the first party of Polish prisoners and civilian hostages amounting to about 500 prisoners in all are already *en route* for Poland and have almost reached the place at which they should cross the frontier.¹³⁹

In sharp contrast, the unofficial diplomatic negotiations held at Mikaszewicze were veiled in the strictest secrecy. Trotsky observed that the negotiations were, "...kept entirely

¹³⁵ TNA, FO 417/7, no. 2, p. 5. On 23 October 1919, Marchlewski declared the willingness of Soviet Russia to abolish the system of hostage taking, if the Polish Government would respect Soviet borders, *Krasnaia kniga*, doc. 59, p. 72.

¹³⁶ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/3, p. 101; *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 235, pp. 376-378.

¹³⁷ *Krasnaia kniga*, doc. 61, pp. 75-80. Rumbold reported, on 9 November 1919, that 10,000 Poles were to be released and handed over on the Polish-Soviet demarcation line, TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 15, p. 22. Official hostage negotiations were fully concluded on 29 November 1919, *D & M*, vol. 3, p. 562.

¹³⁸ *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 271, pp. 433-434; *Krasnaia kniga*, doc. 67, p. 83.

¹³⁹ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 3, pp. 2-3. Successful hostage exchange continued. Douglas Savery, a British diplomat in Warsaw noted, "On... 29 January, the second batch of hostages or prisoners released by the Bolsheviks arrived in Warsaw", TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 19, p. 27.

secret” at Poland’s instigation, whilst Marchlewski reported in a *Memorandum to the Politburo* on 26 October 1919, that the Soviet delegates credentials to discuss an armistice and peace, were not made public, due to Polish concerns.¹⁴⁰ He wrote,

[Ignacy Boerner] stated that he had no written authorisations; the situation in Warsaw is such that they do not wish to put anything in writing. I said that this was not necessary: we would not exchange authorisations but would show them to one another and then hide them in our pockets or burn them.¹⁴¹

To facilitate talks between Marchlewski and Piłsudski’s envoys, Captain Boerner and Lieutenant Birnbaum, “...the ultimatum demanded by the Poles was the preservation of the negotiations in complete secrecy”.¹⁴²

This was essential given Poland’s tenuous international position at the end of 1919. If the discussions had become widely known, the *Entente*, and in particular France, at that time pushing Poland to assist the White Russian movement and launch a joint offensive against Soviet Russia, would have been outraged. The Poles were placed in an extremely difficult position. As the Whites vehemently refused to recognise Polish independence, a White victory in the Civil War was not in their interest. Nevertheless, France remained the chief supporter of Polish claims at the negotiating tables in Paris and Poland’s principal overseas supplier of military equipment and resources. As such, Piłsudski could not risk arousing French hostility towards the infant Polish state. Consequently, whilst negotiation continued, the Polish Army moved troops along its eastern border to convince the Allies that they were making serious preparations to launch a major offensive against the Red Army.¹⁴³

Initially, the Soviet regime was suspicious of the secrecy surrounding the talks and at a *Politburo* meeting on 4 May 1920, resolved, “To propose to Marchlewski that if there is no refusal on his side, to announce in the press the agreement”.¹⁴⁴ The following day, Lenin read Marchlewski’s report regarding the armistice and on 7 May, reconsidered his position, informing Trotsky, “Comrade Marchlewski is also *against* publication of his negotiations with Boerner. It is necessary to secure this decision in the *Politburo*”.¹⁴⁵ Despite the regime’s earlier promise to avoid secret diplomacy, it was, like the Poles, very much in the

¹⁴⁰ J. Meijer, (ed.) *The Trotsky Papers, 1917-1922*, vol. 1, (The Hague, 1964), p. 759.

¹⁴¹ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, doc. 1A, Appendix, p. 179.

¹⁴² I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 14, p. 36, *From a Protocol of the Politburo Meeting CC RKP(b)*, 14 November 1919.

¹⁴³ M.K. Dziewanowski, “Piłsudski’s Federal Policy, 1919-1921”, p. 125.

¹⁴⁴ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 46, p. 86.

¹⁴⁵ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, doc. 1A, Appendix, pp. 179-180; V.I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaya khronika*, vol. 8, (Moscow, 1977), p. 581, Lenin, Trotsky and Kamenev voted against its publication.

Soviet's interest that the diplomatic discussions remained unacknowledged. Demonstrating the willingness of Piłsudski to negotiate with Soviet Russia would have invalidated the latter's assertion that the Polish Government was an *Entente* puppet, and would have fatally undermined Soviet propaganda in Poland and the wider international arena. This could not be sanctioned.

The secret negotiations did succeed in securing two crucial objectives: a temporary truce between the armed forces of Poland and Soviet Russia for a period at the end of 1919, and the presentation, for the first time, of Poland's peace terms. Firstly, both delegations were united in their goal of securing an armistice, at least until the army of Denikin had been defeated. In a *Memorandum from Julian Marchlewski to the Politburo*, penned on 26 October 1919, the chief Soviet delegate recorded, "...for me it was enough if [Boerner] informed me verbally that there is a definite and clear decision by the Polish command: Polish troops will not go farther".¹⁴⁶ Boerner concurred, "It is important to us that you beat Denikin; take your regiments, send them against Denikin, or against Yudenich, we will not touch you".¹⁴⁷

To ratify this agreement, Boerner suggested that Piłsudski send a representative to Moscow. A Soviet delegate would not be welcomed in the Polish capital, for fear of inciting *Entente* opposition, and presenting the Soviet regime with an international platform from which to launch a propaganda offensive. Marchlewski, in turn, expressed concern that Polish dependence on the *Entente* would invalidate any Polish-Soviet agreement reached, and that the Poles would relaunch a military campaign at the behest of the Allies.¹⁴⁸ To this the Polish envoy replied,

No, we will not do that; it is one thing to enter into political deals that are not advantageous to us and another thing to attack. It is not advantageous for us to attack; we have already gone against the will of the *Entente* a number of times, and we will not go along with it in this case. The guarantee is the person of Piłsudski.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, p. 179.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 179-180. Marchlewski further reported, "Poland cannot desire the victory of Denikin, it does not want to prevent us from beating Denikin", *ibid.* p. 180.

¹⁴⁸ He argued, "In that case the entire agreement carries no weight. If Poland depends on the *Entente* to such an extent, then there is no guarantee that tomorrow the *Entente* won't order you to attack and [that] you [won't] do it", *ibid.* p. 180.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. This was true. By holding unofficial, secret talks with Marchlewski, the Poles were already acting in direct contravention of Allied instructions.

This answer satisfied Marchlewski. Five days after his report was sent to the *Politburo*, he again wrote to Lenin of his determination, "...without fail to secure 'the suspension of military action,' ie. the matter of stopping the war".¹⁵⁰ He continued,

This is everything... since to conclude peace they do not now dare, fearing the Entente, on which they depend, not only for part of their finances, but, apart from that, on the question of their southern border (business with Czechoslovakia) and also the border in the Ukraine (whispering together with Petlura, but hoping that the border there will be solved to their advantage by the allies). To conclude peace, to recognise the Soviet government – this means to break from the Entente, but to stop military action is possible.... And I am sure that this can be achieved.¹⁵¹

On 14 November 1919, the *Politburo* met to discuss the Polish ceasefire offer, entrusted Chicherin and Trotsky to work out detailed conditions for the armistice, and defined a demarcation line at which the Red Army would halt at the cessation of hostilities.¹⁵² The resultant armistice strengthened the Soviet position against Denikin, freeing troops for the Reds' Civil War campaign.¹⁵³ Furthermore, so confident was the Soviet leadership that peace with Poland would soon be settled, that they began to remove troops from active duty, transforming them into labour armies.¹⁵⁴ In reality, however, the truce secured only a temporary suspension of hostilities.¹⁵⁵

Secondly, the Polish delegation presented its ceasefire conditions, formulated by Piłsudski on 3 November, for the first time. These announced that,

The Chief-of-State –

1. will not order the Polish army beyond the line Novograd Volynsk - Oleysk - River Ptich - Bobruysk - River Berezina - Berezina Canal - River Dvina
2. to avoid misunderstandings, suggests that a belt 10 kms wide shall divide the two armies
3. declares that he will support the Latvian's claim to Dunaburg
4. demands an end to communist agitation in the Polish army
5. demands that the Soviets shall not attack Petlura
6. not believing in the Soviets' power of discretion, warns that any indiscretion will engender serious consequences

¹⁵⁰ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 12, pp. 32-33.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 33. On 7 December, Savery incorrectly reported that a ten day armistice had been concluded along a sector of the Eastern Front, solely for the purpose of allowing the transportation of hostages from Russia to Poland, set free by the Soviet regime, TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 13, p. 30.

¹⁵² I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 14, p. 36; K. Radek, *Vneshnaia politika Sovetsko Rossi*, (Moscow, 1923), p. 56. Present at the meeting were Lenin, Trotsky, Kamenev and Krestinskii.

¹⁵³ The Red Army transferred 40,000 riflemen from the Polish Front to take part in the Battle of Tula at which they inflicted Denikin's first defeat, A. Zamoyski, *Battle*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ Despite the KPRP Executive Bureau in Russia, on 26 November 1919 voicing concerns to the CC RKP(b) that, "Neither the present stage of negotiations, nor even the anticipated conclusion of an armistice will permit a relaxation of the defense of the front... the 'peace' aspirations of the Polish government undoubtedly wears a temporary character", I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 15, pp. 37-38.

¹⁵⁵ *Krasnaia kniga*, p. 6.

7. affirms that, if the Soviet government agrees to points 2, 4 and 5, a duly authorised representative will be sent to discuss all the conditions directly with Mr. Lenin in person.¹⁵⁶

When the *Politburo* met to discuss these terms on 14 November, it resolved to,

Accept the conditions... in general as acceptable, with the exception of the point about ceasing the armed struggle with Petlura. Decline this point and make reference that with Petlura there are taking place independent negotiations and consequently we do not think that it is possible to discuss these relations with a third party.¹⁵⁷

Piłsudski rejected the Soviet response to the Petlura condition, believing that Poland had demonstrated goodwill by refusing to attack the Red Army whilst Denikin threatened the Soviet regime. As a result, he unequivocally and permanently suspended the negotiations. On 14 December, the Polish and Soviet delegations left Mikaszewicze for the last time.¹⁵⁸

What then was the outcome of the Marchlewski-Boerner negotiations? Firstly, they secured a temporary armistice between the two warring nations and prevented the military escalation of the Polish-Soviet War at the end of 1919. Yet lack of trust and mutual suspicion scarred the discussions. Marchlewski informed Trotsky, “We had withdrawn units and weakened the front, while they had assembled a striking force”, whilst Lenin recorded, “We made huge concessions. These concessions were understood as weakness on our part, and led to war”.¹⁵⁹

In truth, both Lenin and Piłsudski would only deal on their own terms. Once the Russians had satisfied themselves that Poland would not cooperate with Denikin, they saw no reason to accept Poland’s ceasefire conditions. Polish action, too, was driven by the need to secure the defeat of Denikin and it was this single, shared objective which was ultimately responsible for the limited Polish-Soviet armistice achieved at the end of 1919. In all other areas, compromise proved to be out of the question.

3.4 The Soviet Peace Proposal of 22 December 1919

Finally, on 22 December 1919, the *NKID* reopened official negotiations, addressing a formal peace proposal to the Polish Government and requesting that the latter fix a date

¹⁵⁶ A. Juzwenko, “Misja Marchlewskiego w 1919 roku na tle stosunków polsko-radzieckich”, in *Z badań nad wpływem i znaczeniem rewolucji rosyjskich 1917 roku dla ziem polskich*, (Wrocław, 1968), p. 76.

¹⁵⁷ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 14, p. 36. This reply was passed by Boerner to Piłsudski on 26 November.

¹⁵⁸ N. Davies, *White Eagle*, p. 73.

¹⁵⁹ J. Meijer, *Trotsky Papers*, pp. 765-767; A. Richardson, *In Defence of the Russian Revolution: a selection of Bolshevik writings, 1917-1923*, (London, 1995), p. 138.

and place to conclude a peace treaty.¹⁶⁰ Signed by Chicherin alone, the document argued that it would prove relatively easy to secure agreement between the two states, despite the fact that the previous proposal remained unanswered and that Polish troops continued to advance on Soviet Republics, friendly to Soviet Russia.¹⁶¹ After apportioning blame for the previous failed negotiations, Chicherin stated,

All the greater was the astonishment of the Soviet Government when it learned that on 28 November... Skrzyński [Poland's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs], replying to a question in the Polish Sejm, declared that the Russian Republic had never proposed peace to Poland, that it threatened Poland with invasion, and that it had no inclination whatever to make an agreement which would meet the wishes of the Polish people.¹⁶²

As a result, the Soviet Government was now willing to address the present formal peace proposal to the Polish Government.

The abandonment of the unofficial armistice negotiations at Mikaszewicze the previous week, led the Soviet regime to turn to that other bastion of Soviet negotiation: open diplomacy. In sharp contrast with the previous talks, the *NKID* directly utilised the proposal for propaganda purposes, transmitting it to the Poles over an open wireless channel. According to Trotsky, this ensured that, "...the entire world read it".¹⁶³ It also provided an opportunity to encourage Polish working-class support for the Soviet regime declaring,

While thus meeting the Russian workers' and peasants' desire for peace, the Soviet Government is equally aware that its proposals also meets the wishes clearly expressed by all workers' organisations in Poland, irrespective of their party allegiance, by numerous democratic organisations, local authorities and other Polish public bodies.¹⁶⁴

Chicherin argued that the proposal was driven, "...by the aspirations of the Polish masses to peace".¹⁶⁵ This was misleading. In actual fact, two primary concerns directed this diplomatic manoeuvre. Firstly, it was prompted by fear that following the failed autumn negotiations, Piłsudski's forces would coordinate an attack with the Whites against

¹⁶⁰ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 50; Polish Institute, A.11.49/SOW/20, unnumbered doc., p. 26. Rumbold incorrectly dated this proposal to 28 December, TNA, FO 688/1, p. 620.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. The document was neither signed by Lenin, as titular head of the Soviet regime and Chairman of *Sovnarkom*, nor Trotsky, as Commissar for War, raising questions as to the sincerity of the proposal.

¹⁶² *DVP*, vol. 2, doc. 207, p. 312. Trotsky also recorded that Skrzyński, "...impudently and lyingly affirmed in the Sejm that the Soviet Government had never put any peace proposal to Poland", L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 152.

¹⁶³ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 152.

¹⁶⁴ *DVP*, vol. 2, doc. 207, pp. 312-313. This sweeping statement was not supported by any concrete example of which Polish organisations supported the Soviets.

¹⁶⁵ *Krasnaia kniga*, p. 6.

Soviet Russia. Secondly, it was an immediate response to the Allied Supreme Council's declaration, on 8 December 1919, of their envisaged line for Poland's eastern border.¹⁶⁶ As the Curzon frontier lay more than 100 miles west of the Polish troops' frontline on 22 December, the Soviet proposal was a clever attempt to widen the gap between Poland and the *Entente*. Almost all of Belorussia was offered to Polish control as were both Wilno and Grodno.¹⁶⁷ To widen the Polish-*Entente* divide, the Polish Government was castigated as an *Entente* puppet and the proposal commented,

We are not unaware of the existence of some obstacles which may make it difficult for the Polish Government to conclude an agreement with Russia... from foreign sources, which in this case are in conflict with the real interests of the Polish people. The Soviet Government hopes that the peaceful aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the Polish people... will make possible the cessation of hostilities, which merely serve foreign interests.¹⁶⁸

In the event, the Poles made no response.¹⁶⁹ They neither accepted nor rejected it. Instead, they waited to gauge the next move of the Soviet regime: would it invoke a military or a diplomatic response?¹⁷⁰ This hesitation inflicted difficulties on the Poles. As Rumbold reported to his Government on 31 December 1919, "This proposal from the Bolsheviks is rather embarrassing to the Polish Government because, when they get to hear of it, the parties of the left are likely to do their utmost to get the Polish Government to make peace".¹⁷¹ Poland's failure to respond was, in fact, a direct consequence of Allied advice. As noted in two contemporary commentaries, *The Russian-Bolshevist War* and *Poland and the Soviets*, written at the Polish Legation in London,

When Mr Chicherin... sent his first appeal for peace to Poland/Autumn 1919/ the Polish Prime Minister [Paderewski] at that time in Paris, asked the Supreme Council what Poland's attitude should be. He was told that there could be no question of any negotiations between Poland and the Bolsheviks at the time, considering the precarious situation in which such a step on the part of Poland would place the Allied and Russian interventionist forces, and the fact that the Soviets were not recognised by the Allies. Poland was advised to refrain even from giving any acknowledgement to the message of Mr Chicherin. Poland acted according to the wishes of the Allies.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ This later became known as the Curzon line, after the British Foreign Secretary, Lord George Curzon, had signed it, TNA FO 417/9, pp. 23-26.

¹⁶⁷ Polish Institute, A.11.49/SOW/20, unnumbered doc., p. 26.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

¹⁶⁹ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 153.

¹⁷⁰ Exhausted militarily by the Russian Civil War, the latter method was adopted at the outset of 1920.

¹⁷¹ TNA, FO 688/1, p. 620.

¹⁷² Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 11, p. 198. This was despite the fact that the terms proposed by Chicherin were, "...very advantageous", for the Poles, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 1, p. 6; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, p. 40. See also, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 53.

In reality, if Polish objectives could have been secured through diplomatic negotiation alone, the Poles would have halted the military offensive. That is why Piłsudski allowed the Białowieża and Mikaszewicze negotiations to proceed. However, serious mistrust of Soviet foreign policy objectives made diplomatic compromise impossible and encouraged Piłsudski and the Polish Army to seek a military solution at the end of 1919.

4. Conclusion

Throughout 1919, therefore, the diplomacy endorsed by Soviet Russia, Poland and the international community, directly influenced the development and escalation of the conflict. Despite the absence of clear blueprints to follow, it soon became apparent to the leaders in both Russia and Poland that diplomacy was of crucial importance for their involvement in the international theatre and, as a result, the *NKID*, *Comintern* and *MSZ* were established by the respective regimes. As the year progressed, relations between the belligerents alternated between the intermittent pursuit of military offensives and recourse to diplomatic negotiation, as domestic and international conditions dictated. The latter were marred, however, by the mutual, inherent, deep-seated suspicion of their opponents' motives. This was heightened by the utilisation of unofficial negotiations and the widespread dissemination of propaganda and agitation materials by both camps.

Thus, although militarily, the Poles maintained a clear advantage over Soviet Russia in 1919, whilst the latter's focus was directed towards domestic considerations and in particular, the Russian Civil War, diplomatically, the Soviet regime remained extremely active. Led by able diplomats and skilled propagandists, the *NKID* and *Comintern* successfully pursued a two-pronged attack. This aimed at enmeshing their opponents in tactically complex negotiations and at creating divisions between Poland and their western allies, playing to the latter at every available opportunity. The scene was irrevocably set for the decisive culmination of the Polish-Soviet War the following year.

Chapter 3: Polish-Soviet Diplomacy, January-July 1920

1. The Military Situation

In a *Letter to our French Comrades*, Trotsky reported the reaction of the Soviet leadership to the military gains secured by the Polish Army in 1919. He stated, “We look upon the temporary advance by the weak Polish forces with no great alarm. When we have settled Denikin – and that day is near – we shall pour our heavy reserves on the Western Front”.¹ This proved to be the reality at the beginning of 1920. The temporary truce, concluded at Mikaszewicze, was observed only until Denikin had been removed as a threat. Once this had been achieved in April 1920, the Polish-Soviet War resumed, increasing as the year progressed in scale, scope and intensity.²

January 1920 saw the focus of the Red Army directed firmly towards eliminating their domestic White opponents, concentrated around Denikin. Trotsky announced at the beginning of the year that, “The Western Front is of secondary importance for us.... Today the most important front is, and will remain until its tasks have been fully accomplished, the Southern Front”.³ As soon as victory in the Russian Civil War was assured, both Lenin and Trotsky planned for the demobilisation of the military, transferring Red Army conscripts into labour armies to assist in the economic reconstruction of Russia.⁴

This was forestalled by the subsequent civil war swing in favour of the Reds, which removed any Polish constraint from taking action on their Eastern Front. On 3 January 1920, Piłsudski launched an offensive, resulting in the Polish occupation of Dunaburg, securing their North-Eastern Front and cutting Lithuania off from Soviet Russia.⁵ However, difficult winter conditions prevented any further large-scale manoeuvre by the

¹ *Communist International*, no. 5, September 1919; L.D. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, vol. 1, (London, 1973), p. 89.

² For excellent first-hand military accounts see, Polish Institute, KOL 80/6: Plk. Dypl. J. Grobicki, *Walki dywizyjii podlaskiej/9DP/ o Pińsk i Luniniec*; Polish Institute, KOL 187, W. Trawinski, *Sowiet Duckow na Kremlu* and W. Trawinski, *Jak bylo naprawde pod Lwowem i pod komarowem*.

³ L.D. Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed: the military writings and speeches of Leon Trotsky*, vol. 3, (London, 1981), pp. 33-34.

⁴ V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 40, (Moscow, 1963), p. 79, (hereafter PSS).

⁵ A. Zamoyski, *The Battle for the Marchlands*, (New York, 1981), p. 10. K.I. Shutko, head of the Political Department of Revvoensovet Western Front, informed Lenin on 22 January 1920 that the Red Army was unable to halt renewed Polish activity, I.I. Kostiushko, (ed.), *Pol'sko-Sovetskaia voina 1919-1920: ranee ne opublikovannye dokumenty i materialy*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1994), doc. 18, p. 40.

belligerents. Both sides began to plan for a summer offensive. As a result, the leaders of Poland and Russia turned to diplomacy in pursuit of their objectives and for the first four months of 1920, diplomats, once again, took centre stage in the Polish-Soviet War.

2. Polish-Soviet Diplomacy: January-March 1920

That Poland increasingly became the dominant concern of the Soviet regime as the year progressed, can be clearly observed through an examination of Russian archival collections.⁶ Whilst in 1919 Lenin and his colleagues mentioned Poland infrequently, after April 1920, there was a dramatic increase in the output of documents, correspondence and telegrams relating to the developing Polish situation.⁷ Soviet diplomats issued numerous proposals and peace offers which ultimately aimed at the destruction of the Polish State. If this could be achieved through the attainment of peaceful relations with Poland, then Soviet Russia would grasp at the opportunity. If, however, the initiative failed, the Russian Communists, like the Poles, had no qualms in seeking a military solution. As a result, throughout the year both Poland and Russia simultaneously pursued dual policies: diplomatic negotiation and military campaign.

The first significant move of the year occurred when, on 26 January 1920, Chicherin expressed concern to Lenin that the Soviet regime avoid any measures which Piłsudski could use as a pretext for launching a renewed Polish offensive. He argued that,

The most serious danger existing for the Soviet Republic at the present moment is the possibility of a Polish attack. In striving to involve the Poles in a war with Soviet Russia, Polish activists are using the argument... that Soviet Russia is prepared to attack Poland.... In such a situation there must from our side be carefully avoided all that could... be utilised by the Polish activists for reinforcement of their accusation.⁸

This document, recently published for the first time, suggests that the proposal to open peace negotiations with the Poles, issued two days later, may have been initiated by the Commissar for Foreign Affairs. On 24 January 1920, Lenin had argued, “We cannot demobilise the army because we still have enemies such as Poland”, and three days later submitted a draft proposal to *Sovnarkom* to discuss Poland’s military preparations for an

⁶ *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii*, (hereafter RGASPI), fond 19, opis 1; fond 63, opis 1; fond 68, opis 1; fond 70, opis 101-114; fond 76, opis 1; fond 76, opis 2; fond 135; fond 143; fond 159; fond 326.

⁷ This coincided with the Polish Army offensive into Ukraine. By 5 May 1920, Poland’s advance towards ethnographic Russian lands was viewed as a real threat by the Soviet regime, V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, pp. 112-118.

⁸ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 19, p. 41.

attack on Soviet Russia.⁹ The following day, Trotsky concurred that, “All the latest information tells us of the imminent possibility of an attack by the Poles along the entire front”.¹⁰ As a result, he demanded that the following precautionary measures be taken: 1) the mobilisation of the most reliable Polish communists to the Western Front; 2) an increase of printed agitation in the Polish language; 3) a concentration on military readiness; 4) an increase of commanders’ training courses.¹¹

On the very same day, 28 January 1920, the Soviet leadership issued a peace proposal, by radio transfer, to the Poles.¹² This diplomatic initiative, signed by Lenin, Chicherin and Trotsky, was significantly addressed to both the Polish Government *and* the Polish population. It argued that, despite the failure of the Polish Government to reply to the Soviet peace offer of 22 December 1919, the Soviet Government now,

addressed... to the Polish Government and to the Polish Nation, a justifiable statement of their recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the Polish republic, about their preparedness not to overstep the determined line on the western front and about their wish to begin peace negotiations with Poland, in order to achieve a friendly way to resolve with her all questions.¹³

To exert pressure on the Poles, the Soviet leadership stressed the gravity of the situation and sought, once again, to drive a wedge between the Poles and their *Entente* allies, stating,

Poland is now confronted with a decision that for many years to come may have grave repercussions on the lives of both nations. Everything shows that the extreme imperialists among the Allies, the colleagues and agents of Churchill and Clemenceau, are at present making every effort to draw Poland into a baseless, senseless and criminal war with Soviet Russia.¹⁴

Rejecting all accusations of pursuing an aggressive policy, the declaration announced that the Red Army would not advance over the present Belorussian front line, of Drysa, Dzisna, Polock, Parycko, the station of Ptycz and Białokorowicze.¹⁵ If this proposed line had been accepted by the Poles, it would have proven extremely advantageous, lying as it did to the east of the Polish-Soviet border eventually established by the Treaty of Riga. The

⁹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 69.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 476; I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 20, p. 43.

¹¹ J Meijer, (ed.), *The Trotsky Papers, 1917-1922*, vol. 2, (The Hague, 1971), doc. 443, p. 20.

¹² *Krasnaia kniga: sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov o russko-pol'skikh otnosheniakh, 1918-1920*, (Moscow, 1920), pp. 6-7. Rumbold dated it 27 January, The National Archives, FO 417/8, doc. 17, p. 23, (hereafter TNA). A British Government *Memorandum on Polish Foreign Relations* dated it 29 January 1920, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 53.

¹³ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 17, p. 24.

¹⁴ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum A.11.49/SOW/20, p. 14, (hereafter Polish Institute).

¹⁵ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 17, p. 24.

communication categorically confirmed that no agreement, aimed directly or indirectly at Poland, had been concluded with Germany or any other country and asserted that,

So far as the essential interests of Poland and Russia are concerned there is not a single question, territorial, economic or other, that could not be solved in a peaceful way, through negotiation, mutual compromise or agreement.¹⁶

Was this assertion supported by the reaction of the Polish Government and people to the Soviet peace offer? The declaration had, indeed, been skillfully composed and was calculated to appeal strongly to considerable sections of the population. By reasserting their recognition of Poland's right to independence, the Soviet regime immediately drew favourable comparisons with their White Russian opponents, who had failed to officially define their Polish policy.¹⁷ As the British diplomat, Douglas Savery, reported from Warsaw to his Government on 9 February 1920,

The attitude of the press is now decidedly more favourable towards opening up negotiations than it was ten days ago, and in this it really seems to reflect a change in public opinion. Now that the public has had time to get accustomed to the idea of treating with Soviet Russia it is beginning to realise what an enormous gain it would be to this country, firstly, to get rid of the vast unproductive expenditure in the army, and, secondly, to settle the question of the eastern frontiers of Poland.¹⁸

The Polish Legation in London also supported this assertion.¹⁹ However, the KPRP Central Committee, unsurprisingly, demanded that the Soviet offer be accepted and on 27 February denounced Polish Government secrecy surrounding the declaration.²⁰ Even a number of committed Polish federalists, including Daszyński, Chairman of the PPS, declared themselves to be in favour of accepting the Soviet offer to negotiate, on condition that Poland's eastern frontier be drawn according to the wishes of the inhabitants of the disputed territory.²¹

Nevertheless, Polish opinion was certainly not uniform in its reaction and many remained distrustful of Soviet intentions. Deep divisions in the country over the pursuit of war or peace placed the Polish Government in an extremely difficult position. Mindful of the *Entente's* position, the Poles were greatly concerned at the propaganda onslaught

¹⁶ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 17, p. 23.

¹⁷ TNA, FO 688/3, p. 22. The Whites refused to openly discuss their opposition to Poland's independence for fear that it would reduce their support from the Allies.

¹⁸ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 19, p. 26.

¹⁹ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, p. 40.

²⁰ *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii Sovetsko-Pol'skikh otnoshenii*, vol. 3, (Moscow, 1965), p. 559, (hereafter *D&M*).

²¹ S. Grabski, p. 21; TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 17, p. 20.

which diplomatic negotiation with the Soviet regime could facilitate. As British diplomats in Warsaw reported,

The Polish Government... consider that the Soviet Government is... devoid of any honour or scruples and that its policy is determined solely by questions of expediency. They realise that their geographical situation exposes them in an especial degree to Bolshevik propaganda and that if they make peace with the Bolsheviks, any representative accredited by the latter to Poland will not hesitate to conduct Bolshevik propaganda to the utmost extent of his power, whatever engagements they may have taken to the contrary.²²

This lack of trust between the two adversaries was a continual and recurring theme of Polish-Soviet negotiation throughout 1920, as it had been the previous year. The Poles were further concerned that neither the Soviet Government nor any succeeding Russian Government would abide by an agreement reached.²³ The National Democratic Party, in particular, remained deeply suspicious of the Soviet diplomatic proposal.²⁴ Piłsudski, too, feared that it had been made to gain time to enable preparations for a Red Army offensive against the country, whilst Soviet propaganda simultaneously worked to undermine the morale of the Polish soldiers. This suspicion was confirmed when the French Intelligence Service provided Piłsudski with documentary proof of a Soviet plan for a renewed offensive.²⁵ Soviet forces along Poland's eastern front did, indeed, increase rapidly in the two months following the proposal.²⁶

The immediate response of the Polish Government was to telegram their Soviet counterpart on 4 February confirming that an answer would be returned in due course.²⁷ The question was then referred to the Commission for Foreign Affairs and the Army Staff for joint discussion. Consultation with Poland's allies was also essential before a final decision could be taken and as a result, the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stanisław Patek, was dispatched to London and Paris to consult with Allied statesmen. On 23 January, the Polish Prime Minister informed the *Diet* that, whilst a tendency in favour of peace undoubtedly existed amongst the Poles, it was necessary to await the return of Patek before a response could be issued.²⁸ Patek was to explain the attitude of the Poles to the

²² TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 16, p. 22; TNA, FO 688/3, p. 13.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ TNA, FO 417/8, no. 19, p. 26.

²⁵ M.K. Dziewanowski, "Piłsudski's Federal Policy, 1919-1921" in *Journal of Central European Affairs*, vol. 10, no. 2, (1950), p. 126.

²⁶ On 1 February 1920, there were 4 Soviet infantry divisions and 1 cavalry brigade stationed along the front, increasing by 25 April to 20 infantry and 5 cavalry brigades, J. Garliński, "The Polish-Ukrainian Agreement, 1920" in P. Latawski, (ed.) *The Reconstruction of Poland, 1914-1923*, (London, 1992), p. 60.

²⁷ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 19, p. 26.

²⁸ TNA, FO 417/8, doc.17, p. 20.

peace offer, clarify the extent of possible Allied aid to Poland and confirm if the British and French Governments would guarantee any peace treaty concluded between Poland and Soviet Russia.²⁹ His subsequent meeting with Lloyd George was of great importance, clarifying as it did the extent to which Britain was willing to commit herself to the defence of Poland.

During the interview, the latter unequivocally informed Patek that, "...while it was not for Great Britain to advise Poland, which must take full responsibility for deciding as between peace and war, the British Government certainly did not advise the latter".³⁰ Lloyd George drew attention to the withdrawal of the Allies from military intervention in Russia, the recent conclusion of peace treaties between Russia and the Baltic States and Finland, and the fact that British public opinion would reject further involvement in the war. The Poles, alone, would be left to fight the Bolsheviks. As a result, he felt compelled not to give Poland the slightest encouragement to pursue a war with Russia.³¹ In fact, he openly criticised the Poles for jeopardising earlier Polish-Soviet agreement with the advance of the Polish Army eastwards in 1919 and the resultant incorporation of territory containing large Russian minorities.³²

Lloyd George offered an ambiguous promise of British assistance in the event of a Soviet attack, stating that, "...if the Poles made a sincere attempt to make an equitable peace and the Bolsheviks either refused peace or, having made peace, proceeded to repudiate it, Great Britain would feel bound to assist Poland *to the best of its powers*".³³ However, he reported that it would be impossible for the Allies to guarantee any future Polish-Soviet peace treaty. Instead, "...it was really a question of the balance between the risk of making peace with an unstable Government and the risk of war".³⁴ When Patek queried if this was the opinion of all the Allied Powers, Lloyd George answered that it was certainly the view of the British Government, that the Italian, Signor Nitti, "...entirely agreed with them", and while he had not as yet had the opportunity to discuss the question with Millerand, "He was pretty confident ... that France and the Supreme Council... would take the same attitude as he had just outlined".³⁵

²⁹ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 9, p. 11.

³⁰ Ibid. See also, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 53.

³¹ Ibid, p. 10.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. He certainly did have the backing of the British Government and the Cabinet endorsed his advice to Patek on 29 January, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 53. It was only when the Soviets' launched their offensive

This was not, however, the reality. There was, in fact, no consensus within the Supreme Council. In direct contrast with the British position, the French Government favoured a continuation of the Polish-Soviet War and desired that a Polish military offensive be vigorously pursued against Soviet Russia. The latter, consequently, advised the Poles not to negotiate with the Soviet regime and further reasserted French willingness to support the Poles in the event of a Bolshevik attack.³⁶ The American Minister in Warsaw, in turn, having received no direct guidance on the question from his Government, withheld his opinion.³⁷

As a result, the Polish Government anxiously awaited the return of Patek to Warsaw.³⁸ When he arrived, on 1 February, he immediately attended the Belvedere Palace, where a meeting had been arranged for 11.30am with Piłsudski, the Polish Prime Minister and the Director of the Political Department, to consider Poland's response in light of Allied advice.³⁹ It was decided that Lloyd George's guidance made it impossible for the Polish Army, despite their misgivings about Soviet intentions, to resort solely to military means to resolve the conflict. Too great was their need for supplies and equipment from both Britain and France. Diplomacy was, therefore, now desperately required.

Consequently, at a secret session of the Committee for Foreign and Military Affairs in the Polish *Sejm* on 6 February, it was decided to prepare Poland's peace terms.⁴⁰ The Polish Commander-in-Chief informed General Carton de Wiart, a member of the Allied Military Mission, on 9 February 1920 that he had drawn up very stiff terms, keen as he was to avoid any appearance of Polish capitulation, and that these were presently set before the Polish Government for consideration.⁴¹ Two days later, the *MSZ* demanded: the annulment of all consequences of the 1772 partitions, including Soviet renunciation of all resulting territorial rights; that all Polish properties and possessions removed by Russia after the partitions be returned and indemnities paid for all destruction; the recognition of, "national states arising on the territory of the former Russian Empire", and non-intervention in their

into ethnographic Poland in July 1920 that the British Government finally decided to assist the Poles, sending an Allied Mission on 25 July.

³⁶ C. Smogorzewski, *La Pologne restaurée*, (Paris, 1927), p. 142; P. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies, 1919-1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno*, (Westport, Conn., 1974), p. 140.

³⁷ J. Karski, *The Great Powers and Poland, 1919-1945*, (Lanham, MD., 1985), p. 53.

³⁸ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 16, p. 21.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁰ *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series 1, vol. 2, part XI, (London, 1946), p. 215.

⁴¹ TNA, FO 688/3, p. 100.

domestic affairs; the cessation of all Soviet propaganda; the withdrawal of the Red Army from Polish territory to the borders of 1772, and the conclusion of a Russian-Polish peace treaty.⁴² Whilst the Foreign Affairs Committee continued to formulate a draft Polish-Russian Treaty, Piłsudski, simultaneously, began to make military preparations.⁴³ Such a policy of negotiating harsh terms from a position of military strength was consistently employed by both Poland and Russia throughout 1919 and 1920. The superiority of their respective armed forces enabled the diplomats of both camps to expand their demands at the negotiating table. A seesaw motion was, thus, established with either Poland or Russia in the diplomatic ascendancy at any one time.

The Polish terms were never, in fact, formally presented to the Soviet Government.⁴⁴ Instead, they were sent to the Allied Governments, on 13 March, with a covering note, which stated that the Poles were prepared to open peace negotiations towards the end of March.⁴⁵ This was entirely in-keeping with the advice given by Lloyd-George the previous month.⁴⁶ What, then, was Allied reaction to this Polish initiative? France, still hopeful of a White victory in the Russian Civil War, directly opposed the Polish terms which would have forced Russia to renounce all territorial claims to Poland's pre-1772 lands.⁴⁷ The prevalent British Government reaction can be observed in a memorandum, *Polish Peace Terms to the Bolsheviks*, which severely criticised Poland's conditions, arguing that,

The total number of Poles in the world is very much smaller than the non-Polish population of the "Eastern Borderlands" now claimed by them.... the White Russians and Little Russians are branches of the Russian nation ...bound up with Russia not merely by the social interest of the peasantry, but by tradition, language, culture and religion.... the small group of White Russian intelligentsia... professing a nationality separate from that of Russia could probably be seated on a large-sized sofa.⁴⁸

This condemnation was widely shared by the British public.⁴⁹ In actual fact, Piłsudski had demanded the presentation of severe terms in order to allow the Poles to secure their state,

⁴² TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 28, p. 34; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 53; I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 29, pp. 53-54; *D & M*, vol. 2, pp. 521-522, the PPS newspaper, *Robotnik*, criticised the inclusion of the present day Lithuanian state within the frontiers of 1772 which could create many problems for the Poles, whilst the Polish Right argued that no one would recognise Poland's claim to the borders of 1772.

⁴³ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 28, p. 34.

⁴⁴ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 53.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Piłsudski could not openly antagonise the Allies, reliant upon them as he was for military resources.

⁴⁷ A. Cienciala & T. Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno: keys to Polish foreign policy, 1919-1925*, (Lawrence, Kan., 1984), p. 168.

⁴⁸ National Archives of Scotland, GD 40/17/914, (hereafter NAS).

⁴⁹ Soviet propaganda had incited many in the British working class to view Polish moves as "imperialist". A reader's letter to *The Times*, on 11 May 1920, argued, for instance, that to reestablish her 1772 eastern border, Poland "...would not only deprive Russia of a great tract of territory, whose population is

gauge Soviet reaction, comply with British demands to commence negotiation and gain time for military preparation if the latter were rejected.⁵⁰

Whilst the Polish Government debated its response to the Russian offer, Soviet diplomacy once again pursued a dual policy of reducing support within Poland for the war effort and splitting the *Entente* from the Poles through the combined use of open diplomacy and a well-defined propaganda offensive. This was visibly demonstrated when, on the very same day that the Soviet regime radioed its peace proposal to the Polish Government and nation, 28 January 1920, it concurrently issued an *Appeal to the Toilers of the Entente Countries*. Exhorting the working classes of Britain and France to pressurise their respective governments to withdraw support from the Poles in the conflict, it stated,

At this very moment, when Polish workers' organisations of all tendencies are loudly demanding peace with Soviet Russia and the Polish people... the Entente Governments want to force them to shed their blood for the representatives of the same Tsarist reaction which has oppressed the Polish people for centuries.... The only obstacle in the way of peace... is the reactionary imperialist policy of the Allied Governments.⁵¹

It asserted that the Soviet regime presented no threat to Poland and that it was both ready and willing to halt military proceedings and conclude a prolonged peace with the Poles.⁵² The regime was disingenuous here - it already planned to attack when militarily stronger – but was clearly winning the diplomatic and propaganda battles at this time.

At a CEC meeting of the Soviet on 2 February, a further radio appeal *To the Polish Nation* insisted upon the regime's peaceful position and striving to establish peaceful, friendly relations with the Poles.⁵³ Lenin even went so far as to state that the regime had offered peace conditions to the Poles which were highly unfavourable to Soviet Russia,

...because we rated the peaceful economic work to which we had transformed the life of the army and that of tens of thousands of workers and peasants very much more highly than the possibility of liberating by military successes, Byelorussia and part of Ukraine, or Eastern Galicia.⁵⁴

overwhelmingly Russian, but it would also bring Poland dangerously near the gates of the three Russian capitals – Petrograd, Kieff and Moscow”, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, pp. 54-55.

⁵⁰ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 28, p. 34.

⁵¹ V. Kluchnikov, & A. Sabanin, (eds.), *Mezhdunarodnaia politika noveishego vremeni v dogovorakh, notakh i deklaratsiakh*, vol. 3, part 1, (Moscow, 1928), p. 5.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *Krasnaia kniga*, p. 7; *D & M*, vol. 12, doc. 311, pp. 511-513.

⁵⁴ V.I. Lenin, “The International Significance of the War with Poland”, in A. Richardson, (ed.), *In Defence of the Russian Revolution: a selection of Bolshevik writings, 1917-1923*, (London, 1995), p. 138.

He argued that this introduced a “new diplomacy... a special kind of diplomacy”, as Soviet Russia was willing to retreat in order to avoid war, but feared that the Poles regarded this approach as a sign of weakness.⁵⁵

Poland’s failure to respond to their January peace offer until 27 March, further served to intensify the Soviet leaders’ mistrust of the Polish Government. The Polish Bureau attached to the CC RKP(b) reported on 27 February, for instance, that the lack of a Polish response made it absolutely essential that Russia’s Western Front be strengthened to deny the Polish Army an easy victory.⁵⁶ They also recognised, however, the important role still to be played by diplomatic negotiation in the following months, arguing,

...it is necessary to carefully prepare negotiations. Our position is good since our opponents are economically weak, isolated and even encircled by enemies.... But slips attached to the negotiations can damage our position.⁵⁷

Apportioning blame for the failure of Polish-Soviet diplomacy developed during the war, and has continued to flourish ever since, supported by much historiography. Ponomaryov *et al* wrote, for instance, that,

In the period from January to March 1920 the Soviet Government made several attempts to start peace talks, but the reactionary Polish Government was obsessed with its idea of seizing Ukrainian, Belorussian and Lithuanian territories and it turned a deaf ear to the voice of reason.⁵⁸

In contrast, many Polish and a number of Western historical accounts have pointed to the increased concentration of Soviet troops along Poland’s eastern border, whilst the negotiations were proceeding as evidence of Soviet insincerity in January 1920.⁵⁹ In reality, although both sides were willing to allow their diplomats opportunity to secure their objectives by peaceful means, neither the Soviet nor Polish leadership would hesitate to employ military force to achieve their ultimate war aims, as and when the need arose. Mutual suspicion abounded and engulfed every move of the Polish-Soviet diplomatic battle.

⁵⁵ *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 2, (Moscow, 1958), doc. 7, pp. 683-684, (hereafter *DVP*). This was indeed the view of many Poles, including Piłsudski.

⁵⁶ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 31, p. 56.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* The Polish Bureau must also take responsibility for encouraging Lenin’s unrealistic expectations of an imminent Polish revolution, informing the CC RKP(b) in this report that, “The peace proposal from Russia undoubtedly assisted the development of a revolutionary onslaught by the Polish workers against the Piłsudski Government”. This was crucial for the later, fateful decision by the Soviets to cross the ethnographic Polish border in July 1920.

⁵⁸ B. Ponomaryov, A. Gromyko and V. Khvostov, (eds.), *History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1945*, (Moscow, 1969), p. 128. See also, J. Marchlewski, *Rosja Proletarska a Polska Burżuazyjna*, (Moscow, 1921), pp. 14-19.

⁵⁹ A. Zamoyski, *The Polish Way: a thousand year history of the Poles and their culture*, (London, 1987), p. 337; E. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy: a pattern in Poland*, (New York, 1958), pp. 10-11.

This situation ensured that two months passed before a Polish reply to the January peace proposal was finally received by the Soviet Government at the end of March.⁶⁰ What, then, was the latter's reaction? In a word: mistrust. Lenin informed the 8th Congress of the RKP(b) two days later, that in its Polish policy, the regime,

...must be extremely cautious. Our policy demands the most careful thought. Here it is hardest of all to find the proper policy, for nobody as yet knows on what track the train is standing; the enemy himself does not know what he is going to do next... they do not know what they want.⁶¹

Nevertheless, he believed that the revolutionary movement in Poland was gaining momentum and as a result, the Polish proposal could assist Soviet propaganda: securing peace would, "...open channels for our influence a hundred times wider".⁶² This three-pronged diplomatic-*agit-prop*-military approach was the cornerstone of Soviet conduct. As Lenin declared,

That is why we must manoeuvre so flexibly in our international policy and adhere so firmly to the course we have taken. That is why we must prepare for anything. But the measures we take for peace must be accompanied by intensified preparedness for defence.⁶³

Chicherin too recognized the need for flexibility in dealing with the Poles, cautioning Lenin on 26 February 1920 that, "...it is clear that the conditions which will be supplied will be more than unacceptable... it is necessary to be prepared for the attack on us by the Poles, now well armed and we must seriously think about the defence of the Western Front".⁶⁴ The following day, Lenin ordered the Military Revolutionary Council to strengthen the Western Front to prepare for a possible future Polish offensive.⁶⁵ Indeed, the Soviet leadership had received a warning from the Polish Bureau, ten days earlier, that even if peace negotiations between Poland and Soviet Russia were held, "...the Polish Commanders strive to create a strategic situation under which Poland can dictate the conditions. It is beyond doubt that the Polish Army is in a position to go both to Kiev and Smolensk".⁶⁶ As a result, Trotsky considered it necessary to increase *agit-prop* preparations against Poland.⁶⁷ Deeply suspicious of Polish motives, he argued that,

The advance of the Poles can have an ambiguous meaning: a) either the Poles, before entering into negotiations want to seize the most land possible,

⁶⁰ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 153.

⁶¹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 246.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid. Lenin hoped to delay military action for as long as possible, using threatening language to intimidate the Poles. For instance, in response to the threat of a Polish offensive, Lenin declared on 1 March 1920, "We say, 'Just try it? You'll get a lesson you will never forget'", V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 182.

⁶⁴ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 29, pp. 53-54.

⁶⁵ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 484.

⁶⁶ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 25, p. 50.

⁶⁷ Ibid, doc. 29, p. 54.

thinking that up to a well-known boundary that we will not strongly resist them; b) or the Poles have been ordered to provoke us into large military action in order to stir up throughout the world agitation to benefit heroic Poland, suffocating Russia ...to create a political situation for large-scale intervention.⁶⁸

The official Polish offer to open peace negotiations at the end of March, did not in the end include the Polish terms agreed upon by the Committee of Foreign Affairs. The *MSZ* diplomatic note, sent by Patek to Chicherin, simply proposed the commencement of diplomatic negotiations on 10 April at the border town of Borisov. Upon being informed of the Soviet regime's preparedness to send delegates, military orders would be issued to cease hostilities along the Borisov sector 24 hours before that date.⁶⁹

Chicherin proposed leaving the harsh Polish terms unanswered, reasoning that they would highlight Polish unreasonableness. Furthermore, as the Poles were determined on their policy, no Soviet argument would alter their course of severe peace terms and military offensive.⁷⁰ This suggestion was vigorously opposed by Trotsky, who two days later countered,

I consider that Comrade Chicherin's new proposal (to ignore the Polish terms) is mistaken. This proposal is tacitly aimed at inducing the Poles to think that we shall accede to their terms and will make the Poles go further along a path which will inevitably end in war: in other words, it is a provocation to war.⁷¹

He argued that armed conflict could still be averted by the Soviet regime's reaction to the terms, as he did not believe that either Britain or France had the authority to force the Poles to go to war. Instead, if the Polish workers were incited to resist a renewed Polish offensive, full scale war could be frustrated. Indeed, failure to reply would lull the Polish working class to sleep: if no protest was made by Russia against such "...insolent terms", the Polish workers would believe them to be acceptable to Soviet Russia.⁷² In the event, Trotsky's position prevailed.

If agreement could have been reached in the spring of 1920, Lenin and Piłsudski would, given the domestic chaos facing both states, have grasped a settlement with both hands. However, the very nature of the Polish-Soviet War, the ideological and traditional

⁶⁸ Ibid, doc. 32, p. 57.

⁶⁹ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 49.

⁷⁰ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 33, p. 58.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, pp. 58-59; *Izvestiia*, 29 February 1920.

opposition of both states, and their conflicting aims and objectives, ensured that only the military defeat of one protagonist would force the signing of peace preliminaries. A further seven months were to pass before this took place. Before this, once more, diplomacy had its day. The *pourparlers* commenced for Borisov.

3. The Borisov Negotiations

3.1 Why Borisov on 10 April 1920?

Why was the town of Borisov chosen by the Polish Government for the proposed Polish-Soviet negotiations in April 1920? According to Grabski, it was Piłsudski himself who suggested the location for the talks.⁷³ The need to restrict the output of Soviet ideological propaganda within Poland, which would inevitably accompany any negotiations, was of real concern for the Poles. The capital, Warsaw, was immediately ruled out, providing as it would an international platform from which to launch a concerted propaganda offensive.⁷⁴ According to Patek, this was of absolute necessity given that,

The Soviet representatives would undoubtedly come well provided with funds for propaganda purposes.... May and June were likely to be critical months from the food point of view, and the Bolsheviks would not be slow to exploit the distress caused by the food shortage.⁷⁵

The same consideration also prevented the talks from being held in a neutral location.⁷⁶ In contrast, Borisov, a small, frontline town, recently captured by the Polish Army, would inevitably limit both the dissemination and the impact of Soviet propaganda.⁷⁷

Furthermore, geographically, Borisov had merit. It had good railway connections and telegraph communications with both Warsaw and Moscow and according to the Polish Government, "...it was possible to link Borysow for transport and telegraphy with the two capitals within 48 hours".⁷⁸ The River Berezina also formed a loop at Borisov, which could help to ensure that an opportunity for peaceful discussion, free from military interference,

⁷³ S. Grabski, p. 22.

⁷⁴ Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 3, p. 31, Polish Government Memorandum *The Present Situation of Poland with regard to the Bolshevik Menace*, 17 July 1920; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, p. 37.

⁷⁵ TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 49, p. 70; TNA, FO 688/3, p. 39.

⁷⁶ Grabski resigned as Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs over the Poles' refusal to consider another location, S. Grabski, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 3, p. 31.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

was secured.⁷⁹ Finally, there was plenty of available accommodation in Borisov for both delegations.⁸⁰

Initially, the Soviet leaders were willing to allow the Poles to determine the location of the negotiations.⁸¹ They were aware, however, that the Polish Army held a strong military position by March 1920 and that Borisov lay only five miles behind the frontline.⁸² Wandycz has questioned if the town was specifically chosen by the Poles in order to test Soviet intentions and this does seem likely.⁸³ If the Poles had offered a truce for more than 24 hours duration, or had accepted negotiations at any other site, the Red Army would have potentially been able to strengthen its military resources unhindered. The Poles' refusal, however, to consider a different location, greatly heightened Soviet suspicions and according to Trotsky,

In this they pursued a two-fold aim: to keep our delegates in an atmosphere of Polish militarism and "frighten" them with an offensive into Ukraine, and, at the same time, by a partial armistice on the Borisov sector, to tie our hands in selecting the direction for our counter-blow.⁸⁴

Lenin was in complete agreement with this assessment of Polish motives, arguing,

The Poles have proposed that the peace talks should take place in Borisov without any cessation of hostilities. Conducting negotiations in this particular place would prevent us from continuing hostilities during the talks, while giving Poland complete freedom of action in this respect. Of course, we could not conduct peace negotiations on such terms.⁸⁵

Located on the main Russian railway line, near the junction of the Western and South-Western Fronts, negotiations at Borisov would have allowed the Poles to continue their advance towards Ukraine, whilst protecting them from flank attack. If hostilities recommenced, the Red Army would be prevented from launching a counter-offensive in a north-westerly direction.⁸⁶ Consequently, the Soviet leadership did not take the proposed talks seriously.

⁷⁹ TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 49, p. 70.

⁸⁰ TNA, FO 688/3, p. 39.

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 34 & 42.

⁸² *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1920, p. 5.

⁸³ P. Wandycz, *France*, p. 144.

⁸⁴ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 137.

⁸⁵ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 331.

⁸⁶ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 320; *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1920, p. 5.

The date of 10 April was fixed by the Poles for the meeting of the delegations. Firstly, this would allow the Finnish Government sufficient time to participate in the peace talks if they so wished, greatly strengthening the Polish position at the negotiations.⁸⁷ Secondly, the Polish Government was desirous not to provide the Soviet regime with an opportunity to criticise the Poles for rushing into the talks unprepared.⁸⁸

3.2 Polish-Soviet Negotiations: 28 March-25 April 1920

Despite personally selecting the militarily advantageous town of Borisov, Piłsudski regarded the negotiations with suspicion. In a conversation with Patek, he confessed that it was strange that he, as Commander-in-Chief, should be waging war, whilst Patek, as Foreign Minister, was simultaneously preparing peace.⁸⁹ Moreover, Piłsudski warned Patek that a location must be agreed upon quickly: from a military perspective, the Polish Army could not wait indefinitely and would soon be forced to advance if no diplomatic result was forthcoming.⁹⁰ The Polish Marshal knew that the Poles were in a strong position, militarily, and, therefore, had no reason to either sue for peace or to accede to Soviet demands. In April 1920, the scales were tipped firmly in Poland's favour.

Nevertheless, despite these reservations, Polish preparations to attend the peace talks proceeded apace. It was decided that the delegation sent from Warsaw and led by Patek would consist of fifty persons and would include two main commissions of four delegates each, accompanied by a large number of Polish journalists.⁹¹ In contrast, there is no evidence that the Soviet regime appointed a delegation, raising questions as to their sincerity in conducting negotiations with the Poles at this time. On 28 March, Chicherin notified acceptance of 10 April for the first meeting, but objected to the proposed temporary truce on only one sector of the front, suggesting instead an immediate armistice along the entire frontline. He further indicated that a town in Estonia would be regarded as a more suitable meeting place.⁹²

⁸⁷ Ibid. In the event, the Finnish Government declined to participate.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 42, p. 58, this dual policy was well recognised by contemporary diplomats. Rumbold believed that, "The Foreign Minister will do his utmost to conclude a speedy peace, while the Chief of the State will continue to hit the Bolsheviks as hard as possible".

⁹⁰ TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 60, p. 93. In the event, he did advance on Kiev later that month, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 3, pp. 31-32; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, p. 40.

⁹¹ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 42, p. 58; TNA, FO 688/3, p. 163.

⁹² TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 49.

The Polish Government responded, on 1 April, with an insistence on Borisov and a rejection of an immediate truce on the whole front.⁹³ Firstly, military considerations prevented acceptance of this condition. Deep-seated distrust of Soviet intentions can be clearly observed in two diplomatic memoranda issued by the Polish *Chargé d’Affaires* in London, in which he argued,

To conclude an armistice on a front of that length would have necessitated considerable time and the Polish Government had all reason to fear that this time would be used by the Bolsheviks for further concentration of forces and preparation of an offensive.⁹⁴

Evidence of a continued concentration of Red Army troops along the Polish-Soviet Front, whilst these diplomatic exchanges took place, supported this concern.⁹⁵ If an armistice was achieved and Polish soldiers were immobilised, it would have proven extremely difficult for the Poles to renew the offensive.⁹⁶ Consequently, they could have been forced to negotiate a peace treaty, even on disadvantageous terms. As a result, the Polish Government wished to avoid anything in the nature of a general armistice.⁹⁷

Secondly, the Poles, and Patek in particular, greatly feared that the signing of an armistice would open the floodgates for the dissemination of Soviet propaganda, undermining the morale and loyalty of the Polish soldiers and facilitating fraternisation with Red Army troops.⁹⁸ A propaganda appeal was, indeed, issued by the Red Army to Polish soldiers, in which the dual refusal of the Polish Government to conclude an armistice and to begin negotiations in neutral territory was roundly condemned.⁹⁹ Furthermore, by creating the impression that peace with Russia was already assured, Soviet propaganda would have significantly weakened the position of the Polish diplomats at the negotiating table.¹⁰⁰

Soviet condemnation of the Polish position was immediate. In a note sent by Chicherin to Lenin on 2 April, marked “Completely Secret”, he adamantly rejected Borisov, initially arguing that, “Negotiations in Poland are not acceptable”.¹⁰¹ Instead, he suggested that

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Polish Institute, A.12.P. 3/5, doc. 3, p. 31; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, p. 37.

⁹⁵ TNA, FO 417/9, doc.31, p. 37.

⁹⁶ TNA, FO 417/6, doc. 49, p. 70.

⁹⁷ TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 42, p. 58.

⁹⁸ TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 49, p. 70; TNA, FO 688/3, p. 167.

⁹⁹ *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 372, pp. 645-646.

¹⁰⁰ J. Piłsudski, *Year 1920 and its climax the Battle of Warsaw*, (London, 1972), p. 12. Chicherin recognised this stating, “...perhaps they were afraid our presence in Warsaw would excite the Polish working masses to demonstrations”, *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1920, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ I.I. Kostiusko, vol. 1, doc. 36, p. 61.

either Estonia or Russia should accommodate the peace talks. However, Chicherin soon altered tack at Lenin's instigation and, recognising the propaganda potential of negotiating in Warsaw, suggested meeting in the Polish capital. He admitted that the Soviets could not insist on a truce, since Soviet-Estonian negotiations had proceeded without one, but that if an armistice were agreed it should be "Either on the entire front, or not at all".¹⁰² At a joint session of the All-Russian CEC, the Moscow Soviet and leaders of the trade unions and factory committees, on 5 May 1920, Trotsky reported Polish conditions as follows,

Here is the little town of Borisov, which we have taken from you. We command you to present yourselves in this place. Here, around Borisov, we shall arrange an armistice for your benefit – three sazhen to the right, three sazhen to the left – but in other sections, if we wish, we shall advance". Only a barbarian "Excellency", drunk with victory, with his foot on the neck of a prostrate foe, could speak like this.... It is quite obvious that we had to refuse this demand.¹⁰³

Lenin was in complete agreement with the assessment of his two commissars.¹⁰⁴

The relentless, unremitting diplomatic exchange which followed culminated on 8 April with the categorical rejection of Borisov by the Soviet Government and acknowledgement that,

...we are brought face to face with the most regrettable eventuality, that the negotiations with Poland will come to nothing owing to the question of where they will be carried on, which is a fact unparalleled in the annals of international relations.¹⁰⁵

The Soviet Government then changed tack and, in an attempt to increase diplomatic pressure on the Polish Government, informed Patek that a note had been issued to the Allied Governments, on the same day, requesting their assistance with the Poles.¹⁰⁶ It was hoped that this would force the Poles to agree to meet in a different location.¹⁰⁷ Once again, the Soviet leaders' representation to the international community of the Poles as obstinate and intractable was a tactically astute diplomatic manoeuvre.¹⁰⁸ Aware that the

¹⁰² *Krasnaia kniga*, p. 7.

¹⁰³ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 154. A *sazhen* was 2.13 metres.

¹⁰⁴ V.I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaya khronika*, vol. 8, (Moscow, 1977), p. 439.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, FO 688/3, p. 51. Degras incorrectly dates this document 9 April, J. Degras, *Calendar*, p. 30. For more on these diplomatic exchanges, see TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 54; TNA, FO 688/3, pp. 51-54; Polish Institute, KOL 104/3, p. 192; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/3, doc. 2, pp. 98-100; *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 367, pp. 637,

¹⁰⁶ To examine the Soviet Note to the Governments of France, Britain, Italy and the USA of 8 April, see Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/3, doc. 2, pp. 3-5; TNA, FO 688/3, p. 51.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 54.

¹⁰⁸ As former underground revolutionaries, the Soviet leaders had much experience to draw upon and during the war they successfully continued and expanded their tried and tested *agit-prop* methods.

continued isolation of Russia from the European economic and trade network was a concern for many in the West, including, notably, Lloyd George, the Soviet note to the Allies shrewdly reported,

Poland is continuing her war against the Russian and Ukrainian Soviet Republics, hindering, in this manner their peace action, preventing them from taking advantage of their internal riches, and from supplying other nations with the products which they require.¹⁰⁹

It informed the Allied Powers of the Poles' rejection of an Estonian town, Petrograd, Moscow or Warsaw, and suggested instead that London or Paris would be acceptable, "...where the Allies themselves can judge of our peaceful intentions".¹¹⁰ This seemingly conciliatory gesture was not as placatory as it might at first appear. The propaganda value of conducting Polish-Soviet negotiations in an Allied capital would have been enormous. Indeed, Patek accurately recognised that the Soviet note to the Allies was itself, "...in the nature of propaganda".¹¹¹

The appeal concluded,

If.... the *obstinacy* of the Polish Government in not agreeing to any other town besides Borysow as the place for negotiations with Russia, forms the only obstacle to these negotiations... *it will not be possible for the Entente Governments to avoid their responsibility in this event, as their influence might, most evidently, induce the Polish Government to take up a position less irreconcilable in this matter.*¹¹²

The Allies did not wish, however, to accept any such responsibility and so simply advised the Polish Government, on 19 April, not to be too insistent on Borisov.¹¹³ As was the situation throughout the conflict, they preferred to watch the diplomatic drama unfold, in April 1920, from afar. Thereafter, both the Polish and Soviet Governments issued statements blaming their opponent for the diplomatic stalemate which ensued.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ TNA, FO 688/3, pp. 51-53.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 52-53. Chicherin questioned, "Perhaps the Poles are unwilling to go to Estonia because Estonia was the first to make peace, and they feel their presence would be the greatest compliment to the superiority of the Estonian Government?" *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1920, p. 5. This was, indeed, exactly why the Soviets had suggested an Estonian town.

¹¹¹ TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 49, p. 70; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 2.

¹¹² Ibid, pp. 53-54. The Soviet regime remained convinced that the Poles were acting on *Entente* instructions. According to Rumbold, "...the presence of members of Allied legations at Borisov would be misrepresented and give rise to the idea that the Allies were in some way superintending the course of the peace negotiations and would be a party to the same", TNA, FO 417/8, doc. 42, p. 58. The Allies were keen to avoid this responsibility at all costs.

¹¹³ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 54.

¹¹⁴ J. Marchlewski, *Rosja proletarjacka*, pp. 19-21; *Krasnaia kniga*, doc. 86, pp. 102-103.

3.3 Responsibility for the Breakdown in Diplomatic Relations, April 1920

Although the Soviet Government may have sincerely desired to negotiate peace at the end of December 1919, the situation had clearly altered four months later. Following the Red Army's defeat of Denikin, the signing of a peace treaty with Estonia, and the discovery of the willingness of Lithuania and Latvia to enter into peace talks, the Soviet regime changed tack. Their improved military position allowed it to utilise the debate over the meeting place to prolong the preliminary peace talks, guarantee Polish isolation and simultaneously prepare for an offensive against Poland.¹¹⁵ Borisov further served to gain time for the Red Army to turn its attention towards General Wrangel in the Crimea, before its full force could be sent against the Poles. Thus, in the middle of the negotiations, Soviet Western Front Commander, Tukhachevsky, was ordered to plan, "...a deep advance into Poland", to be carried out in July 1920.¹¹⁶ Piłsudski's doubts as to the sincerity of the Soviet peace proposals were certainly well-founded.¹¹⁷

A Soviet *diktat* could then be imposed upon the Poles. Undoubtedly, any peace settlement reached would have been of a temporary, provisional nature until such times as the Soviet regime felt able to spread revolution to the industrialised countries of Western Europe. This overriding long-term and dearly-held objective lay at the heart of Soviet conduct during the war with Poland.

Neither, however, were the Poles blameless. Refusal to reconsider the location for talks was at best tenacious, at worse, a demonstration of Polish insincerity. The Poles aimed to paralyse the Red Army in a vitally important sector of the Western Front.¹¹⁸ It would appear that Piłsudski no longer sought a peaceful solution. Secret Polish military plans for the launch of an offensive into Ukraine were proceeding simultaneously alongside the negotiations. This sought to remove Ukraine from the Soviet sphere of influence and secure it as a Polish ally. Indeed, this was visibly and indisputably demonstrated by the

¹¹⁵ TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 60, p. 92; TNA, FO 688/3, p. 39.

¹¹⁶ A. Zamoyski, *Battle*, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ M. Żułowski, *Wojna z Rosją o Niepodległość, 1918-1920*, (Katowice, 1987), p. 7. The Polish Bureau fully supported this, in a secret document, on 21 April arguing, "First of all the continuation of our policy of peaceful proposals... it is necessary to do everything... so that the Red Army can support the front", I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 37, pp. 61-62.

¹¹⁸ Polish Institute, KOL. 104/3, p. 192; *Izvestiia*, 29 March 1920 & 3-30 April 1920. Trotsky believed that, "The Warsaw adventurers wanted war at any cost", and this led the Poles to reply to all arguments of common-sense with a warlike, "...cock-a-doodle-doo", L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, pp. 142 & 155.

launch of the Polish offensive on 25 April, which occurred too soon after the breakdown in diplomacy not to have been prepared in advance.

Thus, the Polish Government may have appointed a delegation and prepared its peace terms, but these were never handed over to the Soviet Government. In turn, it does not appear that the Soviet Government either nominated a delegation to participate in the diplomatic negotiations or formulated its peace conditions. Instead, the Borisov negotiations provided the diplomats of both Poland and Soviet Russia with an opportunity to play to a large domestic and international audience. Although in this battle Chicherin and the Soviet regime undoubtedly played the more skilful and astute game, following the failed Borisov negotiations, diplomatic stalemate ensued. The scales were now irrevocably tipped, by the leaders of both nations, in favour of a military dénouement.

4. Kiev: April-May 1920

The military solution sought by Piłsudski was to direct an offensive towards Ukraine and the strategically important city of Kiev. Following the cessation of the Great War in November 1918, Ukrainian lands had witnessed chaos and anarchy, as rival groups attempted to assert control over the country.¹¹⁹ The year 1919, alone, saw the establishment there of nine rival governments.¹²⁰ War had broken out between Ukraine and Poland in November 1918 and again in May 1919, before Soviet control over the country was temporarily secured in early 1920.¹²¹

Before Piłsudski launched his attack in April 1920, to rid the country of its Soviet occupiers, he required to secure a Ukrainian ally who would be responsible for establishing and maintaining an independent Ukraine, friendly to Poland. The man chosen was Simon Petlura, Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Directorate. Petlura had presided over a Ukrainian independence movement for longer than any other leader; had obtained considerable, active aid from the Allied Powers, and expected and promised a general Ukrainian uprising against the Soviet regime.¹²² After suffering defeat at the hands of both the Soviets and the Whites in the autumn of 1919, he was exiled to Poland and, there,

¹¹⁹ See, M. Palij, *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance, 1919-1921. An aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution*, (Toronto, 1995).

¹²⁰ R. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: communism and nationalism, 1917-1923*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), p. 137.

¹²¹ TNA, FO 418/53 doc. 23; Polish Institute, KOL 104/3; NAS, GD 40/17/884.

¹²² R. Debicki, *Foreign Policy of Poland, 1919-39: from the rebirth of the Polish Republic to World War II*, (London, 1963), p. 30.

entered into negotiations with Piłsudski.¹²³ The discussions bore fruit on 21 April 1920, when a political agreement was signed by the two men in Warsaw.¹²⁴ Through this understanding, Piłsudski promised military aid to Petlura in the fight against Soviet Russia, recognised the right of Ukraine to self-determination, acknowledged Petlura as Head of the Ukrainian People's Republic and reached agreement on the delineation of the Polish-Ukrainian border. In turn, Petlura recognised Eastern Galicia as a Polish sphere of influence and undertook to cede Lwów and Volhynia to Polish control.¹²⁵ A Polish-Ukrainian military convention on 24 April and a draft provisional economic understanding on 1 May 1920, followed.¹²⁶

What motives, then, guided Piłsudski to launch a military attack towards Kiev in April 1920? Firstly, the establishment of an independent, friendly Ukraine, federated with Poland, was central to his ideological programme. By imposing a third *fait accompli* in the *kresy*, Piłsudski sought to resolve the area's territorial questions without having to take into account Allied wishes. He further believed that, "Refusal to aid a nation with whom we lived in a voluntary union for five hundred years would be an indelible stain on Polish honour".¹²⁷ It would, moreover, provide an example to the other populations of the *kresy* and the Baltic states of the potential benefits to be gained from forming an alliance with the Poles. In this way, Poland would once again receive international recognition as a great European power and the balance of power in Eastern Europe would be realigned in their favour.

Secondly, and crucially, following the ongoing failure of Polish diplomacy to secure agreement, it would allow the Polish Government to negotiate a peace settlement for the region from a position of military strength. Piłsudski remained convinced that the Soviet regime, driven by a desire to spread socialist revolution westwards, would launch an offensive into the Polish lands, as soon as the White forces were defeated in the Russian

¹²³ Piłsudski sought this alliance after he gave the order to launch the Kiev offensive on 17 April 1920, committing himself to the attack, before he considered the political details, N. Davies, *White Eagle*, p. 102.

¹²⁴ J. Szczepański, *Spółeczeństwo Polski w Walce z Najazdem Bolszewickim 1920 roku*, (Warsaw, 2000), pp. 39-41. This was annulled by the Treaty of Riga in March 1921.

¹²⁵ Ibid. The Ukrainian population was informed of the agreement in a manifesto *Petlura to his People*, on 13 May 1920, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 1, p. 1; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 3, pp. 5-6. It was hoped that this would foster widespread Ukrainian support for the forthcoming Polish offensive.

¹²⁶ *D & M*, vol. 2, doc. 381, pp. 660-663; *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 14, pp. 33-36.

¹²⁷ A. Piłsudski, p. 295; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 11, p. 201. Davies incorrectly argued that, "These were not the actions... of a politician working for the imposition of a new order", N. Davies, *Genesis*, p. 60. Although circumstances frequently forced Piłsudski to concentrate on the military situation, he was ultimately driven by his federalist ideology.

Civil War.¹²⁸ He hoped to forestall this by launching a preemptive drive on Kiev and thereby determine the timing of future Polish-Soviet military engagements.¹²⁹ Piłsudski aimed to gain control of the South-Western Front, capture the right-bank Dniester and turn his forces north to face the Red Army on Belorussian territory.¹³⁰ Polish military intelligence demonstrated that the concentration of Red Army troops, following the defeat of Denikin, was increasing along the Northern Front, to a greater extent than on the Southern Front. Consequently, he hoped that a knock-out blow in the south would prevent a Soviet advance in the northern sector.¹³¹

By April 1920, Piłsudski sincerely believed that the Poles held the decisive military cards in their hands. As his friend, de Wiart, recorded,

...having taken Kieff he admitted to feeling uneasy, for he told me that every commander who had attempted to take the Ukraine had come to grief. I asked why he had attempted to take it against his superstitions. His answer was that he had felt his luck stood so high that he thought he could risk it.¹³²

However, Piłsudski had admitted to the British M.P., Sir Hugh MacKinder, in December 1919 that his intention was not to invade ethnographic Russia. Although, "...it was his opinion as a General that he could march to Moscow next May", as a politician, he added, "what could I do when I got there?"¹³³ A Polish occupation of the Russian capital would quickly hand the initiative to the Red Army as Russians, of all political persuasions, would unite against the Polish occupiers.

Finally, the Ukrainian lands were of great economic value to both Poland and Russia. Rich in natural resources, in particular grain, control of Ukraine, strategically situated on the Black Sea coast, would help both to secure their future economic stability and state reconstruction.¹³⁴ Combined with the Soviet regime's vision of Ukraine as a socialist bridge to south-western Europe, these goals set the two states ideologically, politically and economically, on a collision course.

¹²⁸ Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 3, pp. 31-32; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, p. 40.

¹²⁹ See, A.S. Bubnov, S.S. Kamenev, M.N. Tukhachevsky & R.P. Eideman, *Grazhdanskoi Voina 1918-1921*, (Leningrad, 1930), vol. 3, p. 318. According to Trotsky, the Poles overriding objective was to, "...establish there (through the agency of figurehead caretakers such as Petlyura) their own rule - military, national, economic and political", L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 131.

¹³⁰ J. Piłsudski, *Rok 1920*, (London, 1987), pp. 21-30.

¹³¹ The Polish-Soviet Front was divided into two separate theatres of war by the impassible Pripet marshes: in the south, Ukraine, Podolia and Volhynia, which provided the most accessible routes; and in the north, Lithuanian and Belorussian territory, which contained the shortest routes from Moscow to Wilno and Warsaw.

¹³² A. Carton de Wiart, *Happy Odyssey*, (London, 1950), p. 96.

¹³³ TNA, FO 418, doc. 6, p. 24.

¹³⁴ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 11, p. 201; *Manchester Guardian*, 14 April 1920, p. 11.

The importance of the battle which followed cannot be underestimated. It transformed the Polish-Soviet War in both scale and intensity, and had serious implications for the protagonists. The onset of the Polish offensive has been accorded a variety of dates by contemporaries.¹³⁵ Four days after the signing of the Piłsudski-Petlura agreement, the advance commenced and on the following day, 26 April, Polish forces secured Zhitomir, Korostein' and Radomisl.¹³⁶ This was the first time that Piłsudski led his army as *Marshal of Poland* and his confidence was fueled by the rapid progress of the Polish Army. He wrote from Rowno, on 1 May,

Well, I have taken the first plunge... I am preparing the second.... If it proves as effective as the first, the whole Bolshevik Army will be crushed. I have made prisoners of nearly half their force, and taken a quantity of material at the base. The remainder of their army are for the most part demoralized and dispersed. My own loss has been extraordinarily small. On the whole front it amounts to only 150 killed and 300 wounded.¹³⁷

This initial confidence was not misplaced. Following the evacuation of Kiev by the Red Army, the Polish Army entered the undefended city on 7 May and, largely unhindered, occupied almost all Ukrainian territory up to the right bank of the River Dnieper.¹³⁸

Soviet consternation at the Polish occupation of Kiev was quickly replaced by optimism. The potential for increased support within Russia, sympathy from the international community and an intensification of the propaganda drive soon became evident to the regime.¹³⁹ For the first time in the war, Soviet agit-prop officially and directly petitioned Russian nationalist sentiment for support of the war effort.¹⁴⁰ On 29 April, the RKP(b) CEC issued an *Appeal to All Workers, Peasants and Members of Russian Society*, to defend Soviet Ukraine, whilst the Commissar for War directly called for the support of Russian patriots and nationalists in a proclamation entitled *To all*

¹³⁵ Chicherin dated it 6 March, *Krasnaia kniga*, p. 7. The Polish Legation in London dated it 1 April, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 3, pp. 31-32; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, p. 40.

¹³⁶ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 344; *D & M*, vol. 3, p. 564.

¹³⁷ Piłsudski Institute, Kolekcja 1/2/5, p. 12.

¹³⁸ N. Davies, *White Eagle*, p. 109. As a result, 300,000 Polish troops were spread over 1,000 kilometres. For detailed accounts of the Polish occupation see, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 2, pp. 2-3; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 3, pp. 3-5; M. Kukiel, "The Polish-Soviet Campaign of 1920", p. 55 M. Żułowski, *Wojna z Rosją o niepodległość 1918-1920*, (Katowice, 1987), pp. 6 & 10-11; J. Marchlewski, *Rosja Proletarjacka*, pp. 21-24; J. Szczepański, pp. 85-95.

¹³⁹ Thereafter, no-one could, "...present to the working masses the eruption of the Polish White Guards into the Ukraine as an attack by the Bolshevik "oppressors" on peaceful Poland", L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, pp. 142-143.

¹⁴⁰ For an expansion of Soviet Russia's propaganda initiatives see, *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 12-15; *Tymczasowy Komitet Rewolucyjny Polski*, (Warsaw, 1955), pp. 78-81.

Workers, Peasants and Honourable Citizens.¹⁴¹ In this he advocated, "...the peace that the Polish landlords and capitalists want to bring to you on their bayonets, means complete enslavement not only of Lithuanian and Belorussian, but also of the Ukrainian workers and peasants, *and of millions of purely Russian people*".¹⁴²

The nation responded by rallying to the defence of Russia: conservatives, liberals and socialists alike. The approach of the Polish Army towards ethnographic Russia transformed the war, for the majority of the population, into a national war, against a foreign adversary. For instance, the former Tsarist General, A.A. Brusilov, wrote on 1 May 1920 expressing fear of, "...how wide the Polish offensive will be which wishes to capture all the land which comprised the Polish kingdom until 1772, and perhaps will not limit itself to only this".¹⁴³ Polish actions aroused Russian patriotism and as noted by Trotsky, "The capture of Kiev by the Poles, in itself devoid of any military significance, did us a great service; it awakened the country".¹⁴⁴

A sustained, well-organised Soviet response was required. In a "Top Secret" telegram sent by Trotsky, on 26 April 1920, to Lenin, Stalin, Dzierżyński, Kamenev and Serebriakov he argued that,

The situation in Ukraine demands the most serious attention... as well as military measures, extensive ideological measures are necessary. A very considerable number of local political workers must be transferred to Ukraine at once. It is equally essential that staunch political workers from departments at the centre should be seconded there for duty.¹⁴⁵

The previous day, the *Politburo* had requested that Trotsky define the RKP(b)'s response to the offensive and as a result, he penned a 16-point theses, *The Polish Front and Our Tasks*, on 30 April 1920.¹⁴⁶ This document stressed both the class and international nature of the war (points 1-5, 8-9), reflected his optimism regarding the Polish workers' and peasants' support for communism (point 8), and the extreme importance of the conflict for Soviet Russia by April 1920 (points 7, 10). It was now essential that the whole of Soviet

¹⁴¹ *D & M*, vol. 3, p. 564; *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 9, pp. 24-28.

¹⁴² L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, pp. 135-136. Author's italics. In direct opposition to Marxist ideology, outpourings of Russian nationalist slogans were now utilised to counter the fervent patriotism of the Poles.

¹⁴³ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 44, p. 74. As a result, he offered his services to the Red Army. See, *Biographical Notes*.

¹⁴⁴ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn': opyt avtobiografii*, vol. 2, (Berlin, 1990), p. 190.

¹⁴⁵ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 41, p. 69.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, doc. 55, p. 111.

Russia be directed towards supporting the war effort (points 13-16) and that immediate tasks in the agit-prop sphere (point 11), and the economy (point 12), be carried out.¹⁴⁷

The regime further utilised the Polish occupation of Kiev to pursue its stated diplomatic agenda of dividing Poland from the *Entente*. Accordingly, on 19 May, a telegram was dispatched to the Governments of Great Britain, France, Italy and the United States of America, regarding the unjust Polish attack on Ukraine.¹⁴⁸ The Soviet cause, thereafter, gained considerable sympathy amongst the political left in the West.¹⁴⁹

In Poland, in contrast, many warmly greeted Piłsudski's occupation of Kiev, with the *Sejm* telegraphing the Marshal that, "The news of the brilliant victory... fills the whole nation with joyful pride".¹⁵⁰ Dissenting voices were, however, heard. The National Democrats were "...sincerely opposed to Piłsudski's offensive against Kiev".¹⁵¹ The KPRP condemned the Polish initiative outright and resolved, "...to explain to the wide masses, that in the interests of the working people, then all men must give their energy to secure Soviet Russia and Ukraine from Poland and world imperialism".¹⁵² Furthermore, the PPS issued a *Manifesto* opposing the occupation of Kiev as it presented a direct threat to Ukraine's right to independence.¹⁵³

In turn, the majority of the Ukrainian population failed to respond to Petlura's appeals to join the Polish Army in its fight against Soviet Russia and those who did were badly equipped.¹⁵⁴ Most reacted to the Poles with neither enthusiastic support nor hostile opposition. This had devastating implications for the continued Polish offensive in May 1920. Ukrainian nationalism was both anti-Russian and anti-Polish, and according to one observer, Lord Derby at the British Embassy in Berlin, "...the Ukrainian peasants hated whatever Government was in power, and considered any form of compulsion or control intolerable".¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁷ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, pp. 130-134.

¹⁴⁸ V. Kluchnikov & A. Sabanin, vol. 3, part 1, p. 25. Chicherin informed Lord Derby at the British Embassy in Berlin on 15 July 1922, that the Polish offensive had been the result of French determination to separate Ukraine from Russia, NAS, GD 433/2/15, p. 39.

¹⁴⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 May 1920. See L.J. MacFarlane, "Hands off Russia: British Labour and the Russo-Polish War 1920", in *Past and Present*, vol. 38, (1967), pp. 126-152.

¹⁵⁰ N. Davies, *White Eagle*, p. 113.

¹⁵¹ S. Grabski, p. 23.

¹⁵² *D & M*, vol. 3, p. 564; F.G. Zueva, (ed.), *Istoriia Pol'shi*, vol. 3, (Moscow, 1958), p. 136. The German Communist Party (KPD), on 8 May, issued a proclamation to the same effect, *D & M*, vol. 3, pp. 48-49. See also, J. Marchlewski, *Voina i mir*, p. 20.

¹⁵³ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 9, p. 30.

¹⁵⁴ Only a few hundred volunteers joined Petlura during his four weeks in Kiev.

¹⁵⁵ NAS, 433/2/15, p. 39.

Finally, the Polish offensive met with a mixed response from the Allied Governments. King George V of Britain sent a message to the Poles and Piłsudski, on 10 May, with his congratulations and good wishes for the reestablished Polish state.¹⁵⁶ Rumbold praised the Polish Army for achieving a victory over Soviet Russia, which the Allies had, themselves, failed to achieve through intervention in the Russian Civil War. He informed Curzon, “The Poles... in defending their own country have undoubtedly protected Central Europe.... The Poles have therefore rendered real services to Europe as a whole in the struggle against Bolshevism”.¹⁵⁷ This interpretation was echoed by Colonel Willey during a British Parliamentary debate on 26 May 1920, when he stated that,

...Poland succeeded with hardly any assistance from outside in re-occupying lost territory and advancing as far as was necessary for the strategic safety of the State. Everywhere the Polish Army was welcomed as liberators of the oppressed populations and at every opportunity the Polish Chief of State and Government openly proclaimed that they had no imperialistic aims. The entire nation backed the efforts of the Polish military.¹⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Piłsudski’s presentation of another *fait accompli* to the Allies was badly resented and lost the Poles much international goodwill. Following the occupation of Kiev, Lloyd George warned that, “Unless the Poles are careful they will revive and intensify the spirit of Russian nationalism.... The Poles are inclined to be arrogant and they will have to take care that they don’t get their heads punched”.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, so deep-seated was the hostility of the British public to the Polish advance, that Bonar Law was forced to provide *A Ministerial Assurance*, on 13 May 1920, that the British Government had had no prior knowledge of Piłsudski’s plans for the offensive and that Britain had not provided any equipment for this purpose.¹⁶⁰ The aftershock of the Kiev offensive was felt not only in Ukraine, but had ramifications for Poland, Russia and the wider international community.

5. The Soviet Counter-Offensive: May-July 1920

The Soviet military responded quickly. On 28 April 1920, General Mikhail Tukhachevsky, fresh from victory over Denikin, was appointed Western Front Commander

¹⁵⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 May 1920, p. 8, the anniversary of voting of the Polish constitution in 1791.

¹⁵⁷ TNA, FO 417/7, doc. 52, pp. 77-78. Sir Hugh MacKinder, M.P., called the Polish offensive, “...a great adventure”, TNA, FO 418, doc. 6, p. 21.

¹⁵⁸ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 5, p. 20. See also, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, docs, 1 & 2; NAS, GD 40/17/911/3.

¹⁵⁹ G. Riddell, *Lord Riddell’s Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-1923*, (London, 1933), p. 191.

¹⁶⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 May 1920, p. 9.

and given the task of leading the Soviet counter-offensive. On 14 May, the Red Army attack towards Belorussia, commenced.¹⁶¹ Ciechanowski later argued,

It is generally supposed that the last Polish offensive (Kieff) caused, as a reaction, the Bolshevik offensive.... This view is incorrect.... the Soviet offensive was launched seven days after the Poles had taken Kieff... conducted by troops freshly brought from the eastern confines of Russia and the Caucasus... these reasons alone prove sufficiently that the Russian offensive had been planned and prepared carefully for a very long time.¹⁶²

Plans to prepare a strike force for advance into Galicia certainly had been prepared by the Soviet leadership prior to Piłsudski's April offensive. In a secret, coded telegram sent by Lenin to Stalin on 14 February 1920, the Soviet leader requested that the latter, "Advise more precisely what measures you propose for the creation of a Galician striking force.... Our diplomacy ought to... keep silent about Galicia".¹⁶³ Indeed, the need to formulate plans for a military offensive against Poland had been recognised by the Soviet Government as early as January 1920.¹⁶⁴

On 26 May, Piłsudski issued a proclamation *To all the Inhabitants of the Ukraine*, reassuring that the Polish Army had advanced into Ukrainian territory solely to defend the native population against the Soviet occupiers. He announced,

Polish troops will remain in the Ukraine only until such time as it is necessary for a legitimate Ukrainian Government to be formed and set to work. As soon as the future of the Ukrainian state is assured... the Polish troops will retire, having fulfilled their glorious duty as liberators of the people.¹⁶⁵

The proclamation met with instant derision in Soviet Russia. Trotsky denounced it as a "...foxy manifesto", issued by "...a savage wolf".¹⁶⁶ Chicherin believed it to demonstrate the Poles' "...boundless imperialistic outlook" whilst Lenin argued that, "...it is tantamount to Poland's declaration of war on Ukraine".¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ *D & M*, vol. 3, p. 565. A British Foreign Office *Memorandum* dated this to 19 May 1920, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 152. On 2 May, Trotsky appealed that, "The struggle with Poland... become the most important, fundamental and leading task of all workers' and peasants' in Russia", L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 145.

¹⁶² TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, p. 40.

¹⁶³ R. Pipes, (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin: from the Secret Archive*, (New Haven, 1996), doc. 43, p. 77.

¹⁶⁴ J. Meijer, *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 2, doc. 443, pp. 20-21; N.E. Kakurin and V.A. Melikov, *Voina s Belopolakiami*, (Moscow, 1925), pp. 67-70; *Grazhdanskoi Voina, 1918-1921*, vol. 3, pp. 309-310 & 317-318; T.F. Kariaeva, (ed.), *Direktivy Glavnogo Komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii, 1917-1920: sbornik dokumentov*, (Moscow, 1969), pp. 673-678.

¹⁶⁵ Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 4, p. 23; TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, enclosure 4, p. 43.

¹⁶⁶ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 156.

¹⁶⁷ *Krasnaia kniga*, pp. 7-8; V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 330.

The Soviet counter-offensive on the South-Western Front, led by A.I. Egorov and spearheaded by the Soviet cavalry of Budiennyi, was launched on the very same day, 26 May 1920. By 10 June, the Poles had evacuated Kiev.¹⁶⁸ An *Official Polish Military Communiqué* glossed over this retreat, reporting,

In the Ukraine we have evacuated Kieff after destroying the bridges on the Dnieper. Our regroupment is proceeding in the fullest order.... The Bolshevists have suffered enormous losses. Ammunition and large quantities of war material were captured.¹⁶⁹

In reality, however, this was the prelude to a Polish Army retreat along the entire front.¹⁷⁰

The controlled Polish withdrawal was soon overwhelmed, when on 4 July the Red Army launched a counter-offensive which it had been actively planning since 10 March 1920.¹⁷¹ For the next six weeks, the Polish military situation deteriorated as the Soviet regime's first campaign on foreign territory proceeded rapidly. Separated by the impassable Pripet Marshes, the Soviet forces advanced on two fronts: the Soviet Western Front, under Tukhachevsky, moved into Belorussia and Lithuania; the South-Western Front, under Egorov, headed towards Lwów.¹⁷²

On 7 July, the Polish General Staff reported that the Soviets' were advancing along the entire front from the Dwina to the Dniester Rivers.¹⁷³ Four days later, Soviet troops captured the Belorussian capital, Minsk. The signing of a Soviet-Lithuanian Treaty, on 12 July 1920, handed Polish-claimed Wilno, Grodno and Suwałki to Lithuania and, by secret protocol, allowed the Red Army to pass unhindered through Lithuanian territory on its way to Poland, further strengthening the Soviet position. Time was of the essence and on 17 July 1920, the *Politburo* decreed that the military cross the ethnographic Polish border.¹⁷⁴

The importance of this decision cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it may be regarded, along with the Polish rout of the Red Army at Warsaw in August, as *the* pivotal turning point in the conflict, representing as it did a major ideological shift by the Soviet regime. Marx's doctrine that socialist revolution must be the work of a nation's own proletariat had previously governed the Soviet leaders' actions and it was to this end that their pursuit of open, people's diplomacy, in combination with a well-planned agit-prop offensive, were

¹⁶⁸ J. Marchlewski, *Rosja Proletarjacka*, pp. 19-21; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25; TNA, FO 688/5.

¹⁶⁹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25, p. 62.

¹⁷⁰ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, p. 52.

¹⁷¹ N. Davies, *Genesis*, p. 58; N.E. Kakurin & V.A. Melikov, *Voina s Belopoliakami*, 77ff.

¹⁷² Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc.11, p. 201. See, *Biographical Notes*.

¹⁷³ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25, p. 69.

¹⁷⁴ *RGASPI*, f. 19, op. 1, d. 9, l. 3.

directed prior to July 1920. Abandonment of this ideological tenet in July 1920 proved fatal.

What drove the Soviet regime to adopt such a risky strategy in July? What was the motivation? It can, firstly, be argued that the Soviet counter-offensive provided a welcome deflection from the desperate Russian domestic situation, stemming from four years fighting in the Great War, two domestic revolutions, and three years consumed by civil war. The new policy firmly directed the political focus outwards.

Of far greater importance for the regime, though, was the fact that if successful, the Polish campaign would not only secure Soviet authority in Russia, but would spread socialist revolution westwards and provide a viable international alternative to capitalism. This was a risk which they were willing to take. As Marxists, the Soviet leadership was adamant that the revolution had to spread to the more advanced countries of western and central Europe if it was to seriously challenge capitalism on a worldwide scale. Lenin believed that, “Poland, as the buffer between Russia and Germany... is the fulcrum of the entire Versailles treaty”.¹⁷⁵ Removing the Polish nation from the capitalist system would, thus, be the first step in overthrowing the Paris Peace settlement in Europe.¹⁷⁶ As a result, Poland could not simply be neutralised as an opponent, but must be sovietised in order to actively support the Soviet advance into Western Europe, in 1920. This would draw Poland within the Soviet federation of states, secure Russia’s western frontier and assist in the settlement of the volatile *kresy* region.

This conviction was shared by his colleagues. Trotsky’s belief in revolutionary war remained unshaken prior to July 1920 arguing, “...there can be no room for doubt as to the outcome of the impending conflict.... The Polish proletariat will transform their country into a socialist republic”.¹⁷⁷ Karol Radek agreed on 4 May 1920 that, “If white guard Poland cannot exist side by side with Soviet Russia, then a Soviet Poland will”, whilst on 13 July 1920, L.B. Kamenev, a *Politburo* member, commented that the only possible guarantee of avoiding a future war was the “sovietisation of Poland”.¹⁷⁸ The RKP(b), thus, hoped that the Red Army advance four days later would act as a catalyst for a Polish workers and peasants-led socialist revolution.

¹⁷⁵ V.I. Lenin, “The International Significance of the War with Poland”, in A. Richardson, p. 142.

¹⁷⁶ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 324.

¹⁷⁷ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 132.

¹⁷⁸ *Izvestiia*, 4 May 1920. See also, K. Radek, *Piat’ let kominterna*, (Moscow, 1924), pp. 232-251. I.I. Kostiusenko, vol. 1, doc. 70, p. 134.

Furthermore, Poland's geo-strategic position at the heart of central-eastern Europe was a vital component in Soviet Russia's designs on the country in July 1920. The Polish nation had the potential to either exist as a bridge, over which communism could spread to the rest of Europe, or as a barrier, capable of preventing its development.¹⁷⁹ The RKP(b) determined that the former position would prevail, and directed their policy accordingly. Poland would provide two paths along which the socialist revolution could march to Germany in the west and to Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia in the south-west.¹⁸⁰ As early as 30 October 1918, Trotsky had identified the importance of Poland to this plan stating,

Free Latvia, free Poland and Lithuania, free Finland, and on the other side free Ukraine will not be a wedge but a uniting link between Soviet Russia and the future Soviet Germany and Austria-Hungary. This is the beginning of a European communist federation – a union of the proletarian republics of Europe.¹⁸¹

First of all, Germany as one of the most industrially advanced nations in Europe, in July 1920, was pivotal to the Russian revolution's chances of survival. According to Trotsky, "If it were necessary for us to go under to assure the success of the German revolution, we should have to do it. The German revolution is vastly more important than ours".¹⁸² In 1919 there was good cause for believing that Germany was ripe for revolution and could act as a potential base from which to spread socialist ideology throughout Europe.¹⁸³ At the 9th Party Congress, Lenin gave a clear indication of the importance of Germany to Soviet policy, saying,

The approach of our troops to the borders of eastern Prussia... showed that all Germany was seething. News began to come out that tens and hundreds of thousands of German communists were crossing our borders, and telegrams flew [from] German communist regiments.¹⁸⁴

Secondly, the newly established states of Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia in south and south-east Europe, following the trauma of the Great War, were also deemed to

¹⁷⁹ Radek argued in May 1920 that, "Poland must cease to be a wall protecting Europe from Russia and become a bridge between Russia and Germany", K. Radek, "Die Polnische Frage und Die Internationale Revolution", in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, no. 12, (1920), p. 21.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Fiddick argued that Dzierżyński wished to "...build an iron curtain between Bolshevism and bourgeois Europe, in order to protect the Red Army from 'western spies'", T. Fiddick, *Russia's Retreat from Poland, 1920: from permanent revolution to peaceful coexistence*, (London, 1990), p. 191. In this he was mistaken. As the real head of the *Polrevkom*, Dzierżyński was responsible for directing communists' attempts to spread revolution to Poland, not to contain it within Russia.

¹⁸¹ W.H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1921*, vol. 1, (New York, 1954), p. 122.

¹⁸² L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, vol. 2, p. 109.

¹⁸³ A deep war-weariness had beset the country after the Great War and there was increasing resentment in Germany at the harsh terms imposed by the Treaty of Versailles.

¹⁸⁴ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, doc. 59, p. 101. In this, Lenin was poorly informed.

be ready to welcome socialist revolution.¹⁸⁵ On 13 July 1920, Kamenev stated that Soviet control of Eastern Galicia was essential to provide, "...a gateway to Hungary" and an alternative route to Poland.¹⁸⁶ By the time the *Politburo* resolved to cross into ethnographic Poland, Lenin was convinced that the revolution should not only target Germany, but also the countries in south-west Europe. Six days after the decisive 17 July meeting he telegraphed Stalin,

The situation in the Comintern is splendid. Zinoviev, Bukharin, and I, too, think that revolution in Italy should be spurred on immediately. My personal opinion is that to this end, Hungary should be sovietised, and perhaps also Czechia and Romania.¹⁸⁷

He later acknowledged the great significance of this decision in his secret speech of September 1920, when he stated,

We understand perfectly well that the stakes are high, that... in taking Galicia, where Soviet rule is assured [and] which has a connection to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, where things are seething – by doing this – we are opening a direct road for revolution. This is worth fighting for; such a fact cannot be scorned.¹⁸⁸

These coveted objectives of the Soviet political élite were mirrored by the Red Army leadership, entrusted with conducting the offensive against Poland. Tukhachevsky, Western Front Commander argued,

There is not the slightest doubt that, if we had succeeded in breaking the Polish Army of bourgeois and seigneurs, the revolution of the working class in Poland would have been an accomplished fact. And the tempest would not have stopped at the Polish frontier. Like a furious torrent it would have swept over the whole of Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁹

Soviet Russia's aims, by July 1920, were also clearly recognised by the Poles. Piłsudski acknowledged their plan to sovietise Poland stating,

...it is an indisputable fact...that in making war on us, Soviet Russia was conforming to a set plan, namely, the plan of setting up in Poland an organisation identical with its own, that is to say, a Soviet one. This objective was christened "Exporting the Revolution". It was well-known to me that this was the war aim of the Soviets.¹⁹⁰

He further recognised that, despite public protestations of the Soviet leaders to the contrary, the regime was willing to utilise the Red Army to spread this ideology to Poland:

¹⁸⁵ For a fuller examination see, *Chapter 5: Was International Revolution Possible?*

¹⁸⁶ I.I. Kostiuško, vol. 1, doc. 70, p. 134.

¹⁸⁷ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, doc. 54, p. 90.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, doc. 59, p. 110.

¹⁸⁹ M.N. Tukhachevsky, "Pokhod za Vislu", in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1964), p. 167.

¹⁹⁰ J. Piłsudski, *Rok 1920*, (London, 1987), p. 146.

as “...the revolution did not exist in Poland... it was necessary to impose it on us at the point of the bayonet”.¹⁹¹ The Poles also recognised the second crucial Soviet objective of using the Polish nation as a land link with the West. As early as 1919, the Polish Council of National Defence issued a proclamation which stated that, “...the Soviet Armies took Lithuania and threatened to march on Warsaw through the Polish corridor to the German frontier and then through Germany on to the Rhine”.¹⁹²

Thus, when the Red Army entered into ethnographic Poland on 23 July it quite simply, and irreversibly, altered the complexion of the war.¹⁹³ For the majority of Bolsheviks, carried away by the rapid Soviet advance and in direct contradiction of Marxist teachings, it was now deemed acceptable to utilise the Red Army to bring socialist revolution to Poland. The most tacit recognition of this crucial change in policy was made by Lenin at the closed session of the 9th Party Congress on 22 September 1920, when he stated,

We decided to use our military forces to assist the sovietisation of Poland. Our subsequent overall policy followed from this. We formulated it not in an official resolution in the minutes of the CC representing the law for the party and the new congress, but we said among ourselves that we must probe with bayonets whether the social revolution of the proletariat in Poland had ripened.¹⁹⁴

Ultimately, this error of judgement was responsible for the unprecedented defeat for the Red Army before the gates of Warsaw the following month.

6. Conclusion

The first half of 1920, therefore, witnessed a dramatic reversal in the fortunes of the protagonists: an initial Polish stronghold in the *kresy*, secured by the military, culminated in the occupation of Kiev, before a strengthened Soviet counter-offensive threw the Polish Army back ever westwards from early May onwards.

Piłsudski clearly overestimated the strength of the Polish Armed Forces, overstretched his troops and underestimated the resources of the Red Army. He was also guilty of misinterpreting Ukrainian support for both Petlura and the Polish offensive, neither of

¹⁹¹ Ibid. This was an uncanny turn of phrase, mirroring as it did almost exactly Lenin’s secret admission to the 9th Party Congress in September 1920.

¹⁹² Piłsudski Institute, kolekcja 23/2/8, p. 86.

¹⁹³ The Soviet Command approved a plan on 23 July, to capture Warsaw by 12 August, Z. Musiałik, *General Weygand and the Battle of the Vistula: 1920*, (London, 1987), p. 21.

¹⁹⁴ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, doc. 59, p. 98. When *Pravda* published an abridged version of this speech one week later, the phrase “Sovietisation of Poland” was omitted.

which were forthcoming. The Soviet counter-offensive made it impossible for Poles to present the peace terms prepared in March 1920, closing the door on diplomacy. In contrast, support in Russia for the Soviet regime reached an all-time high as Russian nationalism entered the equation for the first time during the war.¹⁹⁵

The failed Polish offensive had lasting repercussions in Poland as the state was brought close to collapse.¹⁹⁶ Skulski's Government was forced to resign and a lengthy cabinet crisis ensued. Indeed, when the Polish Diet met on 20 and 21 January 1921, the National Democratic Party, Witos' Peasant Party and the Polish Socialists demanded that an investigation be held into the Kiev débâcle of the previous summer, to establish,

- 1) How it happened that the advance to Kieff was carried out in defiance of the will of the Diet, the Government and the Allies and who was responsible?
- 2) Why military preparations for the undertaking were inadequate from every point of view?¹⁹⁷

The situation was critical.¹⁹⁸ On the battlefield, the Poles continued to be thrown back and the first day of August saw Brest-Litovsk fall to the Red Army. Piłsudski had lost control of all territory acquired by his troops the previous year.¹⁹⁹

Soviet forces stood at the River Bug, poised to enter ethnographic Polish territory. Debates had raged in the *Politburo* over the desirability of crossing this line, but the eventual outcome was unequivocal: proceed to Warsaw. The Soviet regime was convinced that, "To export revolution was a possibility".²⁰⁰ So confident was the RKP(b) that the Polish workers and peasants would rise up to welcome the advancing Red Army, that it supported the establishment of a Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee (*Polrevkom*), earmarked as the first Soviet Polish Government, on 30 July 1920 in Białystok.²⁰¹ The stage was being prepared for the battle of Warsaw, the outcome of which had lasting repercussions, not only for the belligerents, but for the entire international community.

¹⁹⁵ It also deflected Soviet attention temporarily from Wrangel, allowing him to continue in opposition to the Soviets until November 1920.

¹⁹⁶ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 111, p. 195.

¹⁹⁷ TNA, FO 417/10, doc. 16, p. 33.

¹⁹⁸ The majority of Poles were horrified by the turn in fortunes, Polish Institute, KOL 180, p. 59.

¹⁹⁹ TNA, FO 688/7/147.

²⁰⁰ M.N. Tukhachevsky, "The March beyond the Vistula", in J. Piłsudski, *Year 1920*, (London, 1972), p. 244.

²⁰¹ See, *Chapter 4: Polrevkom*.

Chapter 4: The Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee

The Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee (*Polrevkom*), established by the advancing Soviet authorities in the Polish town of Białystok, in July 1920, at the height of the Polish-Soviet War, was one of the most significant events of the conflict and yet its origin, objectives and activities remain little studied by historians.¹ The importance of the *Polrevkom* cannot, however, be underestimated. If the Polish-Soviet War formed part of the Bolsheviks earliest venture to export revolution by military force westwards, the *Polrevkom* was their first attempt to establish a Socialist Soviet Republic on ethnographic Polish territory. Consequently, it was to have lasting implications for the development of Soviet ideology, the development of the Polish State and the evolution of relations between the two neighbouring states.

Traditionally, and for obvious reasons, many Polish and Russian historians have consciously overlooked the workings of the *Polrevkom*. For the majority of Poles it was, and continues to be, regarded as an alien institution, imposed by a foreign invader, worthy of little attention and meriting no credit.² In turn, Soviet historians primarily wished to avoid raising difficult questions, such as why did this Soviet organisation fail to gain the support of the majority of Poles? Why did it last for only twenty-three days? Why was its fate so closely bound up with the Red Army's defeat at the gates of Warsaw in August 1920?³ Nevertheless, over the years, intermittent interest in the subject developed in Poland and Russia, especially amongst those who sympathised with the organisation's objectives.⁴ Much information can also be found in the writings of its members.⁵

However, it is the opening of the Russian archives, in particular, the *Rossiskii gosudarstvenii arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii* (RGASPI) in Moscow, after the

¹ In Polish, *Tymczasowy Komitet Rewolucyjny Polski*; in Russian, *Pol'skii Vremennnyi Revoliutsionnyi Komitet*.

² See, for instance, T. Teslar, *Polityka Rosji Sowieckiej podczas Wojny z Polską: trzy momenty*, (Warsaw, 1937).

³ For a traditional Soviet interpretation of the *Polrevkom* and its activities see, *Istoriia Pol'shi*, vol. 3, (Moscow, 1955), pp. 136-143.

⁴ The most valuable are, A. Litwin, *Tymczasowy Komitet Rewolucyjny Polski*, (Warsaw, 1955); P. Kalenichenko, "O deiatel'nosti pol'skogo vremennogo revoliutsionnogo komiteta", in Ia. Manusevich (ed.), *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i zarubezhnye slavianskie narody*, (Moscow, 1957).

⁵ J. Marchlewski, *Voina i mir mezhduburzhuaaznoi Pol'shei i proletarskoi Rossiei*, (Moscow, 1921); J. Marchlewski, *Polska Burżuazyjna a Rosja Proletariacka*, (Moscow, 1921); J. Marchlewski, "Mir s Polshei" in *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, no. 14, (1920), pp. 2751-2754; F.E. Dzierżyński, *Dnevnik: pisma k rodnym*, (Moscow, 1958); F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1977); F. Kon, *Feliks Edmundovich Dzerzhinskii: biograficheskii ocherk*, (Moscow, 1939).

collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 which has permitted the present reevaluation. This holds especially important *fondy* relating to the work of the *Polrevkom*, the Polish Bureau of the CC RKP(b) and the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (CEC KPRP). These sources have been supplemented, in the present work, by the extremely rich archival collections of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, the Piłsudski Institute and The National Archives in London, and have facilitated a reinterpretation of the role of the *Polrevkom*. In particular, the establishment of the organization, the choice of Białystok as its location and the involvement of the Central Committee of the RKP(b), shall be discussed. New light is shed on *Polrevkom* objectives and on its immediate tasks, most notably regarding industry and agriculture. Heavily involved in disseminating Soviet ideology through propaganda, it issued enormously diverse appeals, covering socio-economic, political, cultural and military issues and targeted a wide social range, including Polish workers, peasants, soldiers, Red Army men, and the international community. Public sentiment and the reception of the *Polrevkom* by the inhabitants of Poland proved crucial to its survival, with the archives, finally, providing information about its fate and what its lasting consequences were for Bolshevik, Polish and international politics.

1. Establishment of the *Polrevkom*

The need to establish an organisation to direct the sovietisation of Poland and lead a socialist revolution in the country had long been recognised by Polish communists. As early as 15 January 1919, the CEC KPRP wrote to the CC RKP(b) that the future advance of the Soviet army onto Polish territory, would be impossible, "...without a whole series of political acts... the transfer of the leadership of the movement against the Polish bourgeois government, must be placed in the hands of an organisation created by the Polish revolutionary proletariat".⁶ However, the military situation throughout 1919, when the Polish Army held the initiative, and in the first half of 1920, when the Red Army was advancing on non-Polish territory, prevented any such action being taken. Only after the *Politburo* ordered the Soviet Army, under the command of Western Front Commander, M.N. Tukhachevsky, on 17 July 1920, to cross into ethnographic Polish territory, could the question of establishing a Bureau to lead communist party work in occupied Polish territory, again be raised.

⁶ I.I. Kostiuszko (ed.), *Pol'sko-Sovetskaia voina 1919-1920: ranee ne opublikovannye dokumenty i materialy*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1994), doc. 1, p. 20.

In direct response to this military order, Polish communists met in Moscow the following day to discuss the mobilization of all Polish communists residing in Soviet Russia for the imminent entry of the Red Army onto Polish territory.⁷ Feliks Dzierżyński proposed that the CC RKP(b), "... create an organ which would direct all preparatory work, allocate mobilised comrades, draw up instructions and plans of action".⁸ As a result, the RKP(b) *Orgburo* meeting on 19 July 1920, at which Krestinskii, Dzierżyński, Aleksdandrov, Próchniak and Al'sky were present, endorsed the Polish communists initiative, "To nominate a Special Bureau of RKP(b) for leadership of party work in those localities of Poland, which will be strategic considerations for occupation by the Red Army".⁹ Its membership was confirmed as including the well-known Polish communists Julian Marchlewski, Feliks Kon, Eduard Próchniak and Józef Unszlicht, under the chairmanship of Feliks Dzierżyński.¹⁰ Two days later, the *Orgburo* officially registered the group's name as the "Polish Bureau CC RKP(b)" (*Pol'bureau*) and formally received a request from Dzierżyński, on its behalf, for financial assistance.¹¹ In recognition of the envisaged role it would play in the sovietisation of Poland, the *Orgburo* allocated the substantial sum of 10 million roubles to the *Pol'bureau* for its work.¹²

The Bureau's ultimate objective was, like that of the Russian Communist Party, to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat through the creation of a Polish Soviet Government and a Socialist Republic.¹³ It acknowledged, however, that before this goal could be attained it had to provide responsible leadership to guide and direct events.¹⁴ The large *Pol'bureau* CC RKP(b) *fondy* in *RGASPI* provide an excellent indication of the wide-ranging tasks with which the Bureau was involved. These included implementing Soviet ideology in Polish territory occupied by the Red Army; conducting agitational-propaganda (*agit-prop*) amongst the local population; carrying out cultural-educational work, especially amongst Polish youths and women; developing relationships with communist

⁷ Bobinsky, Dzierżyński, Lazovert, Marchlewski, Pestkovsky, Próchniak, Rupevich, Sosnovky, Stokovsky, Vnorovsky, Dzierżyńskaia, Marchlewskaia and Al'sky were present. Already on 1 May, Polish communists in Smolensk had advocated the mobilisation of Poles to aid the Western Front, *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-pol'skikh otnoshenii*, vol. 3, (Moscow, 1965), doc. 13, pp. 31-32, (hereafter *D & M*).

⁸ *Ibid*, doc. 94, p. 163.

⁹ I.I. Kostiusenko, vol.1, doc. 75, p. 144, *Protocol No. 37*.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, doc. 82, p. 153. That is, all those suggested at the Polish communist meeting on 18 July, with the exception of Doletsky.

¹¹ *Ibid*, doc. 76, p. 147, *Protocol No. 38*.

¹² *Rossiiskii gosudarstvenii arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 10, l. 3, (hereafter *RGASPI*). The Polish Bureau, thus, worked closely with the CC RKP(b) and was dependent upon it for funds.

¹³ *Protocol No. 2* of the *Pol'bureau* meeting on 23 July, I.I. Kostiusenko, vol. 1, doc. 77, p. 148.

¹⁴ I.I. Kostiusenko, vol. 1, doc. 82, p. 153.

organisations in the borderlands; establishing ties with the KPRP, and looking after Soviet prisoners of war interned in Poland.¹⁵

However, the most critical of all *Pol'bureau* tasks was its establishment of the *Polrevkom*, resolving on 29 July 1920, that,

...the Bureau will appear as a Provisional Revolutionary Committee, will issue a manifesto to the workers, explaining the motives for the Red Army's entry... will establish local revolutionary committees and lead all organisational and political work.... The Revolutionary Committee will proclaim the Polish Socialist Republic of Soviets.¹⁶

This document clearly demonstrates that it was the *Pol'bureau*, not the CC RKP(b), which was responsible for its establishment, and for defining its programme. It was not, as suggested by Soviet historians, created by a popular, spontaneous workers' movement.¹⁷ Neither, however, was it established directly on the initiative of Lenin, despite assertions that,

...simultaneously with the resolution to continue the pursuit of the Polish Army on its own territory, arose the question about the Red Army giving help to the Polish workers through the establishment by them of revolutionary authority in Poland.... Lenin had an idea about a new authority in Poland.¹⁸

Instead, the initiative lay with the Polish Communists. The establishment of the *Polrevkom* allowed the RKP(b) to, "...probe with bayonets whether the social revolution of the proletariat had ripened", but the Soviet regime in Moscow was neither initially, nor directly, responsible for its formation.¹⁹ Indeed, the decision to form the *Polrevkom* was taken quickly, without a great deal of advance planning by the Polish communists.²⁰ Nevertheless, in line with RKP(b) thinking, they did regard it, primarily, as a means of implementing Soviet ideology in Poland.

The Polish town of Białystok, occupied by Red Army troops on 28 July 1920, witnessed the establishment of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland two days later. Its *Manifesto*, published the same day, announced that,

¹⁵ RGASPI, f. 63, op. 1, d. 172; RGASPI, f. 63, op. 1, d. 314; RGASPI, f. 63, op. 1, d. 315, l. 1. For *Pol'bureau* activities in Smolensk, 1920-1921 see, RGASPI, f. 63, op. 1, d. 295.

¹⁶ I.I. Kostiuško, vol.1, doc. 82, p. 153.

¹⁷ It was asserted, for instance, that, "...the enormous enthusiasm of the working population formed the Provisional Revolutionary Committee", *Istoriia Pol'shi*, vol. 3, (Moscow, 1955), p. 138.

¹⁸ M.N. Chernykh, *Iulian Marchlewskii o Sovetsko-Pol'skikh otnosheniakh v 1918-1921gg*, (Moscow, 1990), p. 186.

¹⁹ R. Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin: from the Secret Archive*, (New Haven & London, 1996), doc. 59, p. 98.

²⁰ RGASPI, f. 63, op. 1, d. 88, l. 1.

In the territory of Poland, freed from the yoke of capital, a Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland has been established, the membership of which is composed of comrades Julian Marchlewski, Feliks Dzierżyński, Feliks Kon, Eduard Próchniak and Józef Unszlicht.²¹

The RKP(b) newspaper, *Pravda*, also published the membership list.²² The *Politburo* further resolved on 10 August, “To include in the Polish Bureau CC and *Polrevkom*, comrade Radek”.²³ Its composition was, thus, well known in both Poland and Russia.

Confusion existed, however, over the exact date of the *Polrevkom*’s formation. A telegram sent by Próchniak, on behalf of the *Pol’bureau*, to *Pravda*, reported on 31 July, “Today in Białystok was organised a Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland”.²⁴ That this was clearly a mistake was verified by a telegram from Dzierżyński, which stated, “Transmit to Lenin: the manifesto and notification of the creation of the *Polrevkom*, printed with the date 30, town Belostok”.²⁵ Yet, on 30 July many of its members were not yet resident in Białystok. On 3 August 1920, S. Budkevich, a military commissar on the Soviet Western Front, reported that Marchlewski remained in Grodno or Białystok, Próchniak was in Vilnius and Dzierżyński had arrived from Grodno only that day.²⁶ In fact, the Committee first met on 24 July in Smolensk, moving by train via Minsk on 25 July and Vilnius on 27 July, before finally arriving in Białystok three days later.²⁷

As both the Soviet leaders and *Pol’bureau* were keen to stress the Committee’s independence from the Russian regime, thereby improving its credibility with the Polish population, Julian Marchlewski was appointed by the *Pol’buro* as titular Chairman of the *Polrevkom* on 23 July 1920.²⁸ Crucially, Marchlewski was not a member of the RKP(b). In contrast, Dzierżyński, its real guiding influence, was not only Chairman of the *Pol’bureau*, but was also the highest ranking Pole in the Soviet Government, a RKP(b) CC member, and the feared head of the *Cheka*.²⁹

²¹ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 2. Próchniak was the Committee’s Secretary. The Russian version in this *delo* omits Dzierżyński’s name, a glaring oversight given that he was not only a member, but unofficial head of the organization. A full list of *Polrevkom* employees, which numbered about eighty, is listed in, *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 37.

²² *Pravda*, 3 August 1920.

²³ Demonstrating direct involvement by Soviet Russia’s governing body in the Committee’s composition.

²⁴ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 5.

²⁵ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 86, p. 162. Its *Manifesto to the Polish Workers of the Town and Villages* was also dated 30 July, *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 2.

²⁶ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 88, p. 163.

²⁷ Z. Dzierżyńska, *V gody velikikh boev*, (Moscow, 1964), p. 327.

²⁸ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 78, p. 149. Reddaway incorrectly states that Leszczyński was *Polrevkom* Chairman, W.F. Reddaway (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Poland*, vol. 2, (Cambridge, 1951), p. 526. He was, instead, Soviet Commissar for Polish Affairs.

²⁹ Dzierżyński penned the majority of *Polrevkom* correspondence with the Soviet regime.

In a further attempt to strengthen its credentials, the *Polrevkom* comprised only Polish communists, and stressed in an appeal *To Legionaries*, on 1 August,

Our names are well-known as we have worked for long years for the emancipation of the working classes... our names form a sufficient guarantee for you, to be elected by you and the Councils of Workmen, Peasants and Soldiers' Delegates as a permanent revolutionary Government.³⁰

The Committee was only too aware that the Polish population could potentially view the Red Army as foreign aggressors, little different from the Tsarist armies which had invaded their homeland in the past. As a result, its leaders were careful to stress their Polish nationality.

Why then was Białystok viewed as, “The Provisional revolutionary capital of workers-peasants Poland”?³¹ As one of the first large towns occupied by the Red Army after it crossed the ethnographic Polish border, Białystok was an ideal location for the *Polrevkom*. It was essential that the Committee be established on recognised Polish territory to strengthen its assertion that it was not a Russian puppet, but a genuine Polish organisation. Furthermore, although Marchlewski had recognised on 14 July 1920, that the Białystok regional *uezdy* contained a population which was largely backward and agrarian, “Catholic and strongly Polonised”, Białystok itself contained a large Jewish population which was, as a traditional opponent of Polish Roman Catholic rule, more supportive of a Soviet-style regime than the majority of Poles.³² Under the Russian Tsars, a Jewish Pale had been created from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south, roughly following the frontier of the old Polish Kingdom, within which the majority of Jews were compelled to reside. This provided the *Polrevkom* with a good support base in the town, but almost certainly gave it a false sense of the support it could expect to receive throughout Poland.

Białystok was also a large industrialised centre, crucial to Bolshevik plans, as the sovietisation of Poland required to be carried through by the local urban working class.³³

³⁰ The National Archives, FO 688/6, p. 32, (hereafter TNA). Underlined in the original. However, both Unsicht and Radek were Jewish, and their names were unlikely to invoke a positive response from the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic Polish population.

³¹ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 166, p. 278.

³² I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 72, p. 140; V.I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaya khronika*, vol. 9, (Moscow, 1978), p. 101.

³³ Białystok, with a population of 50,000, was the industrial centre of the country prior to November 1918, N.P. Vakar, *Belorussia: the making of a nation*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 43. Fischer incorrectly asserts that failure to establish a Polish Soviet Government in 1920 was partly due to the Red Army's inability to

As a result, Dzierżyński was delighted to report on 5 August that, “In the Belostok region all industry (textile, tanning, chemical, woodworking) remain intact.... There are 19,000 workers. The mood of the meetings is excellent”.³⁴ Finally, there already existed considerable support for a socialist Polish republic in Białystok, upon which the *Polrevkom* could build. The *Neue Lodzer Zeitung* reported on 9 September 1920, that the PPS in Białystok had already accepted the principles of the Third International (*Comintern*), breaking to the left from the main PPS.³⁵ Indeed, cooperation between the *Polrevkom* and local grass-root communist organisations had been one of the Polish Bureau’s immediate wishes, recording on 29 July 1920, “We hope that we shall meet... with crucial representatives of party organisations and we shall negotiate with them concerning the future steps for soviet work”.³⁶ Crucially, when the Red Army entered the town on 28 July, there existed a local military revolutionary committee, organised largely by the local KPRP group, and it was hoped that this would provide much needed support to the infant Provisional Revolutionary Committee.³⁷ Consequently, the *Polrevkom* was established, without opposition, on 30 July in the Branicki Palace, Białystok.

2. Aims and Objectives of the Committee

The Polish Bureau entrusted Marchlewski, on 25 July, with the task of preparing the *Manifesto* of the *Polrevkom*, to be published five days later.³⁸ In this document the Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee stated their agenda for the occupied Polish regions, clearly and unequivocally, for the first time and as such, it is worth recording in full.

Until the creation of a permanent Workers’-Peasants’ Government of Poland – to construct the foundation for the future Soviet system in a Polish Socialist Republic of Soviets.

With this the aim of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland is:

- a) to deprive the authority up until now existing in the *szlachta*-bourgeois government,
- b) to reestablish and again to organise factory committees in the towns and farm labourers’ committees in the villages,
- c) to organise local revolutionary committees,
- d) to hand over ownership of the nation’s factories, property and forests to the management of the town and village workers’ committees,

occupy a large industrial town, L. Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs: a history of relations between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world, 1917-1929*, vol. 1, (Princeton, 1951), p. 269.

³⁴ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 95, p. 170.

³⁵ TNA, FO 688/8, doc. 588; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 54.

³⁶ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 82, p. 153.

³⁷ P. Kalenichenko, “O deiatel’nosti pol’skogo vremennogo revoliutsionnogo komiteta”, in Ia. Manusevich (ed.), *Oktiabr’skaia revoliutsiia i zarubezhnye slavianskie narody*, (Moscow, 1957), p. 182; J. Marchlewski, *Pisma Wybrane*, vol. 2, p. 768.

³⁸ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol.1, doc. 78, p. 149; *ibid*, doc. 86, p. 161.

- e) to guarantee the inviolability of the peasants' lands,³⁹
- f) to call to life organs of public safety, the economy and food supply,
- g) to guarantee to citizens, loyally acting on the orders and directions of the revolutionary authorities, complete security.

Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland
30 July 1920.⁴⁰

According to Eduard Próchniak, their objective in issuing the *Manifesto*, was to encourage the Polish masses to, "...rise up against the bourgeois-landowners' government of Piłsudski", in the certain belief that "...a lasting peace... is possible only between a socialist Russia and a socialist Poland of workers' soviets".⁴¹ Poland's sovietisation would facilitate a peace settlement between the newly-established socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. However, although the *Manifesto*'s publication directly fulfilled the *Pol'bureau* agenda set at its meetings on 23 and 29 July 1920, it crucially failed to clarify how its objectives would be implemented in practice.

The ultimate aim of the *Polrevkom* was again clearly defined in its appeal *To Legionaries* on 1 August, when it stated, "We form a Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland which *will take in its hands the interests of the working classes and will solve all [its]... problems*".⁴² To this end, it would organise soviets of workers' deputies, professional unions, factory and farm committees, workers' cooperatives and other workers' organisations.⁴³ As a result, Marchlewski believed that, "...the Polish workers could soon achieve the possibility of establishing in the town and in the village their own authority, proletarian authority, as in the soviet system".⁴⁴

The *Polrevkom* was extremely careful to stress that, as indicated in its title, the Committee was temporary, un-elected as it was by the Polish workers. This would be rectified immediately upon its move to Warsaw, where it would, "...transfer its power to the Communist Party of Poland, would summon the Polish workers to create a revolutionary government, and only after this congress of workers' and peasants' deputies

³⁹ This echoed Lenin's view but, significantly, did not represent the views of the majority of *Polrevkom* members on the agrarian question. This condition may have been imposed by Lenin on the Committee or, more likely, given the *Polrevkom*'s later independence from RKP(b) agricultural policy, Soviet policy was used as a guide before they had time to determine their own programme.

⁴⁰ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 1-2. One Russian language copy in this *delo* excludes Dzierżyński from the list of members, omits point c altogether and incorrectly dates the document to 30 August.

⁴¹ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 5; *Pravda*, 3 August 1920.

⁴² TNA, FO 688/6, p. 32, author's italics.

⁴³ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 126, p. 222.

⁴⁴ J. Marchlewski, *Pisma Wybrane*, vol. 2, (Warsaw, 1952), pp. 764-765.

would be founded a permanent Soviet government”.⁴⁵ This shared objective of the *Polrevkom*, Polish Bureau and CC RKP(b) was strenuously reinforced by *Polrevkom* propaganda. For instance, its appeal *To the Polish Working People of the Towns and Villages*, published on 30 July, stated, “When in all Poland will be overthrown the bloody authorities... the congress of deputies of working people of the towns and villages will establish a Polish Socialist Republic of Soviets and... establish the new regime we have, in Poland”.⁴⁶

Therefore, despite protestations by the *Pol'bureau* and *Polrevkom* that they maintained independence from the Soviet regime in Moscow, and despite policy disagreements between the Polish communists and the Russian Soviet leaders, there clearly remained a close dependency between the communist movements in both countries. In August 1920, for instance, Chicherin wrote that the *Pol'bureau* was obliged to provide the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs with details about, “...that which is going on in Poland, in particular in governmental circles and in the *sejm*”.⁴⁷ A highly valued source, *Pol'bureau* members were heavily relied upon in determining Soviet Russia’s policy during the final stages of the Polish-Soviet War.

The same is certainly true of the *Polrevkom*. As a political instrument, capable of exporting socialist revolution abroad, Lenin was extremely interested in the activities of the Committee.⁴⁸ On 30 July 1920, Marchlewski wrote to Lenin to officially inform him of the *Polrevkom*’s establishment. He thanked the Russian workers and peasants, for entry of the Red Army into Poland, “...as energetic comrades-in-arms in the struggle of the Polish proletariat with the Polish landowners and bourgeois oppressors” and credited the Russian Soviet regime with providing a blueprint and “...guiding example” for the *Polrevkom*.⁴⁹ This emphasised the solidarity of the *Polrevkom* with the RKP(b), and the shared ideology of both.

However, despite this correspondence, it was upon Dzierżyński, a fellow CC RKP(b) member, that Lenin continued to rely for information about the political struggle in

⁴⁵ J. Marchlewski, *Voina i mir mezhduburzhnaznoi Pol'shei i proletarskoi Rossiei*, (Moscow, 1921), p. 22; J. Marchlewski, “Polska Burżuazyjna a Rosja Proletariacka” in *Pisma Wybrane*, vol. 2, pp. 764-765, author’s italics. Thereby predetermining the nature of the future Polish government.

⁴⁶ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 14.

⁴⁷ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 43, l. 6.

⁴⁸ V.I. Lenin, *Voennaia perepiska, 1917-1920*, (Moscow, 1956), p. 244; V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 41, (Moscow, 1965), p. 651, (hereafter *PSS*).

⁴⁹ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 8, l. 4.

Poland.⁵⁰ Indeed, on 4 August 1920, Sklianskii reported to him, “Lenin categorically asks that you send information without fail every day and utilise for this all means of communications, including sending packages by courier and telegraphs”.⁵¹ The Soviet leader was clearly concerned to keep up-to-date with the latest *Polrevkom* developments. The following day, Dzierżyński confirmed, “You will receive reports daily”, and as the archives clearly demonstrate, he consistently fulfilled this promise.⁵² Throughout the *Polrevkom*’s existence, the *Cheka* leader continually updated Lenin about the situation in the Red Army-occupied Polish territories, providing information critical to the Soviet decision-making process.⁵³

The policies adopted by the *Polrevkom* were, however, largely determined by its Committee members and not by Lenin or the CC RKP(b). In fact, the Committee received very little direct instruction from Moscow and, with the exception of Lenin and Dzierżyński, was seldom referred to by the Bolshevik leaders.⁵⁴ Indeed, its intention to act independently from the RKP(b) can be clearly observed in the following conversation: in response to a comment by Lenin, “You should achieve... [revolution] in a different way than we did”, Marchlewski retorted, “No, we will do what you did, but we will do it better”.⁵⁵

3. Immediate Tasks

Faced with the enormous task of Soviet construction in the occupied Polish territories, the *Polrevkom*’s first undertaking was to assign duties to its members at a meeting convened on 4 August. It was agreed that Marchlewski would be in charge of industry and agriculture, Kon was given responsibility for party work, culture and publishing, Dzierżyński controlled military affairs and the *Cheka*, and Tadeusz Radwanski was appointed editor of the Committee newspaper, *Goniec Czerwony*.⁵⁶ This designation of

⁵⁰ Dzierżyński was nominated to the CC at the Second Congress of the *Comintern*, on 16 July 1920, F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1977), p. 478.

⁵¹ I.I. Kostushko, vol.1, doc. 92, p. 166.

⁵² *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 1-23.

⁵³ See, for example, F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, pp. 209-210; *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 157, pp. 169-170.

⁵⁴ Leon Trotsky, Soviet Commissar for War, made no direct reference to the *Polrevkom* in his autobiography *Moia zhizn'* and in his writings *Kak vooruzhalas revoliutsiia*.

⁵⁵ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 29, pp. 152-153. Disagreements between the two authorities did arise, including in August 1920, over the Committee’s agrarian programme.

⁵⁶ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 3, l. 7.

duties, it was hoped, would clarify and ease the burden of work facing the fledgling organisation.

The most urgent problem facing the Polish communists at the beginning of August 1920 proved to be the stabilisation of the economy in the occupied region, in both the industrial and agrarian spheres. On 5 August, Dzierżyński indicated that the five principle economic tasks facing the *Polrevkom* were: 1) immediate mobilisation of Poles, Polish language experts, and Russian instructors for Soviet construction; 2) accelerating the renewal of railways and telegraph communications; 3) mobilization of large numbers of workers to bring in the harvest to supply the industrial centres, necessary to avoid famine. 4) sending monetary tokens to allow factories to continue production; 5) dispatching instructors and organisers in the textile, tanning, chemical and wood-working industries.⁵⁷ The *Polrevkom*'s foremost duties were, therefore, the organisation of industry, transport and communication lines, agricultural production and the establishment of a food supply system.

The *Polrevkom*'s immediate industrial objectives were published on 30 July 1920, in a communiqué *To the Polish Working People of the Towns and Villages*. In this it argued that, "It is necessary to take factories and mines out of the hands of the parasites – capitalists and speculators. They must be transferred to the freed people and their administration must be taken over by the workers' committees".⁵⁸ In this way the Committee attempted to begin the transition of the Polish capitalist system to a Marxist economy, introducing measures similar to those which the Bolsheviks themselves had undertaken three years previously in Russia.⁵⁹ Nationalisation of industry in Białystok was initiated.⁶⁰ The town relied heavily upon textile-weaving, leather factories, chemicals and wood-working for its industrial base. Of these, eight textile works were successfully nationalised and placed under the control of leaders nominated by the industrial department of the Białystok District Revolutionary Committee (*revkom*) and local workers' committees.⁶¹ Occasionally, as in Russia, former owners were appointed as specialists in the nationalised factories.

⁵⁷ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 94, p. 169. On the same day, he informed Rykov, Chairman of the Supreme Council of the National Economy of Soviet Republics (*VSNKh*) that, "It is necessary urgently to have instructors-organisers of industry, perhaps Russians", *ibid*, doc. 95, p. 170.

⁵⁸ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 14; *Pravda*, 3 August 1920.

⁵⁹ Clear parallels between the two authorities can be drawn.

⁶⁰ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 3, l. 2; *RGASPI*, f. 63, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 1-19.

⁶¹ P. Kalenichenko, p. 155; TNA, FO 688/8, doc. 588; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 54.

Nevertheless, despite endorsement of this policy, it is extremely difficult to ascertain the impact of measures taken by the *Polrevkom* in industry. Only a permanent authority could have established full control over the region's industry, but this was never achieved by the Polish communists. The available archival holdings present two completely different interpretations of *Polrevkom* industrial policies, contrasting quite dramatically between the *RGASPI* archives in Moscow, which present a positive picture, and the archives of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum and The National Archives in London, which present a very different interpretation of the Committee's activities.⁶²

Recognising the crucial importance of the local Białystok population for the success of *Polrevkom* initiatives, Dzierżyński was keen to report to Lenin, on 5 August, that the reaction of the Białystok workers to the Committee, at a mass meeting, was excellent and their policies had been well received.⁶³ Ten days later he recorded that, "The mood of the Belostok workers has improved", with numerous labour festivals held to celebrate the reopening of factories in the town.⁶⁴ He did, however, hint that the implementation of a socialist industrial policy was proving problematic when he complained to Tomskii and Serebriakov that, "Factories for the present stand still because of the change of authority and shortage of money tokens. Serious difficulties are arising connected with tariffs, and on this basis, high costs and shortages of supplies are developing".⁶⁵

In stark contrast with this generally positive evaluation of *Polrevkom* industrial policy, the reports sent by Sir Horace Rumbold, British Minister in Warsaw, to his Government, were of an entirely different nature. At the beginning of September, he catalogued a list of *Polrevkom* offences against the local Polish population in Białystok, including: their requisitioning, without payment, of 900,000 metres of cloth; their inability to provide sufficient raw materials and money to restart factory production; escalating unemployment; and the payment of very low wages to those fortunate to find work.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the *Polrevkom* was censured for sacking the house of the *Dziennik Białystocki* publisher, removing important papers from the Riga bank, and conducting "...a policy of pillage" in

⁶² This discrepancy is even more apparent when the attitude of the Polish population to the *Polrevkom* is examined later in the chapter.

⁶³ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 86, p. 162; doc. 96, p. 171. Amongst the policies introduced was an eight-hour working day, N. Davies, *White Eagle*, p. 154.

⁶⁴ F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 212.

⁶⁵ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 95, p. 170. On 15 August, he admitted to Lenin that, "Organisational work to regulate the economy, food supply and administrative work are slowly progressing because of shortages of experienced instructors and the speed of the army's advance", F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 212.

⁶⁶ TNA, FO 688/8, doc. 588; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 54.

the town.⁶⁷ Especial scorn was reserved for those placed in charge of the newly-nationalised factories. According to Rumbold,

The efforts of the “factory commissaries” were primarily directed towards providing for themselves. Thus one of them, besides taking the best cloth for himself, used the horses of the factory to cart milk and wood to his own house in Białystok. Meanwhile, his own daily occupation was the delivery of violent propaganda harangues. Other “commissaries” are said to have behaved still worse.⁶⁸

Finally, he reported that the Committee had allowed the Bolsheviks to take, “...17 hostages at Białystok from the Polish Jewish bourgeoisie.... 6 were shot”.⁶⁹

British details were, however, extremely sketchy and questions of objectivity arise. In the same report, for example, Rumbold recorded that the *Polrevkom* was still residing in the town, when in reality it had long since ceased to function. Furthermore, much of the information received by the British Minister was obtained through second-hand sources, including German newspaper reports. Nevertheless, the true importance of this ongoing correspondence was that it served as justification for *Entente* policy during the war, providing ample evidence of Soviet atrocities.

Nonetheless, this information cannot simply be dismissed out of hand and is supported by a large body of correspondence held in the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum. One report by an American officer on the Southern Front, Major Griffith, to his government on 10 August 1920, noted, for example, that,

In the district of Białystok, the Bolsheviks are taking hostages from all the villages and order foodstuffs to be delivered – if the quantity demanded is not delivered at the time stated the hostages are shot, the villages sacked and the inhabitants tortured. In Białystok famine is reigning – the price of food has attained unheard of figures – about one thousand arrests have been made.⁷⁰

As a result of this situation, it was essential that the *Polrevkom* establish a clearly defined agricultural policy. Responsibility was immediately deferred to Marchlewski, an agrarian expert, at the *Pol'bureau* meeting on 23 July 1920, which decreed that, “...in the agrarian sphere [he]... must outline our slogans and... together with Dzierżyński, is to

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 55, p. 80. This was directly contradicted by Marchlewski's statement that, “...no-one was shot, the number of those arrested was small, the majority of them were comparatively quickly freed”, J. Marchlewski, *Voyna in mir*, p. 31.

⁷⁰ The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 28, p. 126, (hereafter Polish Institute).

coordinate with Lenin”.⁷¹ This was of prime importance given that the area the *Polrevkom* sought authority over was overwhelmingly rural and agrarian. Its manifesto *To the Polish Working People of the Towns and Villages*, of 30 July, announced that, “Farms and forests... must be transferred to the property and put under the administration of the people. Landowners must be driven out, and the administration of the farms given over to the farm labourers’ committees”.⁷² The latter were to make inventories of all landowners’ estates, to establish control, preserve property and prevent looting by the peasantry.⁷³ Finally, peasants were to be accorded access to the forests for the provision of building materials and fuel.⁷⁴

The problem of supplying the industrial centres with sufficient food was critical for the *Polrevkom*, affecting as it did both workers and peasants. On its first day, Dzierżyński admitted concern that resources for the nourishment of the workers were insufficient.⁷⁵ This was compounded by a lack of transportation, and by the fact that the speed of the offensive, forced the Red Army to source its own food and utilise peasants’ carts and horses.⁷⁶ Famine appeared imminent. Dzierżyński, therefore, requested that the army take over supplying the towns and that responsible food workers with an understanding of local conditions, be sent to assist.⁷⁷

The *Polrevkom* also appealed for the protection of railway routes, essential for the supply of food to the towns.⁷⁸ However, as Marchlewski recorded, the Białystok workers,

...showed that if there were no horses, then they needed to harness themselves... People by their own backs, brought sheafs to the threshing-machines or harnessed themselves to the carts... The work went quickly and... the danger of hunger was averted.⁷⁹

⁷¹ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 77, p. 148. For Marchlewski’s views on agriculture prior to the war see, J. Marchlewski, *Pisma Wybrane*, vol. 1, pp. 589-625; vol. 2, pp. 556-668; J. Marchlewski, *Wobec kwestii rolnej w Polsce*, (Moscow, 1918).

⁷² *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 14. See also, *Pravda*, 31 July 1920.

⁷³ A. Litwin, *Tymczasowy komitet rewolucyjny polski*, (Warsaw, 1955), pp. 88-89, (hereafter, *Tymczasowy komitet*), *Polrevkom* appeal, *To the Polish Peasants*, 5 August; reinforced by *Order No. 22*, 15 August, *Goniec Czerwony*, 15 August 1920.

⁷⁴ *Tymczasowy komitet*, p. 89. Concern over fuel soon led Stanisław Bobinski, *Polrevkom* Commissar for Forestry Management, to condemn individuals who felled trees without authorization, *Goniec Czerwony*, 14 August 1920.

⁷⁵ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 86, p. 162.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, doc. 96, p. 171.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*. This was not implemented.

⁷⁸ *Tymczasowy komitet*, pp. 128-129, pp. 130-131.

⁷⁹ J. Marchlewski, *Pisma Wybrane*, vol. 2, p. 771. Dzierżyński concurred on 18 August that, “Agricultural workers... work several ploughs, feeling the shortage of horses”, F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 215.

The problem of providing for the Red Army was addressed by the *Polrevkom* in an appeal, *To the Polish Peasants*, on 5 August, in which the retreating Polish landlords were blamed for, "...destroying foodstuffs which many prepared for the Red Army", and reassurance given that, "...the Red Army takes only that which is necessary. For plunder and violence towards workers and peasants the soldiers are threatened with deadly execution".⁸⁰

By 7 August, the situation had, however, deteriorated further and Dzierżyński, Marchlewski and Smilga were forced to telegram Lenin that, "Absolutely necessary for the success of our business is to place the food supply of the Belostok workers... on the military supply organs. It is necessary immediately to send bread because already famine is beginning".⁸¹ In an attempt to establish firm control over the local economy and food supply the *Polrevkom* made considerable concessions to the local peasant population two days later in an attempt to gain support. It provided for the opening of all petty trade; allowed market trade and the importation by peasants of all types of food; prevented the requisitioning and confiscation of peasants' imported food; entitled them to keep registered reserves of up to one month's supply of food for their own use, and prohibited town dwellers from confiscating peasants' cattle.⁸²

The success of the revolution and the sovietisation of Poland now depended upon the *Polrevkom*'s ability to feed the workers. In an attempt to assert centralised control over these overwhelming economic problems, the Committee reached a secret agreement, on 9 August 1920, with the Special Representative of Western Front for Supply to nominate a representative, "...who in the name of both contracting parties will unite and regulate all the national economy in Polish territory".⁸³ Mikhel'man was nominated by the CC RKP(b) as Plenipotentiary Representative of *VSNKh* to direct the food supply situation, on 13 August, but was unable to actively promote concrete measures before the Committee folded at the end of the month.⁸⁴ The Committee consistently faced time constraints in all its tasks, existing as it did for only twenty-three days and as each concern required immediate attention, the prioritisation of work proved extremely problematic.

⁸⁰ *Tymczasowy Komitet*, p. 88.

⁸¹ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc 98, p 172.

⁸² *Ibid*, doc. 102, pp. 175-176.

⁸³ *Ibid*, doc. 101, p. 174. To simplify the economic situation, the *Polrevkom* defined the strength of the Polish mark against the rouble on 14 August 1920, *ibid*, doc. 114, p. 187.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, doc. 100, p. 173; P. Kalenichenko, p. 169. By 18 August, Dzierżyński informed the CC RKP(b) that the supply problem had eased somewhat, F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 215.

A coherent policy was also required for the treatment of removed factory owners and landowners. On 4 August, the Committee passed a directive, "...that all those dangerous for the socialist revolution in Poland, all representatives of the Polish bourgeoisie and large landowners... are to be arrested and directed to concentration camps".⁸⁵ Eleven days later, it ordered that all Białystok factory owners be arrested and appear before the town revolutionary committee, whilst landowners families were to be immediately evicted from their estates and deprived of the right to gain profit from the hired workers' labour.⁸⁶ The reality was, however, somewhat different. According to Marchlewski, this order was not uniformly carried out and the vast majority of landowners succeeded in evading arrest.⁸⁷

These detailed agricultural policies aimed to assist in the construction of a Polish socialist economy. However, disagreement raged both within the Committee and between the *Polrevkom* and the CC RKP(b), in particular with Lenin, about their implementation. When, on 30 July, Dzierżyński reported to the latter that the *Polrevkom* was to discuss the transfer of landowners' estates to farm labourers and land-hungry peasants, he little realised that it would lead to a debate which would rock the *Polrevkom* and threaten its relations with the Communist leader and CC RKP(b).⁸⁸ The Committee's agricultural programme was strongly censured by Soviet historians and its independence from Moscow listed as one of the principal reasons for its failure. One such account remarked that,

The position of the Polish Communists did not attract the working peasants to the side of the revolution. The *Polrevkom* did not take into account... the political experience of Soviet Russia... in the solution of the agrarian problem. The majority of *Polrevkom* members did not listen to the advice of V.I. Lenin... about the necessity of transferring part of the landowners land to the peasants.⁸⁹

Traditional Polish peasant holdings in 1920, in contrast with Russian villages, were already part of the capitalist economic system, having access to fertilisers, crop-rotation systems, newer agricultural machines and improved strains of livestock.⁹⁰ Consequently, the majority of *Polrevkom* members believed that the division of Polish farms between farm labourers and land-hungry peasants should be prohibited. Marchlewski, in particular, deplored peasant seizures as these often resulted in an enormous loss of buildings,

⁸⁵ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 90, p. 165.

⁸⁶ Ibid, doc. 117, p. 191.

⁸⁷ P. Kalenichenko, p. 167.

⁸⁸ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 3, l. 15.

⁸⁹ *Istoriia Pol'shi*, vol. 3, p. 143.

⁹⁰ P. Kalenichenko, p. 163.

livestock and equipment.⁹¹ Instead, they proposed that through nationalization, individual farms would be transformed into large state farms, and placed under the management of farm labourers' committees.⁹² This would prevent farms being divided into too small, unsustainable plots, threatening the collapse of agricultural production.

However, not all *Polrevkom* members supported this agrarian policy. It was opposed, most notably, by Dzierżyński who, in correspondence with Lenin, argued, "...for the inclusion of the demand for the transfer of landlords' estates to farm labourers and land-hungry peasants".⁹³ The debate also impacted upon the *Polrevkom*'s relationship with Lenin and the CC RKP(b), which became increasingly, "...disturbed by part of the appeals of the *Polrevkom*, dealing with the peasant question".⁹⁴ Radek acknowledged, on 15 August, "Our fears about mistakes in the agrarian question are confirmed", and five days later, Lenin criticized *Polrevkom* policy to Dzierżyński, Radek and the KPRP, remarking,

If... land-hungry peasants have begun to seize estates, then it is absolutely necessary to give out special decrees of the *Polrevkom*, in order that without fail part of the landowners' lands are given to the peasants and in this way reconcile the peasants who are land-hungry with the factory labourers.⁹⁵

The existence of peasant unrest was confirmed by the Polish Chief Commander of State Police on 16 August, when he stated that, "...farm labourers and land-hungry peasants already have begun to wilfully divide the land".⁹⁶

However, again, timing proved crucial and the collapse of the *Polrevkom* ultimately prevented a resolution being agreed, forestalling publication of a comprehensive decree on the distribution of landowners' estates. Marchlewski argued that the complexity of land nationalization and the "provisional" nature of the Committee was responsible for deferment of the question until a Polish Socialist Government was established. So, too, did Dzierżyński, informing Lenin on 15 August that, "The question about the land policy will be examined in full capacity in Warsaw".⁹⁷ Yet, undoubtedly, this procrastination and failure to provide effective leadership, inflamed the Polish peasantry, encouraging them to

⁹¹ However, he believed that Polish peasants seldom showed any personal inclination to divide landowners' estates despite encouragement to do so by Red Army soldiers and political commissars, J. Marchlewski, *Voyna i mir*, p. 31; J. Marchlewski, "The Agrarian Question and World Revolution" in *Communist International*, no. 12, 20 July 1920.

⁹² P. Kalenichenko, p. 164.

⁹³ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 190, p. 317. For more on this debate, see F. Kon, *Feliks Edmundovich Dzerzhinskii: biograficheskii ocherk*, (Moscow, 1939), p. 76.

⁹⁴ P. Kalenichenko, p. 164.

⁹⁵ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 118, p. 192; *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 190, p. 316.

⁹⁶ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 190, p. 316.

⁹⁷ F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 212.

seize land on their own initiative, as had their Russian counterparts three years earlier. Peasant discontent with the Soviet authorities, and in particular the *Polrevkom*, inevitably followed.

4. Propaganda and the *Polrevkom*

In an attempt to address this dissatisfaction and win the support of the local population for its work, the *Polrevkom* was deeply committed to propaganda and agitation work. An unbroken and extensive stream of manifestos, appeals and proclamations were disseminated in the Białystok region and beyond.⁹⁸ Following the example of the Russian Soviet regime during the war, the *Polrevkom* directly addressed its target audience of workers, peasants and soldiers, over the heads of the Polish Government and military leadership. To this end, it began to publish its own newspaper, *Goniec Czerwony*, providing the Poles with information about the Committee's objectives and activities in the Polish territories occupied by the Red Army.⁹⁹

The circulation of propaganda was absolutely vital to the interests of the *Polrevkom*. Dzierżyński acknowledged to Lenin, on 6 August 1920, that it was necessary, "To send messengers and take measures to disseminate the manifesto and appeals of the *Polrevkom*", whilst Marchlewski argued for, "...the conduct of intensive propaganda and agitation" amongst agricultural workers.¹⁰⁰ Responsibility for its distribution was placed on *Polrevkom* members, the KPRP, Polish communist and worker organisations, local revolutionary committees and the advancing Red Army.¹⁰¹

Soviet aeroplanes were used to scatter thousands of appeals and announcements to reach the widest possible audience, in remote, outlying districts. Radek telegraphed Lenin, Trotsky and Chicherin that many appeals were, "...spread with the help of aeroplanes", whilst Dzierżyński recorded, "We publish *Goniec Czerwony*, our daily organ, appeals and orders... spread... by aeroplanes".¹⁰² This echoed Soviet policy throughout the war and on 3 August, Lenin ordered Tukhachevsky and Smilga, "...to take every measure for the dissemination in Poland of the manifesto of the *Polrevkom* by the widest means

⁹⁸ RGASPI, f. 68, op. 1, d. 4; RGASPI, f. 68, op. 1, d. 29.

⁹⁹ *Goniec Czerwony* appeared in twelve issues, RGASPI, f. 68, op. 1, d. 32.

¹⁰⁰ F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 210; *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 157, p. 270; J. Marchlewski, "The Agrarian Question and World Revolution", p. 43.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² I.I. Kostiusko, vol. 1, doc. 118, p. 192; F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 212.

possible. Use our aviation for this”.¹⁰³ Therefore, although the RKP(b) did not itself issue numerous propaganda appeals about the *Polrevkom*, it was certainly happy to utilise its own resources to support the Committee’s own agit-prop. The Soviet military shared RKP(b) support of *Polrevkom* propaganda, with P.V. Suslov arguing, “Our leaflets, appeals, bulletins, proclamations and newspapers break the power of the enemy... no less than do bayonets, machine-guns and rifles”.¹⁰⁴

A variety of propaganda methods were employed by the Committee to gain local support. Their appeals frequently catalogued Polish ruling class oppression against the workers, stressing the former’s subservience to the *Entente* and aggressive ambitions towards the eastern borderlands and Soviet Russia. One proclamation reported, for instance, that, “...the ruling classes of Poland, taking for themselves the role of hangmen of revolutionary Russia, must also be the hangmen of the Polish revolutionary working people”.¹⁰⁵ Polish communists, realising that the Red Army offensive into ethnographic Poland could be regarded by the local population as a national war, utilised propaganda to address this concern. Making clever use of the traditional Polish slogan “For Your Freedom and Ours”, first employed during Polish anti-tsarist revolts in the 19th Century, they presented Russian soldiers as united in fraternal alliance with the Poles in the international anti-capitalist struggle.¹⁰⁶ The *Polrevkom* also used propaganda in an attempt to empower the local population, consistently inciting the Poles to, “...take your destiny into your own hands”, and invoke action with phrases such as, “Workers! Your Future is in Your Hands”.¹⁰⁷

Extremely diverse in subject matter and target audience, *Polrevkom* propaganda was very impressive given the organisation’s short life-span. It addressed not only its economic and political agenda, but also its cultural, religious, educational, military, and international programmes. At a Committee meeting on 12 August, for example, it was resolved that responsibility for the safekeeping of libraries, museums, art collections, paintings, statues, musical instruments, objects of antiquity, furniture, clothes and domestic utensils would be placed on farm-labourers’ committees, whilst any objects not listed could be utilised by

¹⁰³ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 51, pp. 247-248.

¹⁰⁴ P.V. Suslov, *Politicheskoe obespechenie sovetso-pol’skoi kampanii, 1920 g.*, (Moscow, 1930), p. 104.

¹⁰⁵ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 13, *To the Polish Working People of the Towns and Villages*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 14.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 12 & 15.

agricultural workers, their families and the poorest peasants.¹⁰⁸ Failure to comply would lead to severe punishment. Clearly, although anxious to begin immediate policy implementation, it was determined to maintain strict control of the transfer of power to the working class. Lawlessness would not be tolerated.

During this volatile period, *Polrevkom* members were forced to determine policy from day to day, hour to hour and as a result, inconsistencies were inevitable. On 1 August, for instance, a *Declaration about Freedom of Conscience* announced that religion was, "...a personal matter of conscience".¹⁰⁹ This was a clever tactical manoeuvre given that Poland was an extremely religious country, with an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic population, and such concessions would be required if the local inhabitants were to be won over by communism. However, in its desire to separate the church from the state, the order prohibited the clergy from "interfering" in politics, resulting in widespread Polish outrage.¹¹⁰

The *Polrevkom* was also aware that it was being closely observed by the international community, providing it with an opportunity to direct its propaganda outwith the Polish borders. In an appeal *To the Proletariat of All the World*, published on 5 August, it declared, "To you we appeal, comrades! Give help to the Red Army, give help to the revolutionary proletariat of Poland!... Not one person, nor one tool, nor one cartridge for the army of the Polish counter-revolutionaries!"¹¹¹ This mirrored Soviet propaganda appeals which had successfully influenced workers in the West, especially in London, where quayside dockers had refused to load ammunition onto ships bound for Poland three months earlier.¹¹²

Inevitably, given that the *Polrevkom* was called into existence during war-time and that one of its declared objectives was securing peace between a socialist Poland and socialist Russia, it is hardly surprising that much of its propaganda efforts were directed towards the military of both countries. Two days after its establishment, it released an emotive appeal

¹⁰⁸ RGASPI, f. 68, op. 1, d. 4, l. 1; RGASPI, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 1. Following Soviet Russia's example, the *Polrevkom* planned to nationalise all culture, including public and private theatres, cinemas, publishing houses and libraries, *Goniec Czerwony*, 10 August 1920.

¹⁰⁹ RGASPI, f. 68, op. 1, d. 4, l. 2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. This was further intensified by the closure of all religious schools in the region, under the guidance of Feliks Kon, Commissar for National Education, F. Kon, "Szkoła Proletariacka" in *Goniec Czerwony*, 15 August 1920.

¹¹¹ *Tymczasowy komitet*, pp. 93-94; *Goniec Czerwony*, 7 August 1920.

¹¹² See, L.J. MacFarlane, "Hands off Russia: British Labour and the Russo-Polish War 1920," in *Past and Present*, vol. 38, (1967), pp. 126-152.

To Legionaries of the Polish Army, designed to evoke civilian and military outrage against the Polish authorities, which began,

The inevitable has happened! Poland is completely ruined, distress and famine are everywhere and the Polish Army is dispersing.... Polish Soldiers!... Where are your allies who drew you into this murderous war? Where is their help and support? Where are those Polish squires who sitting in the *Diet* and smoking good cigars from a distance encouraged you to fight? Where are those who played with the life of thousands delivering them to torture and suffering and to the hell of war and death?.... They are not with you.¹¹³

In contrast, it stressed that the Red Army was not staffed by professional soldiers, but by workers in uniform, fighting for Poland's liberation, a consistent *Polrevkom* tactic.¹¹⁴ A further appeal *To the Warsaw Proletariat*, published on 5 August, called on inhabitants of the city to take power into their own hands before the Red Army reached the Polish capital.¹¹⁵ In this way, the Committee hoped to prepare the ground for the Battle of Warsaw by invoking support for the Soviet authorities before the *Polrevkom* transferred to the city on the back of the Red Army.¹¹⁶

However, it was also felt necessary to appeal directly to Red Army soldiers engaged in military action on Polish territory. Controlling relations with the local civilian population, upon whose support the *Polrevkom* depended, was vital and as a result, the Committee sought to prevent Russian soldiers from carrying out depredations or atrocities.¹¹⁷ On 1 August, a leaflet entitled *Comrade Red Army Men*, underlined to the soldiers,

You are entering onto Polish territory, on territory covered in the blood of Polish workers... you, sons of the revolutionary nation, do not bring oppression, but freedom as in your country... for the sins of the Polish landowners and capitalists you will not subject the unfortunate Polish people.¹¹⁸

To prevent communism being regarded as an invading, external force, the *Polrevkom* and RKP(b) called for the establishment of a Polish Red Army.¹¹⁹ This was to comprise Poles

¹¹³ TNA, FO 688/6, pp. 31-32.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 32; *Tymczasowy komitet*, p. 88.

¹¹⁵ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc 154, pp. 267-268.

¹¹⁶ Realising the crucial importance of disrupting the Polish rank-and-file, like Soviet propaganda, it blatantly encouraged desertion, TNA, FO 688/6, p. 30.

¹¹⁷ This objective was not achieved. Red Army atrocities towards wounded and captive Poles were well documented. A report by General Szeptycky, for instance, recorded that near Zamosze-Zawidno, "... [Polish soldiers] were found with ripped-open abdomens, disembowelled, skulls shattered, armpits pierced, explosive bullet wounds and covered with bruises made with rifle-butts, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/3, p. 12.

¹¹⁸ P.V. Suslov, *Politicheskoe obespechenie sovetsko-pol'skoi kampanii 1920 goda*, (Moscow, 1930), pp. 170-171. This was entirely consistent with Soviet Russian propaganda posters issued at the time which greatly stressed that the Red Army was fighting the Polish ruling circles and capitalists, not the workers and soldiers.

¹¹⁹ F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 210.

living in Russia, Polish prisoners-of-war and Poles already serving in the Red Army on the Western Front.¹²⁰ However, although this objective was supported by the Red Army High Command, developing military action forced these plans to be shelved.¹²¹ Once again time constraints proved crucial in hampering the work of the Committee.

The *Polrevkom*, therefore, utilised a variety of propaganda methods to spread their policy objectives and disseminate their appeals to the Polish population they encountered. In this way, they were able to reach a diverse range of people in a short space of time, including Polish workers, peasants, agricultural workers, soldiers, the inhabitants of the capital city and Red Army men, as well as the populations of the *Entente* countries. The reaction of the local population to this propaganda onslaught shall be examined shortly.

5. The Wider Picture: *Revkomy*

It is important to remember that the activities of the *Polrevkom* were closely bound up with a wider movement to establish Soviet revolutionary committees (*revkomy*), throughout the occupied territories of Poland and the *Kresy*. On 23 July 1920, the *Pol'bureau* resolved that, "In the Polish localities, occupied by the Red Army, are to be organised revolutionary committees" and immediately following the *Polrevkom*'s establishment, it called on the Poles to, "Create local revolutionary committees".¹²² As early as 19 May 1920, Soviet Western Front Commander ordered that *revkomy* be established in localities abandoned by the Polish Army and by 1 July, over thirty had been formed.¹²³ On 12 August, the Committee appointed, "Noskiewicz, a communist of part Polish origin, to organise Soviets in all Polish territory under Bolshevik occupation... this work is being carried out with the utmost rigour", with *revkomy* already set up Białystok, Łomża and Tarnopol.¹²⁴

The RKP(b) clearly supported the establishment of local *revkomy*, although the initiative came, as with the *Polrevkom*, from the *Pol'bureau*. The latter issued directives defining *revkomy* membership and on 27 July, Dzierżyński and Smilga wrote to Krestinskii

¹²⁰ TNA, FO 688/6, p. 32. For further details of this proposal and initiatives taken for its implementation, see, *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 12.

¹²¹ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc 166, pp. 278-279.

¹²² *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 1, l. 15; I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 77, p. 148. For further details of Polish *revkomy*, *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 10.

¹²³ M.K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, p. 89.

¹²⁴ TNA, FO 688/6, pp. 41 & 52.

requesting that one billion roubles-worth of credit be opened for the Western Front.¹²⁵ In response, on 1 August, *Sovnarkom* released this sum, “...for the organisation of *revkomy* and Soviet authority in the territories captured from Poland”.¹²⁶

The *revkomy* aimed to establish soviets of workers’ delegates, professional unions, farm and factory committees, and agricultural cooperatives, with the stated intention of, “...strengthening contact between the *revkomy* and the politically conscious part of the working class”.¹²⁷ On 5 August, Smilga elaborated their tasks as including: the establishment of workers’ authority; registration of food and other supplies within the Polish Republic; disarming and detention of the bourgeoisie; arming of workers and communists; preservation of national property from damage and plundering, especially transport facilities, and the organisation of a soviet militia.¹²⁸ An agenda to carry out *Polrevkom* policies at the local level was, therefore, immediately defined. Indeed, on 16 August, Marchlewski issued a fifteen-point programme on behalf of the *Polrevkom*, following Smilga’s initiative, regarding the objectives of the *revkomy*. Most importantly,

- ...2) ...the revolutionary committees.... must themselves create the necessary departments: administration; land; and a department for supply.
- 3) ...must create a peoples’ militia in the towns and villages for the safety of the working masses and to defend the peoples’ property from robbery...
- 6) ...must arrest all those without exception, employees of the *gendarmerie*, counter-intelligence, open and secret police and also spies of the bourgeois government...
- 8) ...must register all means of travel.
- 13) ...must give in every possible way help to the Red Army....¹²⁹

What then was the *Polrevkom*’s relationship with these local organisations, largely established to carry out its instructions? In theory, firstly, the *Polrevkom* was to liaise with *revkomy* to coordinate Soviet policy in the occupied Polish lands.¹³⁰ It was also responsible for guiding the elections of *revkomy* at all levels, and for examining the activities of the local organisations, clarifying their position as either *uezd* or *oblast revkomy* and dispatching its own members to support *revkomy* as necessary.¹³¹

¹²⁵ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 77, p. 148; doc. 87, p. 163. For Białystok *revkom* membership see, *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 37.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 162.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, *Polish Bureau Protocol No. 2*, 23 July 1920.

¹²⁸ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 10, l. 5.

¹²⁹ *Tymczasowy komitet*, pp. 100-103. For Białystok *revkom* correspondence with *Sovnarkom*, the *Polrevkom* and local *revkomy*, its work with youths, the Jewish population, trade unions and revolutionary tribunals, and the activities of its Financial and Economic Departments see, *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 24; *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 38.

¹³⁰ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 129, p. 202.

¹³¹ *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 3, l. 15; *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 3 & 24. The relationship between the Committee and local *revkomy* was frequently strained, as a shortage of committed communists allowed the *revkomy* to

However, in reality, on 4 August, it admitted that, due to the rapid advance westwards of the Red Army, “...it is absolutely impossible for the Polish-Soviet Government to take upon itself the organisation of Soviet authority in the freed localities”.¹³² As a result, it was decided that the Western Front *Revvoensovet* be given full responsibility for both the organisation of Soviet authority and the practical leadership of Soviet organs, thereby making it the highest civil-military authority in occupied Poland.¹³³ Cooperation between the civilian and military organisations was essential if the sovietisation of Poland was to succeed.¹³⁴ This was the clearest indication to date that the Committee was entirely dependent upon the Soviet armed forces for its continued survival. Without the Red Army, the *Polrevkom* could not have itself functioned, nor controlled the local *revkomy*, in the occupied Polish lands. Herein lay its fundamental weakness.

6. Polish Reaction to the Committee

As noted by Count Paul von Wolff Metternich, in June 1808, “Public opinion is the most powerful medium of all”.¹³⁵ This observation could easily have referred to the Polish-Soviet War, 114 years later. Central to the *Polrevkom*’s long-term objective of becoming the Socialist Government of Poland was contemporary reaction to it: the local population in Poland ultimately held the Committee’s fate in its hands. It was, moreover, crucial in determining the conduct, development and eventual outcome of the conflict for the Polish State. What then was the view of the Polish population towards the war and thus, the Committee? Did a homogenous opinion exist?

From the beginning of July, the month in which the *Polrevkom* was established, support for the Polish Army began to intensify throughout the Republic with the approach of the Red Army towards ethnographic Poland. A strong defensive movement, organised by the Polish Government, made the task facing the *Polrevkom* extremely difficult from the outset. A diverse cross-section of Polish society patriotically remained loyal to the state and following the publication of an appeal by the Council of National Defence, signed by

be filled by a wide range of *PPS* members, National Democrats, anarchists, and Jewish leftists, P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, p. 227; P.V. Suslov, p. 144.

¹³² I.I. Kostiuško, vol. 1, doc. 89, p. 164, this decision was taken at a joint meeting of the *Polrevkom*, the Białystok *revkom* and the Red Army.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ For details of *Polrevkom* relations with Western Front *Revvoensovet* see, *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 10.

¹³⁵ K. Hamilton & R. Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: its evolution, theory and administration*, (London & New York, 1998), p. 124.

Piłsudski, on 12 July 1920, members from all social classes voluntarily joined the Polish armed forces. In fact,

All political parties, all the most important social organisations, associations of scientists, teachers, students and *Sokols* issued proclamations exposing the gravity of the situation and calling upon all the citizens to offer their services to their threatened country. Members of Parliament, Government officials, men of letters, artists, are hurrying to the Colours.¹³⁶

Even more worrying for the Polish communists who were soon to establish the *Polrevkom*, was the reaction of Polish socialists, their potential allies, to the Soviet advance. On 15 July, in a *Manifesto to Socialists of the World*, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) summoned all socialists to support Poland in the war against Soviet Russia, declaring, “The Red Russian army is led by Tsarist Generals. The Russian militarised newspapers are full of racial hatred and threaten to dictate peace on the smouldering ruins of Warsaw”.¹³⁷ Regarding the Red Army occupation as imperialist, the PPS further questioned the type of socialism which would be established in their country, declaring,

It is not the social revolution which is threatening the gates of Poland... the Soviet leaders bow before imperialist militarism, replacing the old principles of liberty by an appeal to annex foreign territories.... We say to the workmen and peasants of Poland.... Tell them that we are masters in our country and that we ourselves will bring about the Socialist reconstruction of our country and that we will not allow Tsarist Generals to introduce into Poland a pretended sham Socialism.¹³⁸

The PPS believed it to be a national war, not class, despite both the Soviet Russian regime and the *Polrevkom* stressing that this was the nature of the conflict. That the vast majority of the Polish population shared this interpretation as soon as the Red Army crossed over the ethnographic border had critical implications for the longevity of the *Polrevkom* and, ultimately, for the outcome of the Polish-Soviet War.

Crucially, therefore, the Committee not only faced strong Polish governmental opposition from the outset, but also deep-seated grassroots hostility from left-wing, Polish socialists, upon whom it was dependent upon for support. This established opposition to Soviet authority before the *Polrevkom* had even been formed, meant that the Committee was to face an uphill struggle to gain recognition and support both from the Białystok region and the wider Polish population.

¹³⁶ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 8, p. 26. This did not, of course, include the KPRP.

¹³⁷ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 9, p. 30. The appeal, signed by the CEC PPS, was sent by the Polish Legation in London, to the *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, *Reuters International News Service*, *United Press of America* and *The Times*.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 30-31.

Following the Committee's establishment, the majority of Polish political parties, condemned outright its objectives, ideology and activities. Piłsudski was well aware of the potential threat which the *Polrevkom* posed to the Polish State, commenting to a newspaper correspondent, "Do you wonder that I am afraid of the Bolsheviks coming here uninvited to reorganise the Polish Government?"¹³⁹ Daszyński, Vice-President of the Polish Council, and a socialist deputy in the Witos Government, informed the Warsaw newspaper, *Journal de Pologne* of his, "...utter disbelief in the possibility of the institution of a Soviet form of Government in Poland except by brute force.... Soviets... were an imported article which would never take root in Poland".¹⁴⁰ This well-organised political opposition was led by President of the Council, Wicenty Witos, leader of the Peasant Party, as he issued numerous propaganda appeals, calling for the defence of the Polish Republic during late July and August 1920.¹⁴¹ In a proclamation to the Polish peasantry, he announced, for instance,

Peoples' Poland is threatened by a catastrophe; the Bolsheviks have attacked the land; are already in Polish villages and towns carrying destruction and aiming at the extermination of the State and the servitude of the people. These very Bolsheviks... are penetrating further and further into Poland to subdue the Poles, to take their goods and property, and to force on them a form of government which has turned the great land of Russia into a desert.¹⁴²

Witos stressed the crucial role to be played by the Polish peasantry in the rebuttal of Soviet authority and, "...addressed not an appeal, but a summons, to each of his brother peasants to fulfill his duty and to each one capable of carrying arms to go to the front".¹⁴³ In a predominantly agrarian country, this Polish Government announcement recognised the crucial role which the peasant community would play in the struggle against the *Polrevkom*. Whichever organisation won the loyalty of this class would, ultimately, control the Polish Republic.

What, then, was the view of the Polish peasantry towards the Soviet advance and the activities of the *Polrevkom*? Soviet historians and Committee members traditionally stressed a positive reaction from the Polish agricultural workers, farm labourers and landless peasants.¹⁴⁴ Dzierżyński, for instance, was keen to report to CC RKP(b) on 18

¹³⁹ A. Piłsudski, *Piłsudski: a biography by his wife*, (New York, 1941), p. 296.

¹⁴⁰ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 22.

¹⁴¹ This was in direct response to *Polrevkom* propaganda publications, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, pp. 26-27. See, W. Witos, "W Obronie Warszawy i Polski. Do Mieszkańców Warszawy. Do Armji Narodowej", in *Kurjer Porawy*, 7 August 1920.

¹⁴² TNA, FO 688/6, despatch no. 506. Underlined in the original.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, P. Kalenichenko, p. 161.

August that, “A conference of agricultural workers from neighbouring estates took place in Belostok yesterday. Their attitude – is magnificent. Many arrived after walking over twenty *verst*”.¹⁴⁵ The *Polrevkom* newspaper, *Goniec Czerwony*, frequently listed goods and supplies which had been voluntarily presented to the Red Army by the local peasant population.¹⁴⁶ It would appear, moreover, that *Polrevkom* propaganda did initially produce a limited reaction amongst the peasantry, who were led to expect that confiscated landowners’ estates would be distributed amongst them, without payment of rent.¹⁴⁷ According to one contemporary newspaper report, “...the Bolsheviks appear to have succeeded by their policy of pillage in setting the country population against them with the exception of the agricultural labourers who enjoyed the opportunity of living in the deserted manor houses and robbing the landlords without any payment”.¹⁴⁸

This picture does not, however, present an entirely accurate picture of peasant-*Polrevkom* relations. Often, the former remained completely passive to the work of the Committee. In a telegram to Lenin on 15 August, Dzierżyński was to concede that, “In the region of Mławy-Włotławek the mood of the peasants is neutral”, whilst Marchlewski, admitted that, “The peasants with characteristic distrust.... in general remained neutral”.¹⁴⁹ More frequently, *Polrevkom* agrarian policies invoked a strong reaction from farm workers. The inclusion of Dzierżyński, as member and unofficial leader of the *Polrevkom*, lessened any opportunity for the Committee to gain support, infamous as he was throughout Poland as the brutal head of the *Cheka*. As noted by a resolution of the Parliamentary Club of the Polish Peasants’ Party, the peasantry had been forced to bear all necessary sacrifices to repel the invasion.¹⁵⁰ According to one contemporary observer, “The Polish peasants in recently occupied territory are infuriated against the Soviets, who, despite their promises and their very extensive propaganda amongst them, have taken everything methodically without payment”.¹⁵¹ For many this echoed the fresh and painful memory of tsarist oppression.

¹⁴⁵ F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 215. 1 *verst* is the equivalent of 1.06 km.

¹⁴⁶ *Goniec Czerwony*, 14-19 August 1920, *RGASPI*, f. 68, op. 1, d. 32.

¹⁴⁷ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 42, p. 62.

¹⁴⁸ TNA, FO 688/8, doc. 588; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 54, *Neue Lodzer Zeitung*, 9 September 1920.

¹⁴⁹ F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 212; J. Marchlewski, *Pisma Wybrane*, vol. 2, pp. 779-780.

¹⁵⁰ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 32, p. 140.

¹⁵¹ TNA, FO 688/7, doc. 741, Lord D’Abernon to the British Government, 22 August 1920.

The available evidence clearly suggests that the majority of peasants were soon disappointed by *Polrevkom* agricultural policies and their failure to deliver promises. A Polish Foreign Ministry communiqué, reported on 30 August 1920,

Witos... visited various localities liberated from the Bolshevik invasion. On August 28 the Premier traversed the province of Plock, which was particularly devastated. Everywhere traces of atrocities and violence were visible.... The peasants throughout the whole devastated areas showed bitter hostility to the invaders.¹⁵²

Discontent intensified following the Red Army's requisitioning of food supplies, carts, horses and cattle for its own use, the payment of extremely low prices to peasants for goods purchased, and frequent repression and atrocities carried out by the Soviet forces against the local populations, in which peasants were the dominant class.¹⁵³ The Committee's preference to await the establishment of a permanent Polish socialist government, to resolve the thorny agrarian issues over which its members had so strongly disagreed, proved fatal.

Further evidence of Polish hostility towards the Soviet regime, the Red Army and the *Polrevkom* is, ironically, provided by communists and Red Army soldiers. Marchlewski was forced to acknowledge that, "The Red Army could not attract the peasants".¹⁵⁴ The *1920 Diary* of Isaac Babel, a Red Army political worker attached to the First Cavalry Army, commanded by Semen Budennyi, also provides illuminating details of locals perception of the advancing Soviet troops. On 6 August 1920, at Khotin, he recorded, "...we are destroyers... hated by everyone".¹⁵⁵ Twenty days later he further explored this disillusionment, reporting that at Sokol, "The cobbler had looked forward to Soviet rule – and what he sees are Jew-baiters and looters, and that he won't be earning anything, he is dismayed and looks at us mistrustfully".¹⁵⁶

What, then, was the reaction of the workers, who were the *Polrevkom*'s intended support base and in whose name the Committee was working in Białystok and beyond? Communists in Poland and Russia, Soviet historiography and a number of contemporary Western observers suggest that Soviet ideology, *Polrevkom* objectives and the Red Army

¹⁵² Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 42, p. 116. Copies of this were sent to *The Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, *Reuter*, *International News Service*, *United Press of America*, *The Times*.

¹⁵³ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 42, p. 62; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 55, p. 79. Charles Sarolea, a western observer, asserted, "Recent history has established beyond contestation that Bolshevism can strike no root in the Polish peasant communities", C. Sarolea, *Letters on Polish Affairs*, (Edinburgh, 1922), p. 41.

¹⁵⁴ J. Marchlewski, *Rosja Proletarjacka a Polska Burżuazyjna*, (Moscow, 1921), p. 42.

¹⁵⁵ I. Babel, *1920 Diary*, (New Haven, 2002), p. 56.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 81.

were enthusiastically greeted and supported by the Polish population, as liberators from capitalist domination by “White-Guard” Poles. These accounts draw on the various meetings, demonstrations and rallies, held in several Polish localities in support of communism and Soviet Russia. For instance, the Soviet publication *Istoriia Pol'shi*, recorded that in response to an appeal by the CC KPRP on 29 April, which called on the Polish population to demonstrate against the war,

On 1 May massive meetings and demonstrations took place. In Warsaw the demonstration against the anti-Soviet War saw about 30,000 persons take part. Large demonstrations took place in Dombrovsk Basin, Lodz, Ozorkov, Aleksandrov, Egezh, Pabianitsa, Blotslavk, Zhirardov and other Polish towns.¹⁵⁷

The Red Army reported similar scenes as it advanced towards Warsaw. A telegram sent to Lenin on 12 August 1920, by *Revvoensovet* Western Front member and Polish Communist, I.T. Smilga, stated that although there was no discernable movement by the farm labourers in the Polish territory occupied by the Red Army, the town workers, railwaymen and the local Jewish population were supportive.¹⁵⁸ Marchlewski further contended that, “...the proletarian elements stood on the side of the revolutionary army... represented by the revolutionary committee”.¹⁵⁹ This was corroborated by the British diplomat Edgar D'Abernon, who spoke of,

...the extent to which sympathy with the Bolsheviks dominates the working classes in Central Europe. This sympathy is almost more religious than political. It is unaffected by ordinary considerations of interest and survives the complete failure of Bolshevik economic administration – no less than their admitted brutality and cruelty.¹⁶⁰

RGASPI also holds numerous letters, proclamations and telegrams expressing support for the work of the *Polrevkom*, as do Soviet documentary collections.¹⁶¹ The latter record, for instance, that a mass meeting of workers' representatives in Białystok on 31 July 1920, declared, “We with enthusiasm welcome the rising up of this government as having the most appropriate aims and interests of the workers”.¹⁶² *Izvestiia* reported that, at a large workers' meeting in the town on 2 August, “The speech of Marchlewski, which set forth the programme of the *Polrevkom*'s activities, was accompanied by an ovation”, and a

¹⁵⁷ *Istoriia Pol'shi*, vol.3, p. 136.

¹⁵⁸ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 107, p. 179.

¹⁵⁹ J. Marchlewski, *Voina i mir*, p.24.

¹⁶⁰ E. D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World*, (London, 1931), pp. 48-49.

¹⁶¹ *RGASPI*, f. 63, op. 1, d. 88. This view was, further, endorsed by Soviet historians. For example, “In all Polish towns, in which there were created revolutionary authority, the working masses without hesitation, went over to its side”, *Istoriia Pol'shi*, vol. 3, p. 138.

¹⁶² *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 129, p. 226.

meeting of railwaymen of the Białystok Junction, on the same day, confirmed, “We welcome the *Polrevkom*, we express in them full confidence and swear that in circumstances of necessity, we shall stand to defend them”.¹⁶³ In Russia too, 1,200 Polish POWs resolved on 14 August to fight to support the *Polrevkom* if the opportunity arose.¹⁶⁴

It is, thus, likely that the *Polrevkom* enjoyed support amongst elements of the Polish working class, and indeed it was this group which the Committee claimed to represent.¹⁶⁵ However, even here the *Polrevkom* faced problems.¹⁶⁶ Dzierżyński was forced to acknowledge to the CC RKP(b) that despite initial reports about the excellent mood of the Białystok population, by 12 August, “...all military strength of Belostok and the region consists of seventy people.... Such a situation we recognise as intolerable, fraught with sad consequences”.¹⁶⁷ So great was his concern that he requested a disciplined battalion of the *Cheka* be sent, “...for the defence of the *Polrevkom*”.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, although the *Polrevkom* appears to have enjoyed a level of worker support during the initial phase of its activities, within two weeks this had waned. The reality of factories and industries remaining at a standstill, the authorities failure to pay wages, the high cost of living, increasing rise of unemployment, and the very real risk of famine engulfing the town, quickly dampened support.¹⁶⁹

This was also certainly the position with Białystok’s Jewish population. It would appear that the Jewish majority supported the Soviet authorities, at least initially, with many contemporaries recording evidence of communist-Jewish support in the Polish towns.¹⁷⁰ Upon its establishment, the *Polrevkom* recognized both Polish and Yiddish as the official languages of the Committee and only those who spoke either were given positions within the organisation.¹⁷¹ However, although Marchlewski claimed that the Jews

¹⁶³ *Izvestiia*, 6 August 1920; *Goniec Czerwony*, 17 August 1920; in contrast, Teslar recorded that the latter meeting, “...met resolutely with hostility from the side of the Polish proletariat”, T. Teslar, *Propaganda Bolszewicka podczas Wojny Polsko-Rosyjskiej 1920 roku*, (Warsaw, 1938), p. 246.

¹⁶⁴ *Pravda*, 11 August 1920.

¹⁶⁵ Despite the sweeping assertion by Richard Pipes that, “...the Red Army met with hostility from all Polish workers”, R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, 1917-1924*, (London, 1940), p. 188.

¹⁶⁶ Questions of objectivity can, for instance, be raised over foreign newspaper articles, TNA, FO 688/8, doc. 588; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 54; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 28, p. 125.

¹⁶⁷ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 94; *ibid*, doc 108, p. 180.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, vol. 1, doc. 108, p. 180. On 14 August, the 28th Battalion was sent from Smolensk for this purpose, *ibid*, doc. 155, p. 188. The Congress of Trade Unions, which convened in Warsaw, in July 1920, was visibly anti-communist in persuasion, M.K. Dziwanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁹ F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 212.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 31. As a result, the Polish Government was forced to intern a number of Jews in a military internment camp at Jabłonna during the conflict, P. Stachura, *Poland in the Twentieth Century*, (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 44-45.

¹⁷¹ P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, p. 227.

maintained excellent relations with the *Polrevkom*, sections of this sizeable group of workers became increasingly alienated by the Committee's dissolution of the Jewish commune, welcoming the return of the Polish town authorities after the Battle of Warsaw.¹⁷² Indeed, one observer expressed surprise that prior to the battle most of the people he saw erecting barbed wire defences against the approaching Red Army were Jews.¹⁷³ Deep-rooted anti-semitism, evident in a number of Red Army units, including Budennyi's cavalry, and the failure of the Soviet authorities to deal with it, were important reasons why the Jewish population in Poland turned against the Committee.¹⁷⁴ Dzierżyński was forced to admit that crime and mistreatment were factors in the relationship of the occupying forces with the populations in the Polish lands.¹⁷⁵ Białystok also contained a sizeable Lithuanian population and here again the Committee lost a potential support base following Marchlewski's announcement that, after the establishment of a Polish Socialist Government, the only official language throughout the country would be Polish.¹⁷⁶

Finally, the *Polrevkom* failed to win the support of the Polish socialists and was unable to coordinate its activities with the one Polish group which supported it fully, the KPRP.¹⁷⁷ The day after the formation of the *Polrevkom*, the Białystok PPS group welcomed the Committee and expressed their willingness to cooperate with it.¹⁷⁸ However, for the majority of PPS members, opposition to the *Polrevkom*, deemed a, "...pseudo-socialist government", prevailed.¹⁷⁹ The majority of Poles, including many workers, regarded national independence and security as more important than the achievement of a socialist revolution or adoption of an alien Soviet ideology. The KPRP was limited in size, many of its leaders were in exile or prison, and it failed either to raise widespread awareness of Soviet aims or to organise mass demonstrations in support of the *Polrevkom*. Indeed, on the 10th anniversary of the Polish-Soviet War, the party's theoretical organ, *Nowy przegląd*, acknowledged, "Not... always and not everywhere were we sufficiently active in a

¹⁷² J. Marchlewski, *Pisma Wybrane*, vol. 2, p. 770; TNA, FO 688/8, doc. 588; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 54.

¹⁷³ E. D'Abernon, p. 52.

¹⁷⁴ For reports of Red Army atrocities against Jews, including looting, rape and murder see, R. Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin*, doc. 61, pp. 116-117; doc. 71, pp. 128-129. Lenin's response to this information was "Into the Archive", meaning that no further action was to be taken.

¹⁷⁵ I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 106, p. 179.

¹⁷⁶ TNA, FO 688/8, doc. 588.

¹⁷⁷ For fuller details of KPRP support see, *RGASPI*, f. 63, op. 1, d. 88.

¹⁷⁸ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 129, p. 226, signed by the group's Chairman, Bernacki, and by twenty-eight workers' representatives in Białystok.

¹⁷⁹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 24.

revolutionary way.... In various sectors the certainty of the Red Army's victory... created an atmosphere of passivity".¹⁸⁰

Soviet assertions of deep-seated, widespread support are, thus, contradicted by the overwhelming majority of available sources, including such diverse commentators as the Polish Foreign Ministry, western observers, Polish Communists and political workers in the Red Army. These contemporaries witnessed the existence of a strong and resilient anti-Bolshevik sentiment across the whole spectrum of Polish society during the war.¹⁸¹ Socialist revolution had, in reality, no real support base in Poland upon which to draw. Neither did the *Polrevkom*. Its failure to deal with the many, diverse problems requiring its attention drove its initial supporters to abandon it to its fate. As Dzierżyński acknowledged with great honesty, the work of the Committee failed as it was, "...not moved forward by any internal struggle in Poland itself".¹⁸²

Reaction to the *Polrevkom* was also varied in Russia. Although the CC RKP(b) supported the organisation, provided blueprints for it to follow and, crucially, financed its work, disagreements did break out with the Committee over policy issues, most notably the agrarian question. Even amongst the general public, divergent opinions could be discerned. Telegrams of support were sent to the *Polrevkom* from numerous soviets throughout Russia, the *kresy* and beyond, including, Tver, Vladikavkaz, Georgia, Armenia and Eastern Galicia.¹⁸³ Many Russians remained doubtful, however, about the Committee's activities and questioned the possible success of a Polish revolution. As noted by the Commander of the Soviet IV Army, for example,

The outbreak of a Polish Revolution was considered seriously only by those Soviet authorities, which were far from the front. The Red Army did not believe in it. The failure to enroll a Polish army in Białystok was ample evidence that this hope was without foundation.¹⁸⁴

In direct contrast, the Polish *Chargé d'Affaires* in London, Jan Ciechanowski, noted that the advancing Polish Army was welcomed in all the towns and localities into which it advanced, freeing the population from Soviet rule.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, a petition, signed by 35,000 inhabitants of Minsk, Sluck, Bobrujsk, Thumen and Borisów, belonging to the Roman

¹⁸⁰ M.K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, p. 94

¹⁸¹ TNA, FO 417/7, no. 14, p. 31; TNA, FO 417/8, no. 18, p. 25.

¹⁸² Z. Dzierżyńska, *Dnevnik zakliuchennogo pis'ma*, (Moscow, 1966), p. 263; F.E. Dzierżyński, *Dnevnik: pisma k rodnym*, (Moscow, 1958), pp. 258-260.

¹⁸³ P. Kalenichenko, p. 154.

¹⁸⁴ Polish Institute, E.N. Sergeev, *Ot Dviny k Visle*, (Smolensk, 1923), p. 42.

¹⁸⁵ TNA, FO 417/9, no. 31, p. 38.

Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish faiths, was presented to the Polish Government and Allied representatives on 22 August 1920. This stated that,

The population of our country will never consent to it being granted to the Bolsheviks without the expression of its will... if the Bolshevik army does not immediately withdraw beyond the Dnieper and the Dzwina, we, citizens of the outraged country... will begin an action on our own initiative.... two months ago our population sent a delegation to Warsaw with an authorisation containing 250,000 signatures and that now state this to be our final warning.¹⁸⁶

7. Conclusion

By mid-August, there were significant levels of discontent against the *Polrevkom*. Had the outcome of the Battle of Warsaw been different, however, there is no reason to doubt that its members would have been transferred to Warsaw and established there as the Polish Socialist Government. Indeed, on 15 August, Dzierżyński, Marchlewski and Kon left Białystok for Warsaw with this objective in view.¹⁸⁷

Why then did the *Polrevkom* fail to establish its longed-for socialist government in Poland? Primarily, and fatally, the Committee failed to win the support of the local Polish population, who refused to be inspired by Soviet ideology. It failed also to coordinate its actions and policies with the one organisation which unreservedly supported it, the KPRP. This party potentially provided an infrastructure for organising socialist authority through existing local revolutionary committees but action between the two bodies was disjointed.¹⁸⁸ Radek complained, for instance, on 15 August that the *revkomy* communications with Warsaw did not exist, whilst Dzierżyński, stated four days later, “There is no constant communication with party organisations”.¹⁸⁹

The *Polrevkom* itself was also not as coordinated as previously imagined. For example, Marchlewski complained that many officials who worked for the Committee were, “...one-sided, narrow-minded”, individuals who were, “...not familiar enough with the obligations and duties of a revolutionary power”, to be of great assistance.¹⁹⁰ Its members often worked from hour to hour, deciding policy *ad hoc*, rejecting Russian methods as

¹⁸⁶ TNA, FO 688/10/156.

¹⁸⁷ F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 212; J. Marchlewski, *Pisma Wybrane*, vol. 2, p. 778, however, they only travelled thirty miles before military fighting forced them to return.

¹⁸⁸ I.I. Kostiusko, vol. 1, doc. 82, pp. 153-154.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, doc. 118, p. 192; doc. 131, p. 205. The *Polrevkom* frequently complained to the CC RKP(b) about the lack of Polish communist mobilization to help in its work, *ibid*, docs. 86, 94, 119 & 129.

¹⁹⁰ J. Marchlewski, *Rosja Proletariacka*, p. 30.

sometimes inappropriate to the Polish situation. This made it difficult not only for the *Polrevkom* to spread its ideological objectives to the localities, but also for the Committee to react quickly to changing circumstances in the political, economic and social spheres. Furthermore, time constraints frequently prevented implementation of agreed policy initiatives.

Nevertheless, the *Polrevkom* did carry out a huge amount of work in a very short space of time. Although established without detailed planning, in response to the Red Army crossing into ethnographic Poland, the *Polrevkom* successfully initiated a huge range of diverse economic, political, social, cultural, religious, military and international policies. With only the Russian Soviet regime capable of providing the Committee with an example to follow, it was frequently forced to decide policy on its own initiative. Founded by well-known, competent and experienced Polish communists, who were not afraid when the need arose, to stand up to CC RKP(b) criticism and follow an independent line, the *Polrevkom* may have succeeded in becoming the first socialist government of Poland, if the military situation had been more favourable. However, in this dilemma lies the crux of the *Polrevkom*'s collapse.

Undoubtedly, the principle reason for the failure of the Committee was that it had always been utterly dependent upon the forces of the Red Army to control the areas over which it sought to establish authority. Its influence, therefore, only ever extended into Soviet-occupied Poland as far as the Red Army frontline.¹⁹¹ Thus, when Tukhachevsky's forces suffered a crushing defeat on the outskirts of the Polish capital in mid-August, no-one, not even the Polish workers, whom it claimed to represent, were willing to take up arms in its defence, and the fate of the Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee was sealed.

What lasting impact therefore, did the *Polrevkom* make? If it lasted only twenty-three days, can it have made any impression at all on Poles, Russians and the wider international community? The answer to these questions must be a resounding yes. Firstly, the Committee's activities left an indelible imprint on the populations it ruled over, raising awareness amongst the Polish population of the communists aims and objectives, especially through its industrial, agricultural and *agit-prop* activities. At its height it certainly enjoyed support amongst elements of the working classes, the peasantry and the

¹⁹¹ At the peak of its success, the *Polrevkom* possessed authority over the lands encircled by the Western and South-Western frontlines, the East Prussian frontier to the north, and the Bug River to the east.

Jewish communities in the occupied territories. Its work impacted upon not only Poles, but also Russians and the populations of the *Kresy* – Lithuanians, Belorussians and Ukrainians – who resided in the occupied lands. Its policies touched lives across the classes, and encompassed workers, peasants, soldiers, landowners, industrialists, government circles and military leaders. This legacy was not immediately forgotten by events on the battlefield at Warsaw.

Secondly, as an embryonic Polish socialist government, which had controlled at the peak of its success, almost a quarter of ethnographic Poland, it served as a warning to the Polish Government, and their Western allies, about the threat posed by the Soviet regime. If anyone had doubted Bolshevik intentions during the Polish-Soviet War before July 1920, the establishment of the *Polrevkom* left them in no doubt about the Communists ultimate objective: the establishment of a Soviet Socialist Republic. Indeed, so concerned was the Polish Government by the *Polrevkom* and its implications for their state, that the eventual peace treaty signed between the Soviet Russian regime, the Ukrainian *SSR* and the Polish Government, included a term specifically designed to prevent its reestablishment on Polish lands at a future date. When the Preliminary Peace Treaty and Armistice Agreement was signed on 12 October 1920, ending the Polish-Soviet War, the second article stated,

Both contracting parties include in the peace treaty an obligation neither to create nor to support organisations which have as their aim an armed struggle against the other contracting party, which have as their aim the overthrow of the state or social order of the other side, making an attempt on its territorial integrity, as well as of organisations assuming the role of a government of the other side.¹⁹²

Finally, the *Polrevkom* left an indelible trace on Soviet history.¹⁹³ The Committee was the ultimate attempt by Polish communists and the Soviet regime in Moscow to impose its ideological objectives, not simply through propaganda, but through decisive and concrete practical action. Exporting revolutionary government to Poland was a direct break with Lenin's earlier policy of national self-determination, but after the *Politburo* decision to cross into ethnographic Poland, taken largely at the Soviet leader's instigation, the establishment of the *Polrevkom* exactly reflected his aims by mid-1920. More than any other event of the Polish-Soviet War, the establishment, conduct and activities of the

¹⁹² TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 83, enclosure 1.

¹⁹³ Soviet historians traditionally focused upon its importance for the development of the revolutionary movement in Eastern Europe, believing that, "...it proved that between the working classes of Poland and the working classes of Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia, there could not be any cause for hostile relations, and that their interests coincide", *Istoriia Pol'shi*, vol. 3, p. 143.

Polrevkom graphically demonstrated that which Soviet Russia hoped to achieve in Poland and beyond. Moreover, its collapse ably demonstrated the reasons for Soviet inability to gain support in Poland. As such, it deserves far greater attention than it has previously received by historians of the conflict. Although it failed to achieve its ultimate objective, the *Polrevkom* would provide a blueprint for a later Soviet generation to finally establish a Polish Socialist Republic after World War Two.

Chapter 5: Polish-Soviet Relations, July-August 1920

1. Baranowicze Negotiations

Before the final military manoeuvres of the war were enacted, diplomacy once again entered the theatre of Polish-Soviet relations. Indeed, rumblings of the need for renewed peace negotiations could be heard in both camps, during July, as the Red Army continued its advance westwards.¹ Chicherin hoped to secure a temporary armistice, strengthening the position of both the Soviet state and the Red Army. On 13 July 1920, he sent an extremely important, secret note, recently published for the first time, to Lenin, Trotsky, Krestinskii and Kamenev, in which he argued,

We must *utilise the advantage* of the proposed armistice and *avoid its disadvantages*. From Minsk to Brest 300 versts; the armistice will give this to us at no cost.... [but]...will be *without date* and will have a *very short time of refusal* – install a new line... at once inform Poland of our conditions; and if not obeyed, *renew the offensive* from the new line.²

Clearly, Chicherin promoted a dual approach: diplomatic and military. He tacitly acknowledged, however, that the former was unlikely to secure its aims stating, "...we will stand at the new line and will carry out negotiations until we can organise supplies. If we need to end operations... it will be possible to begin to stretch out the *negotiations about the armistice*."³ He argued that at the subsequent peace conference in Warsaw, "...we will set out our ultimatum".⁴ The peace treaty was, thus, to be a *diktat*. By proposing the "...stretching out of negotiations" to assist the Red Army, light is shed on the leading Soviet diplomat's view of the Baranowicze negotiations which commenced two weeks later.⁵

Playing to an international audience four days later, Chicherin informed the British Government of Russia's willingness to secure an armistice and peace treaty with Poland.⁶ Ironically, the very next day, the Soviet High Command issued an order that Warsaw be

¹ T. Dombal proposed a draft resolution in the Polish *Sejm* for the conclusion of the War on 30 July 1920, *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii Sovetsko-Pol'skikh otnoshenii*. vol. 3, (Moscow, 1965), doc. 61, p. 107 (hereafter *D & M*). See also, *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii*, fond 68, opis 1, delo 12, (hereafter *RGASPI*).

² I.I. Kostiusenko (ed.), *Pol'sko-Sovetskaia voina 1919-1920: ranee ne opublikovannye dokumenty i materialy*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1994), doc. 68, pp. 130-131. A *verst* was 1.06 kilometres. Italics in the original.

³ *Ibid.* Italics in original.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 93, pp. 157-162. Poland had itself proposed an armistice but received no reply from Soviet Russia before the deadline ran out on 18 July, The National Archives, FO 688/5, p. 179 (hereafter TNA).

captured by 12 August.⁷ The Polish Foreign Minister, Eustacy Sapieha, confessed to Rumbold on 21 July that the Polish proposal to open peace talks with Soviet Russia had been delayed, "...at the instigation of the [Polish] generals".⁸ For the soldiers and diplomats of Poland, too, a dual policy was pursued.

1.1 Diplomatic Negotiation, July-August 1920

On 22 July, the Polish Government radioed to the Soviet regime, proposing immediate armistice negotiations.⁹ The Head of the Polish Army General Staff, General T. Rozwadowski, simultaneously telegraphed the Supreme Commander of the Red Army, S.S. Kamenev, with a proposal to end all military action.¹⁰ The Red Army, however, continued its offensive and on the same day Trotsky sent a telegram to the *RVS* Western and South-Western Fronts, marked "Highly Urgent", which stated,

The Polish Government proposes an armistice and peace. It proposes that parliamentarians go down to the line between Baranowicze and Brest-Litovsk.... Chicherin is replying immediately... about a well-timed dispatch of representatives from our side for a meeting with the Polish parliamentarians. Further instructions will be received tomorrow. *Until new instructions, all old remain in effect.*¹¹

The initiative remained firmly with the military.

The same day, the *Politburo* entrusted Chicherin to send a delegation to negotiate an armistice and peace with Poland's representatives, although it had already resolved that the Red Army must cross the ethnographic border and advance to Warsaw.¹² The Soviet agreement to negotiate, communicated by Chicherin to the Polish Government, and by the Red Army High Command to the Polish Army High Command, on 23 July 1920, thus served as a smokescreen, behind which the military could advance.¹³ If diplomacy could have secured Soviet objectives, the regime would most probably have responded positively: it was not in their interest, following the Great War and Russian Civil war, to prolong military engagements unnecessarily. If this proved impossible, however, the majority had no qualms, contrary to Marxist teachings, in using military force to impose

⁷ J. Piłsudski, *Rok 1920*, (London, 1987), p. 212.

⁸ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 16, p. 22. See also, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 18, pp. 23-28.

⁹ *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 3, (Moscow, 1959), doc. 18, p. 61, (hereafter *DVP*).

¹⁰ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 107, p. 190.

¹¹ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 79, pp. 150-151. Author's italics.

¹² *Ibid*, doc. 78, p. 149.

¹³ *DVP*, vol. 3, doc. 18, pp. 60-61.

their ideological agenda on the Poles and the rest of Europe.¹⁴ By now, Marxism had metamorphosed in Russia into Marxist-Leninism. Still the Soviet offensive continued.¹⁵

On 27 July, the Soviet regime informed the Poles that, “The road suggested by you, viz. between Baranowicze and Brest has been chosen. The crossing of the front by your representatives will be made on July 30 at 8pm”.¹⁶ The Poles accepted the proposed date for the meeting, but protested vigorously against an insinuation in the Soviet telegram that 30 July had been decreed by the Polish General Staff.¹⁷ On 27 July, the *Politburo* CC nominated Karl Danishevsky to lead the Soviet delegation.¹⁸ The following day, the Polish *Chargé d’Affaires* in London, Jan Ciechanowski, wrote to the British Foreign Secretary, George Curzon,

I am instructed by my Government to inform Your Lordship that the Government of the Soviets, with the obvious desire to delay the eventual assistance of the Allied Powers to Poland, have proposed the 30th July as the date on which the negotiations for an armistice... are to begin.... The Polish Government has had no part in delaying the opening of negotiations for an armistice till 30th July.¹⁹

Embroiling the Polish diplomats and Government in haggling over minute detail served a two-fold purpose: firstly, Polish attention was distracted from the wider diplomatic game, and secondly, the Soviets were able to present the Poles as divisive, petty and unreasonable. This provided diplomatic opportunities to drive a wedge between the Poles and their Western Allies.²⁰

The Poles were extremely sceptical of Soviet sincerity, not least because the Red Army continued its advance into ethnographic Polish territory.²¹ Reaction in the Polish capital to the Soviet agreement to negotiate was witnessed by Edgar D’Abernon, chief British diplomat in the Allied Military Mission. His diary entry for 27 July recorded,

¹⁴ As discussed in Chapter 1, p. 54, Marx had argued that socialist revolution in Poland would be a spontaneous event, driven by the Polish working class itself.

¹⁵ *The Times*, 27 July 1920, p. 14.

¹⁶ TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid; Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25, p. 74, (hereafter Polish Institute); Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 23, p. 96. L.B. Kamenev informed Lloyd George on 5 August, that Rozwadowski had, “...mentioned the 30 July as the date of the meeting”, TNA, FO 418/54, doc. 47, p. 228.

¹⁸ *Izvestiia*, 1991, no. 2, p. 118. See, *Biographical Notes*.

¹⁹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 15, p. 15. This document was sent, in an effort to raise Allied support for the Polish cause, to *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, *Reuters*, *International News Service*, *New York Sun* and *The United Press of America*, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 16.

²⁰ For correspondence between Krasin, Kamenev and Lloyd George, over the negotiations, see TNA, FO 418/2/24, p. 78; TNA, FO 418/2/69, pp. 247-248.

²¹ See, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/3, doc 6; *Kurjer Polski*, 27 July 1920; *Gazeta Poranna*, 27 July 1920; *Gazeta Warszawski*, 4 August 1920; *Rzeczpospolita*, 4 August 1920, *Robotnik*, 4 August 1920.

At 3pm today a telegram from London announced that the Soviet Government was ready to negotiate a favourable armistice with Poland. This news came as a surprise here and is not generally credited. The expectation has been that the Soviets would drag on armistice negotiations while their troops advanced. When it came to signing the demands would be so excessive as to be unacceptable.²²

This is indeed exactly what happened when the Soviet regime presented their terms to the Poles on 5 August.²³ Polish preparations to attend the peace talks continued, however, and the delegation received the following instructions on 30 July,

...the Polish Government was in the last resort prepared to accept a minimum frontier which was even less favourable to the Poles than the Spa frontier. The Polish delegation had instructions, not to accept less than the above-mentioned frontier, not to agree to disarmament of the Polish Army as this would leave the Poles helpless vis-à-vis the Russians, not to accept interference in the internal affairs of Poland in the direction of prescribing the form of Government in this country.²⁴

This latter term was crucially important, given that the *Polrevkom* was established in Białystok on the exact same day. In turn, the preliminary Soviet peace terms were defined by the *Revvoensovet* of the Republic on 30 July and revised by Chicherin the following day.²⁵

When the Polish delegation arrived at Baranowicze on 30 July, the Soviet representatives insisted that proceedings be adjourned for a few days.²⁶ Curzon was informed by Rumbold that he had received,

...exceptionally reliable information that the Commissar of Staff of one of the Soviet armies has been notified as follows, 'We have arranged not to inform the Poles of armistice conditions before 4 August instead of 30 July. You have, therefore, four more days in which to continue fighting Poles until you receive orders from staff.'²⁷

As a result, when the Poles presented their credentials on 1 August, the Red Army representatives, Shutko and Leov, informed General Romer and Wroblewski, that they required a written mandate, signed both by Piłsudski as Chief-of-State and by the Polish Government. This "...should empower the Polish Delegation to sign not only an armistice

²² E. D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World*, (London, 1931), p. 37.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 7. See also, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 17.

²⁵ For full text see, I.I. Kostiuško, vol. 1, doc. 84, pp. 155-160.

²⁶ *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series 1, vol. XI, (London, 1946), p. 422.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 422.

but also the preliminaries of peace”.²⁸ It was then suggested by the Soviet representatives that the mandate could be received either by radio communication, the dispatch of fresh delegates, sending a courier to Baranowicze, or by the Polish delegates themselves returning to Warsaw. The communication concluded with a request that the new credentials be received by 4 August, allowing the negotiations to begin on that date at Minsk.²⁹

The Poles insisted on returning to Warsaw to receive instruction from their Government.³⁰ As noted this suggestion was initially made by the Soviet delegates, although the Soviet regime traditionally presented this event as a sign of Polish bad faith. For instance, L.B. Kamenev informed Lloyd George on 5 August that, “...such limited powers did not correspond to the tasks with which the conference of the delegates were to deal”, whilst a Soviet historian remarked, “It became obvious that the Polish ruling circles were in no hurry to sign a peace treaty; their purpose was to hinder the offensive of the Red Army and win time”.³¹

The Polish Vice-President, Ignacy Daszyński, informed the newspaper, *Journal de Pologne*, on 31 July that following the conclusion of an armistice, the Polish Government would accept an immediate peace on two conditions: 1) that the independence of Poland be recognised, 2) the border states, lying between Poland and Russia, be awarded the right of self-determination.³² This interview is of extreme importance to our understanding of the failed Baranowicze negotiations as it clearly demonstrates that the Polish Government sought an armistice first and only when this was secured, would they commence peace *pourparlers*. Moreover, the Polish delegation had not been given powers to conclude a peace settlement, as it had been proposed by the Allied Governments at the Spa Conference earlier in the month to hold a peace conference in London, over which their

²⁸ TNA, FO 688/2, pp. 108-109; TNA, FO 418/54, doc. 47, p. 229; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 19, p. 75. Shutko was plenipotentiary delegate of RVS of Western Front, Leov was plenipotentiary delegate of the Staff and Wroblewski was Polish Under-Secretary of State.

²⁹ Lenin telegraphed Stalin on 2 August, to inform him that, due to the serious threat posed to the Soviet regime by Wrangel, “...the opinion is mounting in the Central Committee that peace with bourgeois Poland should be concluded immediately”, V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 51, (Moscow, 1965), doc. 435, p. 247, (hereafter PSS).

³⁰ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25, p. 75; TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 13.

³¹ TNA, FO 418/54, doc. 47, p. 228; B. Ponomaryov, A. Gromyko & V. Khvostov, (eds.), *History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1945*, (Moscow, 1969), p. 132.

³² TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 22, p. 28.

representatives would preside.³³ Also, at no time prior to the Baranowicze negotiations had the Soviets intimated that additional credentials would be required.³⁴

The Polish response to Soviet demands was of resentment, incredulity and suspicion, as clearly demonstrated by an *MSZ* Information Office Report, issued on 3 August, which stated that,

It is evident that the Soviet Government tends to draw out armistice negotiations hoping to delay help from our Allies. It is also evident that meeting on August the 4th is a physical impossibility since the departure of a delegation... cannot take place at so short notice... the Government must necessarily await the report of the Delegation from Baranowicze before the departure of new delegates.³⁵

The Polish Commander-in-Chief also reacted with hostility, recording,

We had to send a peace delegation – where? To Minsk, to M. Tukhachevsky's own headquarters, to beg for peace. "Begging" is the correct term, since we had to initiate peace conversations at the moment when the victorious enemy was knocking at the gates of our capital and threatening to undermine the whole organisation of the state before he would utter the word "peace".³⁶

By proposing Minsk the Soviets could indeed suggest that the Poles were attending the Soviet military headquarters as a defeated power, forced to sue for peace. It also gave the Soviet regime the opportunity to isolate the Polish delegation from any potential Allied assistance during the talks. As a document, recently published in Moscow demonstrates, on 10 August 1920, the *Politburo* had resolved,

... if it is possible to surround [the western newspaper correspondents'] train so that they will be completely isolated. To [ensure]... the possibility of accomplishing such isolation... the Special Department of VChK [Cheka] will not allow the train of foreign correspondents to go to Minsk for the peace negotiations.³⁷

A further complication surrounding the Baranowicze talks was the difficulty which the Polish delegation experienced in dispatching radio communications to its Government. Suspicion of Soviet interference in this matter led the Polish representatives to issue a protest to the Soviet regime on 3 August.³⁸ In response, Chicherin blamed a weakening of

³³ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 23, pp. 96-97.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 97; TNA, FO 688/6, p. 52.

³⁵ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 19, p. 75. This interpretation of Soviet motives was shared by the British Minister in Warsaw, TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 12.

³⁶ J. Piłsudski, *Rok*, p. 113.

³⁷ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 103, p. 176.

³⁸ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 19, p. 75.

the radio current due to bad weather, for the Soviets inability to accept Polish telegrams.³⁹ The same day, Polish Ministers discussed an allegation that the Baranowicze delegation's return to Warsaw had been impeded by Red Army troops and that the route to Minsk was almost entirely impassable.⁴⁰ This simply served to heighten Polish mistrust of Soviet motives. As a result, the Poles appealed to the Allies for assistance on 4 August.⁴¹ In response, Lloyd George met with Kamenev and Krassin and, "...made it plain to them that, if they made further difficulties about the armistice and advanced into Poland, complete rupture with the allies was inevitable".⁴²

On 5 August, Kamenev, a member of the Soviet trade delegation to Britain, informed Lloyd George that the Soviet Government reaffirmed its recognition of the Polish state within wider frontiers than those suggested by the Supreme Council and indicated by the British Government note of 20 July.⁴³ At the exact same time, the Red Army advance was proceeding rapidly and, having crossed every conceivable frontier, was within 40 kms of Warsaw.⁴⁴

Later that day, Sapieha informed Chicherin that, desiring cessation of the war, the Polish Government accepted the proposal to send a delegation to Minsk and to simultaneously negotiate peace preliminaries and an armistice.⁴⁵ Peace, at this time, was greatly desired by the Poles, given that the Polish Army was being pushed back dangerously close to Warsaw. He demanded that all aggressive military manoeuvres by both the Red Army and the Polish Army cease from the outset of the Minsk negotiations.⁴⁶ Ironically, this Polish condition for an armistice along the whole front was the exact same term which the Soviet regime had insisted upon at the failed Borisov negotiations. Once again, the Moscow radio station refused to accept the Polish communiqué on 5 August.⁴⁷ It

³⁹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 26, pp. 118-119; *Daily Telegraph*, 4 August 1920. Lloyd George informed Kamenev, on 11 August, that the constant refusal of the Russian wireless stations to receive Polish messages, whilst the Red Army was advancing, could not fail to arouse suspicion, TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 48.

⁴⁰ E. D'Abernon, pp. 54-55.

⁴¹ TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 23

⁴² TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 21, p. 28.

⁴³ H.W. Henderson, (ed.), *Polish-Soviet Relations, 1917-1945: facts and documents*, (Glasgow, 1945), p. 4.

⁴⁴ TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 30.

⁴⁵ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 21, pp. 81-82; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/3, doc. 9, pp. 27-29; TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 36, he insisted that the delegation be assured unhampered radio communication and given all the facilities of travel necessary, p. 81.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 33. For the Soviet's continued refusal to transmit Polish notes to the Soviet Government see, Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 29, pp. 103-104; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 26, pp. 118-119.

was finally accepted by the Soviet authorities on 9 August.⁴⁸ The convenient breakdown in Moscow's radio system would indeed appear well-timed, especially given the Soviets' secret intention of delaying diplomatic proceedings until the Red Army had taken Warsaw.⁴⁹

On 6 August, the Polish Government, faced with an impending Soviet military advance, stepped up its own propaganda offensive and issued a press statement, denying responsibility for the delay to the peace negotiations.⁵⁰ The Polish Council of National Defence published a proclamation, in which it called the Soviets to account for their actions, arguing that the, "Soviets want to gain time: they want to take Warsaw and dictate, there, terms of peace to a defeated Poland".⁵¹ The Red Army, meanwhile, continued its westward progression. The next day, 7 August, the *NKID* instructed the *MSZ* that, "...our delegates will arrive at Minsk on 11 August, and we propose that your delegates cross the Chaussee-Siedlce-Miedzyrzecz-Brest-Litovsk frontline on 9 August at 8pm".⁵²

The Soviet diplomatic offensive began to reap rewards as the Allied Powers increasingly questioned Polish sincerity. On 9 August, a joint British and French telegram recommended that the Poles do their utmost to conclude an armistice and preliminary peace.⁵³ It continued,

If, however, the Russian Soviet Government insists on terms, which infringe the legitimate independence of Poland, and the Polish Government rejects them, the British and French Governments will:
Take all the steps they can to interrupt contact between Russia and the outside world and put pressure on Russia by other means to respect the independence of Poland;
Supply the Polish Army with military material, but cannot send further Allied troops;
Do their utmost to keep open communication between Poland and the Allies.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 29, pp. 103-104. Trotsky remarked that the Warsaw wireless station had also refused to accept Soviet communications, *Manchester Guardian*, 16 August 1920, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 26, pp. 118-119; Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 29, pp. 110-112.

⁵⁰ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 23, pp. 96-98. See also, TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 34, pp. 48-49; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 35, pp. 49-54.

⁵¹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 22, p. 85. Chicherin did, indeed, aim in July and August 1920 to impose a Soviet *diktat*. For Polish newspaper coverage of this diplomatic tête-à-tête, see *Rzeczpospolita*, 6 August 1920; *Przegląd Wieczorny*, 6 August 1920.

⁵² TNA, FO 418/54, doc. 48, p. 230. The Soviet Government, again playing to the sympathy of the British Government, informed the latter of this proposal, on the same day, TNA, FO 418/54, doc. 48, p. 230; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 29, p. 131.

⁵³ TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 41; *The Times*, 12 & 13 August 1920.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 42.

In turn, the Poles were required to: publicly declare their intention to fight to the end for Poland's independence, and appoint a Commander-in-Chief who would hold no other official office, be willing to accept the assistance of Allied officers, and accept and act on Allied military advice.⁵⁵ These conditions were regarded as an insult to Polish honour and integrity. Sapieha informed Rumbold two days later, that the Poles had repeatedly assured the Allied Mission in Warsaw of their intention to fight to secure their independence.⁵⁶

At the same time, Curzon telegraphed Rumbold that the,

French Government have exactly the same information as we have as to refusal of Polish Government to act reasonably or to listen to advice and they tell us that Poles even scout advice of General Weygand who is ablest and most experienced Chief of Staff in the world. The French are now gravely suspicious that Piłsudski means to compromise with Bolsheviks and Sovietise Poland provided that his own power is safeguarded.⁵⁷

This statement indicates the extent to which the Western Allies were out-of-touch both with the current Polish situation and the aims and objectives of the Polish Marshal. This was further demonstrated by the Allies refusal to assist the Poles, "...unless the Poles are really prepared to fight as vigorously and tenaciously for their independence as the Allies were for their own freedom".⁵⁸ To suggest that the Poles would refuse to fight for their independence was entirely misguided. In fact, with the exception of the KPRP, the PPS-Left and left-wing elements of the Jewish community in the Bund, this had been the dominant concern of the vast majority of Poles since the reestablishment of Poland in November 1918. Their determination to secure and consolidate their state was one of *the* principal reasons for the Polish-Soviet War in 1919 and 1920.

1.2 Soviet Peace Terms and Reaction

On the evening of 10 August, Kamenev provided the British Government with a copy of the peace terms, which the Soviet regime was to offer to the Polish delegation at Minsk. The Polish Army was to be reduced to a civic militia of 50,000 men, whilst the army command and administration was to be limited to 10,000 men. Demobilisation of the Polish Army was to be completed within one month and all arms, except those required by the reduced army and civic militia, were to be handed over to Soviet Russia and Ukraine.

⁵⁵ Ibid. The latter term was a direct attack on Piłsudski of whom the Allies remained deeply suspicious, given his initial socialist leanings and constant refusal to bow to Allied pressure, presenting the latter with regular *fait accomplis*.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 45.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 42.

⁵⁸ Ibid. These terms, drafted by Marshal Foch, were fully supported by the Allied Supreme Council.

All Polish war industries were to be demobilized and the Poles were banned from importing either troops or war material from abroad.⁵⁹

Lloyd George insisted that when Rumbold handed the Soviet terms to the Poles on 11 August, he was to,

...tell them that His Majesty's Government are of the opinion that, provided these terms are *bonâ fide* offered at Minsk, and that no substantial addition is made to them, they would appear to leave the independence of Poland within her ethnographic frontiers unimpaired.⁶⁰

The British Prime Minister believed that these terms were simply designed to guarantee Soviet Russia against future attacks.⁶¹

The Poles did not regard the proposals in the same light. Indeed, so outraged was Sapieha, that he informed Rumbold, on 13 August, of his refusal to even communicate the advice of the British Prime Minister to his Government.⁶² He further declared,

Poland will not agree to any humiliating terms – there can be no question of demobilisation and disarmament. Poland does not need to issue declarations that she is prepared to defend her independence, which is a humiliating demand, as Poland is decided upon defending her independence in the fullest meaning of the word.... We shall continue to defend ourselves even if deserted by all our allies.⁶³

He further rebuked the Western Allies stating,

When we placed the question of peace or war in the hands of our Allies we could not have supposed that they would advise us to conclude a disgraceful peace, which we will never accept. The Bolshevik terms are equivalent with the destruction of Poland. The Polish delegation is leaving tomorrow for Minsk with instructions to agree to no humiliating or wrongful terms.⁶⁴

The Polish Minister also argued that if news of Lloyd George's advice became public knowledge in Poland, the bitterest reaction against the British Government would result.⁶⁵

In an attempt to salvage the situation, Curzon apologised to Rumbold for the offence caused and reasoned that it was dictated by the refusal of the British public to become

⁵⁹ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 23, p. 29; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 36, pp. 55-56. These terms formed the basis of the Soviet peace terms submitted at Minsk on 17 August, see *Chapter 6*, pp. 206-208.

⁶⁰ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 23, p. 29.

⁶¹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.3/4, doc. 35, pp. 129-130.

⁶² Polish Institute, KOL 82/3, doc. 8, p. 16.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 18; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 27, p. 32; for Polish press reaction see, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 29, p. 131.

⁶⁵ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 27, p. 32.

directly involved in the war.⁶⁶ The damage, however, had been done. The British Government came under severe criticism, including from its own diplomats. D'Abernon argued that the terms were so extravagant that the Polish Government could, on no account, consider them, and that the British Government should have refused to pass them on.⁶⁷ Churchill condemned the Soviet diplomatic move as an attempt to, "...carry out a Bolshevik revolution in a disarmed Poland".⁶⁸ In contrast, the French Government, outraged at both the Soviet terms and the British advice, informed the Polish Government of its full support in the matter.⁶⁹

Still, the Poles, facing the continued Red Army offensive, and shaken by Britain's response, prepared for the Polish-Soviet diplomatic negotiations at Minsk. Zdisław Okęcki of the Polish *MSZ* and Major Stamirowski arranged with the Soviet authorities, to commence talks on 14 August.⁷⁰ The Polish delegation, led by Jan Dąbski, former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, and comprising representatives of all *Diet* parties and the General Staff, duly left on the specified date.⁷¹ As Sapieha noted, "The discussions amongst the... delegation would take place in private and... would present a united front to the Bolsheviks".⁷²

At the exact moment of the delegates' departure, a large-scale military operation, planned by the Polish General Staff at the beginning of the month, was launched. As Piłsudski recollected, "...as Commander-in-Chief or as Head of State, it was up to me to ensure that our delegation did not leave the capital except with the certainty that Warsaw would hold out".⁷³ The Battle of Warsaw had begun.

Soviet reaction was immediate. Trotsky announced that,

This moment in diplomatic relations is extremely crucial. I believe that it is necessary for us to... abruptly accuse Poland, France and even Britain of breaking off or tolerating the disruption of negotiations with Poland in order to present us with an opponent's peace.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 29, p. 32, a debate in the House of Commons conclusively demonstrated this.

⁶⁷ E. D'Abernon, pp. 71-72, by these terms, the Soviets slammed the door on negotiation, inspiring the Poles to fight to the end.

⁶⁸ L. Kirkien, *Russia, Poland and the Curzon Line*, (Duns, Berwickshire, 1944), p. 34.

⁶⁹ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 29, p. 32.

⁷⁰ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 31, p. 138. See also, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 30, p. 136.

⁷¹ Ibid; I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 118, pp. 192-193. For an account of proceedings see, J. Dąbski, *Pokój Ryski: Wspomnienia. Pertraktacje. Tajne układy z Joffem. Listy*, (Warsaw, 1931), pp. 29-34. Rumbold commended the Polish delegation as most conciliatory, TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 61.

⁷² TNA, FO 688/6, p. 59.

⁷³ J. Piłsudski, *Rok*, p. 114.

⁷⁴ I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 1, doc. 112, pp. 185-186.

This directly reflected the situation on the battlefield. As soon as the Polish Army launched its response to the Red Army offensive, the Soviet regime made immediate diplomatic moves. For both sides during the conflict, when the military situation was proceeding favourably, diplomacy took a backseat, but when the tables began to turn, the diplomats again took to the stage. As a result, diplomatic negotiation continued as the Battle of Warsaw raged on.

1.3 Failure of the Talks

The failure of diplomacy in August 1920, once again, witnessed the participants seeking to apportion blame for their inability to reach agreement. And, once again, lack of trust and deep-seated suspicion lay at its heart. A Polish report, issued by the Legation in London, entitled *The Present Situation in Poland with regard to the Bolshevik Menace*, argued that, "...the real policy of the Soviets cannot be judged by the utterances of their Foreign Minister which only serve as a mask to cover their true intentions".⁷⁵ It is certainly true that the Soviets sought, via diplomacy, to gain time for the Red Army advance and to allow the widely disseminated Soviet propaganda to bear fruit in Poland.

In contrast, the Soviet regime argued that the negotiations failed due to Polish play-acting and dishonesty. Chicherin laid the responsibility for the breakdown in the peace talks firmly at the door of the Polish Government, informing Kamenev on 11 August 1920 that,

It is certain that the Poles are trying to protract preparations to negotiation and to delay the latter.... This has continued already for three weeks and every time the delay comes from the Poles. It is obvious that they passionately desire the negotiations to be delayed; probably they think that if Warsaw is taken it will force the Allies to intervene, and they lead, thus, to a policy of provocation.⁷⁶

This opinion was shared by Soviet contemporaries and a number of Western historians.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Polish institute, A.12.P.3/5, doc. 3, p. 14. This view was shared by Rumbold, TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 30, and D'Abernon, p. 27. The latter recounted six occasions on which the Soviet regime deliberately delayed the armistice and peace negotiations see, *ibid.* pp. 101-104.

⁷⁶ TNA, FO 418/54, doc. 48, p. 230.

⁷⁷ TNA, FO 418/54, doc. 47, p. 229; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 21, p. 28. For instance, "It was Poland who continually delayed or broke off peace talks, not Soviet Russia", T. Fiddick, *Russia's Retreat from Poland, 1920: from permanent revolution to peaceful coexistence*, (London, 1990), p. 18. See also, L. Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs: a history of the relations between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world, 1917-1929*, vol. 1, (Princeton, N. J., 1951), p. 266.

Who then was to blame for the failure of the Baranowicze peace talks? In July and August 1920, it benefited the Soviet regime to draw out diplomatic initiatives, whilst the Red Army offensive was being pursued. Quite simply, it was not in the interest of the *NKID* to negotiate until the lines on the battlefield had been drawn. The optimism of the Soviet leaders in a potential Polish socialist revolution and their conviction that the Red Army would be victorious at Warsaw, removed any pressing need to negotiate before these objectives had been achieved. The *Polrevkom* resided in the wings, ready to grasp political power in Poland as soon as the Polish Army was defeated. What incentive was there, then, for Lenin and his colleagues to negotiate with a Polish Government, soon to be replaced by an ideologically allied socialist government? Instead, the Baranowicze talks allowed the Soviet regime to play once again to an international audience and embroil the Poles in a confusing web of diplomatic manoeuvres. Poland was not, however, blameless. For the Poles, also, the outcome of the battle was awaited before they would fully commit to participating in negotiations. Guided and led by Piłsudski, they, too, were confident of victory.

2. The Battle of Warsaw

2.1 The Battle

The advance of the Red Army in August 1920 and the resultant Battle of Warsaw was of decisive importance for the development of Soviet Russia, Poland and the wider international community. As recorded by one contemporary observer,

...the battle which was fought on the plains of the Vistula was not the battle for Warsaw alone, or even for Poland. It had a far wider significance.... It was the battle for civilisation, for liberty and justice, and for every principle for which democracy stands.⁷⁸

If successful, the Soviet authorities aimed to spread their ideology and incite socialist revolution not only in Poland, but throughout the European continent and beyond.⁷⁹ For the Poles, the battle signaled their final stand in the struggle to consolidate and secure their infant state.

⁷⁸ A. Piłsudska, *Piłsudski: a biography by his wife*, (New York, 1941), p. 301.

⁷⁹ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 41, p. 64.

The Polish military offensive was devised by Piłsudski during the night of 6 August 1920 at the Belvedere Palace and, despite reservations expressed by various Polish military experts, he refused to alter his strategy. This,

...involved a considerable element of risk, for it depended on letting the enemy concentrate his full strength against the defences of Warsaw while Piłsudski and his army waited for the critical moment to launch an attack on the Russian flank from Puławy. Correct timing was of vital importance and, therefore, he insisted on waiting, though telegrams from Warsaw repeatedly urged him to attack.⁸⁰

Instead of organising strong lines of defense around the city, Piłsudski prepared to strike against the Red Army.⁸¹ Whilst the Soviet Command expected the Polish forces to be concentrated in the north, Piłsudski sent them south of Warsaw.

Meanwhile, the Soviet advance continued. On 8 August, Western Front Commander, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, ordered his troops to avoid a direct frontal assault on Warsaw.⁸² Instead, they were to advance towards three separate targets: the right wing was to move along the Prussian border and capture Toruń; the central group to cross the Vistula below Warsaw and launch an attack on the city from the west and south, and the left flank to capture Lwów.⁸³ Three days later, the Red Army crossed the River Vistula at Włocławek near Toruń and by 13 August, was positioned six miles from the Polish capital.⁸⁴ The occupation of the city appeared imminent.⁸⁵ The Poles intercepted a Soviet radio message, which indicated that the Red Army attack was to commence the following morning at 5am.⁸⁶ Soviet confidence in securing a speedy victory remained high.⁸⁷ The majority of Allied diplomats and the Allied Mission, fearing Soviet occupation, left Warsaw for Poznań.⁸⁸ The diplomats had lost all control of events.

In contrast, the Polish civilian population rallied to the defense of their country. As early as 11 July 1920, an *Official Polish Communiqué* reported that, "Volunteers from

⁸⁰ A. Piłsudska, p. 300.

⁸¹ R. Jackson, *At War with the Bolsheviks: Allied intervention into Russia, 1917-1920*, (London, 1972), p. 232.

⁸² T. Fiddick, p. 627.

⁸³ E. D'Abernon, pp. 80-81.

⁸⁴ N. Davies, "August 1920", in *European Studies Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, (1973), p. 270, within 150 miles of Berlin.

⁸⁵ For the strengths of the Polish and Soviet Armies see, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 53, p. 198; TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 31, pp. 41 & 190-195.

⁸⁶ E. D'Abernon, p. 77.

⁸⁷ As noted on 14 August, "Chicherin's despatches show that the Bolsheviks feel that they are on top. They have assumed an aggressive, domineering tone", G. Riddell, *Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-1923*, (London, 1933), p. 231.

⁸⁸ TNA, FO 688/8/150, pp. 70-71, only General Weygand, General Radcliffe and Sir Percy Lorraine, remained.

every part of the country are joining the fighting forces. During the last two days, over 300,000 volunteers from Polish territory have enlisted in the army”.⁸⁹ In the week preceding the Battle, Rumbold observed that, “Bands of volunteers paraded the streets and even a women’s corps, which looked very workmanlike, has made its appearance”.⁹⁰ Polish patriots fired by the approach of their historic opponent towards the capital, displayed steely determination to fight to the last.⁹¹

Unsurprisingly, the Red Army offensive was accompanied by an intensified Soviet propaganda drive, reflecting both military and political initiatives. An appeal, *To the Proletariat of Warsaw!*, issued on 5 August, by the *Polrevkom*, declared,

Comrades, the revolutionary Red Army in its victorious march to Warsaw is a messenger of the collapse of capitalist slavery and complete freedom of the working class. *At this moment, the heroic proletariat of Warsaw cannot passively wait for events....* We call you to action.... Warsaw must be taken by you, yourselves.... The hour of liberation is approaching! To arms!⁹²

The Soviet propaganda machine went so far as to spread misinformation that Warsaw had already been captured by the Red Army on 13 August.⁹³ This blatant untruth was immediately decried by the Poles.⁹⁴

In the vitally important days prior to and during the battle, a large number of Polish propaganda proclamations and appeals were issued. In these, the Red Army was portrayed as a weakened force, requiring only a concerted effort to be ousted from Polish territory.⁹⁵ The Polish population immediately responded. Crucially, the majority of workers, the Soviets’ intended audience, continued to view the war as a nationalist conflict against a traditional enemy. As Feliks Dzierżyński, head of the Cheka and *Polrevkom* member, was forced to acknowledge,

The PPS are developing rapid agitation for the defense of Warsaw. Its influence is still great among skilled, well-earning workers.... thousands of men and women are being dispatched to dig trenches [and] to establish wire obstacles... in the streets.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25, p. 71.

⁹⁰ TNA, FO 688/6, p. 61. At a meeting in Warsaw on 13 August, 100,000 Poles pledged to support the defence of the city, “...to the last gasp”, *Manchester Guardian*, 16 August 1920, p. 7.

⁹¹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 24, pp. 100-101.

⁹² A. Litwin, (ed.), *Tymczasowy Komitet Rewolucyjny Polski*, (Warsaw, 1955), pp. 91-92.

⁹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 August 1920, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 24, p. 101; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 36, p. 151.

⁹⁵ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 24, pp. 100-101; F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1977), vol. 1, p. 299.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 298-299. The influential Polish Roman Catholic Church also supported the Polish war effort, sending appeals abroad to request assistance, *Kurjer Polski*, 6 August 1920.

On 6 August 1920, the Polish Council of State Defence, mirroring Soviet diplomatic practice, issued an international proclamation to the Western Allies, warning,

If Polish freedom dies tomorrow yours will be threatened. Think how the fall of Poland may become the commencement of a new world war. Bolshevik victory on the Vistula threatens all Western Europe: a new world war hangs over the world like a storm cloud. Wake up, nations of the world, humanity, justice and truth call you.... Not only our, but also your future is at stake today on the Vistula.⁹⁷

The decisive blow took place on the 15-16 August. Piłsudski launched a flank attack, which resulted in the virtual annihilation of the Red Army in Poland.⁹⁸ Poor coordination of the Soviet advance allowed a gap to emerge between the Soviet armies. The Polish Marshal withdrew six of his most reliable divisions, organised them into “shock groups” and advanced into the vacuum, driving a wedge through the Soviet ranks.⁹⁹ He later recollected the ease with which the Polish Army advanced and stated,

On the 16th, I let loose the attack – if one can call it an attack. Only the 21st Infantry Division came into action, and engaged in a light and easy combat.... by the evening all Divisions had covered well over 30 or more kms towards the north.... It was like a dream.... The 17th August came... I spent the whole day motoring, seeking for traces of the phantom enemy, and endeavouring to discover troops, which I feared.¹⁰⁰

An *Official Polish Military Communiqué* confirmed that by 19 August, the Polish counter-offensive was rapidly advancing.¹⁰¹ Two days later the Polish Command reported,

We have retaken Brest-Litowsk. Our action in the direction of Bielsk-Białystok is progressing. The engagements in the sector of Lwów (Lemberg) are developing in our favour.... In the sector under Command of General Sikorski, 10,000 prisoners, 33 guns and 112 machine guns have been taken since the beginning of our operations.¹⁰²

Still, Chicherin attempted to gloss over events. On 24 August, he informed the Soviet trade delegation in London that, “The Russo-Ukrainian Army is ready for a new advance when the moment is considered favourable. The Polish radio communications about a great victory belong to the domain of fable”.¹⁰³ This was nothing more than wishful thinking. A

⁹⁷ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 22, p. 87.

⁹⁸ See, J. Piłsudski, *Rok 1920*; M.N. Tukhachevsky, “Pokhod za Vislu” in J. Piłsudski, *Voyna 1920 goda*, (Moscow, 1992); M. Tarczyński, *Bitwa Warszawska 13-28 August 1920: dokumenty operacyjne*, (Warsaw, 1996); A. Zamoyski, *The Battle for the Marchlands*, (New York, 1981); N. Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: the Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20*, (London, 2003), pp. 188-225; U. Olech, *Wojna Polsko-Sowiecka 1919-1921: materiały do bibliografii*, (Warsaw, 1990), pp. 54-64.

⁹⁹ Polish Institute, KOL 24/107.

¹⁰⁰ J. Piłsudski, *Rok*, p. 126.

¹⁰¹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25, p. 86.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 88, the report was forwarded to *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, *Reuters*, *International News Service*, *United Press of America* and *Daily Chronicle*.

¹⁰³ *Manchester Guardian*, 26 August 1920, p. 4.

large number of Soviet units had been driven over the Prussian border and disarmed.¹⁰⁴

The losses suffered by the Red Army following the Battle of Warsaw were extensive in terms of both manpower and equipment.¹⁰⁵ The Red Army had been well and truly defeated by the Poles. Piłsudski's strategic plan had been fully implemented and the Polish Army had imposed the first military defeat, by a foreign adversary, on the Soviet Russian Republic.

2.2 Who was Responsible for the Polish Victory?

Responsibility for the Polish victory has been claimed by, and accorded to, a number of groups and individuals. In particular, the Allied Military Mission, sent to Warsaw in July 1920, and the French General, Maxime Weygand, have been signaled out for praise by contemporaries and historians of the war. For others, it was the planning, action and leadership provided by the Polish General Staff, under Piłsudski, which drove the Red Army from the Polish lands in the summer of 1920.

Praise for the Allied Mission in securing the Polish victory was first promulgated by its diplomatic leader, Edgar D'Abernon.¹⁰⁶ He asserted,

Had there been no mission, or had we been unsuccessful in establishing communication between Warsaw and Danzig, or again had we failed to inspire the Polish Government with reliance on the support of the Western Powers, I have little doubt that... the Polish Army, driven back so far, would have been incapable of serious resistance and impotent to prevent the Bolshevik troops from capturing Warsaw.¹⁰⁷

This interpretation has been taken up by later historians, including Bryant Russell, who argued that, "...the Anglo-French Mission did indeed play a major role in the defeat of the Bolsheviks before Warsaw".¹⁰⁸

D'Abernon further singled out the role of General Weygand as crucial to Polish success, informing Curzon on 28 August 1920, that,

...great credit is due to the Polish commanders who devised the plan, and to General Weygand who improved it in many directions and who certainly contributed vastly to its successful execution... without General Weygand,

¹⁰⁴ Polish Institute, A.12.P.1/3, doc. 22, p. 88; Polish Institute A.12.P.2/2, doc. 41, p. 165.

¹⁰⁵ National Archives of Scotland, GD 193/327/64 (restricted), p. 46 (hereafter NAS); Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25, p. 89; Polish Institute A.12.P.2/2, doc. 41, p. 165; TNA, FO 688/6, p. 81.

¹⁰⁶ E. D'Abernon, pp. 113-114.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 122.

¹⁰⁸ B. Russell, "Lord D'Abernon, the Anglo-French Mission, and the Battle of Warsaw 1920", in *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 38, (1990), p. 546.

who insisted on the Poles adopting a definite plan and sticking to it – and who also introduced the novelty (for Poland) of written orders to commanders of troops – and vastly improved, if he did not create, a liaison service between units, and without French officers, it is most doubtful whether success would have been attained.¹⁰⁹

This interpretation was supported by many contemporaries and historians, including Piłsudski's opponents, who sought to discredit the Polish Marshal and promote Allied importance in the victory.¹¹⁰ This was paradoxical, given the intransigence demonstrated by the Allies and, in particular, Lloyd George, in assisting the Poles in any meaningful way during the war. Without doubt, Weygand did carry out a considerable amount of work, organising the defences of Warsaw prior to the battle, helping to secure transport links and war supplies, and reorganising the Polish Army command structure.¹¹¹ Indeed, in recognition of his efforts, the French General was awarded Poland's highest military medal – the *Vituri Militari*.¹¹²

Polish historians, in contrast, tend to stress that Weygand's role was limited, unfamiliar as he was with local Polish conditions and unacquainted with the morale of the Polish troops.¹¹³ In a revealing account of the war, Zdzisław Musiałik charted Weygand's own presentation of events. Initially, the French General asserted that,

This is a purely Polish victory. The preliminary operations were carried out in accordance with Polish plans and by Polish generals. My task, like that of the other officers of the French Mission, has only been to make certain suggestions regarding the details of execution.¹¹⁴

However, by the time he wrote his memoirs, first published in 1957, Weygand had significantly increased the importance of his own role.¹¹⁵ In reality, he was neither a commander on the battlefield, nor the author of Poland's military strategy.

This honour rested firmly with Piłsudski, who had devised the military strategy, and commanded the Polish Army, which carried it out to the letter.¹¹⁶ This was recognised by

¹⁰⁹ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 41, p. 64. For further details, see Piłsudski Institute, 23/4/1/1/25.

¹¹⁰ TNA, FO 688/7, pp. 235-236; H. Nicolson, *Curzon: the last phase, 1919-1925, a study in post-war diplomacy*, (London, 1934), p. 206; H.J. Elcock, "Britain and the Russo-Polish Frontier 1919-1921", in *Historical Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, (1969), p. 151.

¹¹¹ See, M. Weygand, *Mémoires*, vol. 2, (Paris, 1957); B. Russell, pp. 539-546.

¹¹² P. Wandycz, "General Weygand and the Battle of Warsaw", in *Journal of Central European Affairs*, vol. 20, (1960), p. 365.

¹¹³ Culminating with Wandycz's "General Weygand and the Battle of Warsaw".

¹¹⁴ *London Illustrated News*, 28 August 1920; *L'Information*, 21 August 1920.

¹¹⁵ Z. Musiałik, p. 96. Russell incorrectly argued that neither D'Abernon nor Weygand ever claimed credit for the Polish victory, B. Russell, p. 526. They both clearly did.

¹¹⁶ Józef Piłsudski Institute, Kolekcji 23, no. 1, (hereafter Piłsudski Institute).

contemporary Polish and Allied observers, including General Kazimierz Sosnkowski. An active participant in the battle, he recollected that, "...the super-human efforts of the Commander-in-Chief, his brilliant conduct of the campaign together with perfect manoeuvring led to a final triumph".¹¹⁷ Douglas Savory, MP, recorded that, "The masterly turning manoeuvre which outflanked the Russians, was exclusively the idea of the Marshal himself seconded by General Sikorski".¹¹⁸ Even D'Abernon was forced to acknowledge that Piłsudski, as Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, "...has immense authority here and a greater knowledge of local conditions than anybody".¹¹⁹ Piłsudski's utilisation of these dual roles, enabled him to direct, guide and lead the Polish state, assisted by his command staff, during the decisive battle. He, himself, vehemently denied receiving any concrete Allied assistance from either the Military Mission or General Weygand, stating,

As regards military questions... I was not disposed to submit to any [Allied] dictation.... I offered to share command with General Weygand. He refused, saying with great justice and good sense that the Command of troops so rapidly formed as ours, of whose value and that of their leader he knew nothing would be too difficult and indeed impossible for him, since he would not know what he could ask of his soldiers. It was for this reason that he confined himself to expressing theoretical judgments and, at least so far as I was concerned, abstained from exercising the slightest pressure on my orders and decisions whatsoever they were.¹²⁰

Finally, however, credit for the victory must be accorded to the Polish population, which, consumed by patriotic fervour, rallied to the defence of the nation. Tukhachevsky later claimed that, "All the verbiage about the awakening of national sentiment in the Polish working class in connection with our offensive is merely due to our defeat".¹²¹ This is entirely incorrect. The Polish Marshal was much better acquainted with Polish sentiment, when he reported that, "...the Soviet revolution could never get beyond the bayonet-point, because it had no real influence within Poland".¹²² Even Lenin was forced to acknowledge this truth. At the 9th All-Russian Conference of RKP(b), on 22 September 1920, the Soviet leader recalled a statement of the Polish delegation in Minsk that, "We know that it was not the Entente that saved Warsaw and Poland; it was unable to save us. It

¹¹⁷ J. Piłsudski, *Year 1920*, p. vii.

¹¹⁸ Piłsudski Institute, 23/4/1/1/25; *Daily Telegraph*, 30 December 1952. Invaluable assistance was provided by Major-General Władisław Sikorski, Commander of the Polish 5th Army, who secured Polish success to the north of the city, Piłsudski Institute, Kolekcji 23, no. 31; Polish Institute, KOL 24/104; W. Sikorski, *La Campagne Polono-Russe de 1920*, (Paris, 1928). For the role of General Rydz-Śmigły see, Piłsudski Institute, Kolekcji 23, no. 18.

¹¹⁹ E. D'Abernon, p. 34.

¹²⁰ J. Piłsudski, *Rok*, pp. 152-153.

¹²¹ M.N. Tukhachevsky, "Pochód za Wisłę" in J. Piłsudski, *Rok*, p. 195.

¹²² J. Piłsudski, *Rok*, p. 147.

was the upsurge of patriotism that saved us”, to which Lenin added, “Such lessons are not to be forgotten”.¹²³

2.3 Reasons for the Soviet Defeat and Reaction

The statesmen and military leaders of the Soviet regime were deeply shocked by events at Warsaw. So confident were they of success that plans had already been made to transfer the *Polrevkom* to the Polish capital to take over the reins of the new socialist Polish State.¹²⁴ The prestige of the world’s first socialist army was shattered by the defeat. The immediate response of many was to relaunch a Soviet counter-offensive. Trotsky recorded, “I found Moscow favouring a second Polish War. Now even Rykov went over to the other camp. ‘Once started’, he was saying, ‘we must carry it through to the end’”.¹²⁵ As noted by an *Official Polish Military Communiqué*, on 31 August, the Soviets went so far as to order a general mobilisation for 18 to 50 year olds.¹²⁶ The Western Front Command also favoured continuing the war. Trotsky recollected,

I found the headquarters at the front in favour of another war. But there was no conviction there; it was simply a reflection of the attitude in Moscow. The lower I went on the military ladder – from an army to a division, a regiment, a company – the more I realised the impossibility of an offensive war.¹²⁷

He subsequently urged Lenin to reject a renewed offensive.¹²⁸ So great was his concern, that if the *Politburo* voted to proceed with the war, he would refuse to submit to its decision and appeal directly to RKP(b) members.¹²⁹ Previously, Lenin had asserted, “If we have to wage a winter campaign we shall win, despite exhaustion and fatigue. There can be no doubt on that score”.¹³⁰ However, following Trotsky’s assessment, the Soviet leader agreed that to continue the offensive would pose a grave risk to the security of the regime.¹³¹ The *Politburo* resolved to sue for an immediate peace.¹³²

¹²³ V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 41, p. 284, (hereafter *PSS*).

¹²⁴ F.E. Dzierżyński, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1977), p. 212; I.I. Kostushko, vol. 1, doc. 125, p. 198

¹²⁵ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn’: opyt avtobiografii*, vol. 2, (Berlin, 1990), p. 193.

¹²⁶ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 25, p. 92.

¹²⁷ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn’*, vol. 2, pp. 193-194.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 194.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*.

¹³⁰ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 285.

¹³¹ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn’*, vol. 2, pp. 193-194.

¹³² *Ibid*.

Ironically, both the Polish Government and Polish delegation at Minsk entirely misunderstood the real debate taking place within the Soviet leadership.¹³³ The Polish diplomat, Łukasiewicz, informed Rumbold in September 1920,

There were... two parties in Russia, which were about equally matched. There was the party of Lenin, which desired peace, because it thought that the Bolshevik principles, in which it sincerely believes, could be best spread by means of peaceful penetration.... But the party of Trotsky was quite different; it was not interested so much in the spread of Bolshevik ideals as in the perpetuation of the present régime in Russia, and the only means of doing so, in its opinion, was to keep on fighting.¹³⁴

Thus, although the Poles were aware of Soviet disagreement surrounding the continuation of the war, they were entirely incorrect in their placing of Lenin and Trotsky at the head of each group. The reverse was the reality.

Publicly, the Soviets launched a propaganda offensive to gloss over the defeat. The regime asserted that the overwhelming military force of the *Entente* was responsible for the result.¹³⁵ In an article composed on 10 September 1920, entitled, *We are stronger than we were*, Trotsky publicly asserted, “We have dealt the Poland of the gentry a mighty blow. And today we feel more capable than ever before of dealing a second blow, mightier than the first”.¹³⁶ This was blatantly untrue. In *The Polish Gentry Do Not Want Peace*, he changed tack, declaring that the Soviet drive had succeeded in compelling the Polish Government to make peace.¹³⁷ Publicly, Lenin, too, maintained this façade, informing the 9th All-Russian Conference of the RKP(b) on 22 September 1920, “...we have never been and are not far from victory over Poland”.¹³⁸ He maintained that the Battle of Warsaw had,

...a profound effect on the revolutionary movement in Europe, particularly in Britain... We have succeeded in influencing the British proletariat and in raising the movement there to an unprecedented level, to an absolutely new stage of the revolution.¹³⁹

¹³³ This misconception, shared by the Allies, was primarily due to a lack of communications with, and lack of independent observers in, Russia following the October Revolution and during the war.

¹³⁴ TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 52, p. 75.

¹³⁵ *Daily Herald*, 19 August 1920; *Le Figaro*, 19 August 1920. Traditionally, Soviet historians argued that the Soviet defeat was due to vast levels of Allied aid awarded to the Poles prior to the battle, for example, B. Ponomarev, p. 134. In reality, this aid was very limited. Indeed, London dockers refused to load ships with war material bound for Poland in May 1920.

¹³⁶ L.D. Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed: the military writings and speeches of Leon Trotsky*, vol. 3, (London, 1981), pp. 235-236.

¹³⁷ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 239. Marchlewski shared this interpretation, J. Marchlewski, *Voina i mir mezhduburzhuaiznoi Pol'shei i proletarskoi Rossiei*, (Moscow, 1921), p. 37; J. Marchlewski, “Na Straży Pokoju”, in *Sztandar Komunizmu*, Minsk, 16 October 1920.

¹³⁸ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 281. Crucially, this view was not expressed in his secret speech to the same conference.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-277. In this Lenin entirely misunderstood the political climate in Britain.

If the Red Army had been victorious, he argued that the entire Versailles system would have been irrevocably overthrown.¹⁴⁰

Privately, however, the Soviet authorities recognised the devastating catastrophe which had befallen the international socialist movement. In his secret speech in September 1920, recently opened by the Russian archives and never intended for publication, Lenin acknowledged that the Battle of Warsaw had been a major turning point not only in the Polish-Soviet War, but also for the entire world.¹⁴¹ Crucially, for the first time, he admitted that the Polish workers did not desire a socialist revolution, the likelihood of which he had consistently overestimated throughout the war, and that, contrary to all Marxist teachings, the Soviet regime had authorised the use of the Soviet military to overthrow the existing Polish state. Lenin admitted,

As far as we were able to probe with a bayonet the readiness of Poland for social revolution, we must say that this readiness was slight.... We did not really manage to test the true mood of the proletariat masses among either farm labourers or the industrial proletariat.¹⁴²

Accordingly, an error had been made, resulting in a gigantic, previously unheard of, defeat.¹⁴³ Lenin argued that,

...a mistake has undoubtedly been committed; after all, we had victory in hand and we let it slip.... The mistake clearly had to be either in policy or in the strategy of war.... Perhaps the mistake was political, perhaps it was strategic as well... I will state now that the Central Committee analysed this question and left it open.¹⁴⁴

Significantly, no mention was made of Trotsky's doubts about the Red Army crossing the ethnographic Polish border in late July 1920. Clearly, the Soviet leader wished to avoid any responsibility for insisting on the *Politburo* support for this action. Instead, he deemed that the question of mistaken Soviet policy would be decided by historians.¹⁴⁵

Soviet and much Western historiography have shed little light on the principal reasons for the Soviet defeat.¹⁴⁶ Fiddick argued that Russia's retreat may have been pursued to allow the reestablishment of Soviet diplomatic relations with the West and the replacement

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 324.

¹⁴¹ R. Pipes, (ed.) *The Unknown Lenin: from the Secret Archive*, (New Haven, 1996), doc. 59, pp. 96-100.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 100.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 106.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 100-107.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 107.

¹⁴⁶ J. Marchlewski, "Mir s Polshei", in *Kommunisticheski Internatsional*, no. 14, (1920), pp. 2751-2754.

of War Communism with the New Economic Policy domestically.¹⁴⁷ In this, he entirely misread the situation. If the Red Army had been successful in spreading socialist revolution to the industrial countries of Western Europe, there would have been no question of retreating. The subsequent introduction of NEP and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the West were as a *result* of the Red Army defeat at Warsaw, *not the reason for that defeat*.

Accounts by Red Army participants also often fail to enlighten the reader.¹⁴⁸ A culture of blame developed around the question, as each leading participant sought to remove personal responsibility for the catastrophic result. Aware of the potential internal conflict within the RKP(b), Lenin avoided fanning the flames of discontent by refusing to place blame on individuals for the Soviet defeat.¹⁴⁹ His colleagues were not as restrained. Stalin was criticised for moving the Red Army's left flank towards Lwów and for its failure to support the drive on Warsaw.¹⁵⁰ Semen Budennyi was singled out for condemnation.¹⁵¹ Trotsky, too, received criticism for his role.¹⁵² The Soviet Commander-in-Chief, S.S. Kamenev, came under fire for vacillating between the demands of Tukhachevsky and those of Egorov and Stalin.¹⁵³ Finally, the finger was pointed at Tukhachevsky.¹⁵⁴ Ironically, only Lenin, the instigator of the Red Army advance in July 1920, avoided condemnation.

Did the Soviet mistake lie in the sphere of military strategy or in the formulation of Soviet policy towards Poland? Tukhachevsky himself acknowledged that the Soviet authorities had made, "...errors in our strategical consideration".¹⁵⁵ The strategy of directing troops in three separate directions, north-west to reach Germany, west to take Warsaw, and south-west into Eastern Galicia, has been severely criticised.¹⁵⁶ This dispersal of Soviet forces hampered Red Army communications prior to and during the battle. A

¹⁴⁷ T. Fiddick, p. 21.

¹⁴⁸ Isaak Babel, *Konarmia* member, makes no mention at all of the Soviet defeat, I. Babel, *1920 Diary*, (New Haven, 2002). See, *Biographical Notes*.

¹⁴⁹ J. Erickson, p. 99.

¹⁵⁰ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, vol. 2, p. 192; R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, p. 188; V.I. Semenenko, p. 62. Tukhachevsky also cautiously blamed the South Western Front in 1923, *ibid*, p. 74.

¹⁵¹ Notably by Sikorski and Weygand, T. Fiddick, p. 628. See, *Biographical Notes*.

¹⁵² V.I. Semenenko, p. 74.

¹⁵³ N. Davies, "The Soviet Command and the Battle of Warsaw", in *Soviet Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, (1972), p. 576.

¹⁵⁴ Tukhachevsky "...committed fatal strategic blunders", R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, p. 189. In contrast, Piłsudski believed that Tukhachevsky's strategy of marching into Poland at full speed, had been correct, J. Piłsudski, *Rok*, p. 138.

¹⁵⁵ M.N. Tukhachevsky, *Pochód za Wisłę*, p. 210.

¹⁵⁶ W. Sikorski, *La campagne Polono-Russe*, pp. 223-225; A. Richardson, (ed.), *In Defence of the Russian Revolution: a selection of Bolshevik writings, 1917-1923*, (London, 1995), pp. 134-135.

poor supply system and troop desertion compounded the difficulties.¹⁵⁷ Tukhachevsky asserted that, “The essential cause of our defeat was insufficient technical preparation of troop commanders”, whilst at the 10th All-Russian Congress of RKP(b) in March 1921, Lenin admitted that, in part, it “...was due to the fact that we had overestimated the superiority of our forces”.¹⁵⁸ Finally, lack of coordination between the force led by Tukhachevsky towards Warsaw and the Red Army’s left flank (12th Army and Budennyi’s 1st Cavalry Army), commanded by Egorov and supervised by Stalin, allowed a gap to develop.¹⁵⁹ This was a direct result of Lenin’s order that the south-west sector establish a revolutionary bridge to Southern Europe, especially to Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania.¹⁶⁰ Piłsudski wasted no time in driving a wedge between the two Soviet fronts and destroying their communication and supply lines.

These military mistakes were, however, compounded by critical errors in misguided Soviet policy. The primary reason for the Soviet defeat in August 1920 was the failure of the long-anticipated Polish revolution to materialise and the active participation of the Polish population in defending the nation against the Red Army invaders. In June 1920, Lenin acknowledged that,

The most dangerous thing in a war... is to underrate the enemy and to reassure ourselves with the thought that we are the stronger. That is a most dangerous thing, which may lead to defeat in the war; it is the worst feature in the Russian character.¹⁶¹

Six weeks later, the Soviet regime and Lenin failed to heed this warning by fatally underestimating the Poles. They sincerely believed not only that the demoralised Polish Army would prove entirely incapable of resisting the Soviet advance, but that the Polish workers and peasants would welcome the Red Army as liberators from bourgeois oppression. The reverse was the reality.

Firstly, Polish resistance, fired by nationalist sentiment, intensified the closer the Red Army approached to the capital. As Lenin acknowledged, “...the tide turned.... the Polish troops, supported by a wave of patriotism in Warsaw, and with a feeling that they were now on their own soil, found encouragement and a fresh opportunity to advance”.¹⁶² Secondly, and of absolutely decisive importance for the outcome of the battle, was the

¹⁵⁷ N. Davies, “Soviet Command”, pp. 575-576.

¹⁵⁸ M.N. Tukhachevsky, *Pochód za Wisłę*, p. 217; *RGASPI*, f. 76, op. 2, d. 2, l. 98.

¹⁵⁹ R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, p. 190.

¹⁶⁰ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, p. 7.

¹⁶¹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 144.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 321.

failure of socialist revolution to take root in Poland, despite the best efforts of both Soviet propaganda and the *Polrevkom*. Communist ideology failed to inspire the vast majority of the Polish population.¹⁶³ Dzierżyński's insistence on drafting large numbers of Chekists to support the *Polrevkom*, suggests that he, too, questioned the potential for revolution among Polish workers and peasants, prior to August 1920.

Marchlewski blamed the late organisation of the *Polrevkom*, its promulgation of too radical a programme, and the failure of Polish communists to inspire and direct the workers, for the failure of the Polish revolution.¹⁶⁴ Many communists failed to return to the country from Russia and the KPRP proved ineffectual. Strikes organised by the KPRP and Jewish Bund failed to attract support, efforts to establish Polish Units in the Red Army collapsed and many communists were arrested by the Polish authorities.¹⁶⁵

In reality, for the majority of Poles the Red Army was indistinguishable from the traditional invading armies of Tsarist Russia, bent on subjugating their reestablished nation. Polish patriotism strengthened, regardless of social class. At best, the *Polrevkom* reported, "...the peasants regard the war indifferently and avoid mobilisation".¹⁶⁶ At worst, the workers, the Soviets intended target leaders of the Polish revolution, failed to respond to communist propaganda. According to E.N. Sergeev, "...our information agencies had been too optimistic as regards the state of affairs in Poland".¹⁶⁷ As Rumbold observed, "...even when the Bolshevik forces were at the very doors of Warsaw there was no sign of a communist movement in this town".¹⁶⁸

Ultimately, the old adage that opinions can prove stronger than armies was demonstrated by the Polish-Soviet War. As Trotsky was forced to acknowledge,

Where the action of armies is measured by days and weeks, the movement of people is usually reckoned in months and years. If this difference in tempo is not taken fully into account, the gears of war will only break the teeth of the revolutionary gears, instead of setting them in motion. At any rate, that is what happened in... the Polish War.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ R. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, doc. 59, p. 100.

¹⁶⁴ J. Marchlewski, *Voina i mir*, pp. 20-37.

¹⁶⁵ M.K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland: an outline history*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 88-89; F.E. Dzierżyński, pp. 298-299; *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 122, pp. 207-211.

¹⁶⁶ *RGASPI*, fond 76, opis 1, delo 1330, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶⁷ J. Piłsudski, *Rok*, p. 150.

¹⁶⁸ TNA, FO 688/6, p. 318.

¹⁶⁹ L.D. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, vol. 2, p. 192.

As he had suspected, the Red Army could not be used to launch a revolution in Poland. Marx decreed it mandatory that the establishment of socialist revolution be the work of the local population itself. The Soviet Russian regime paid a heavy price in August 1920, for ignoring this socialist ideological dictum.

3. International Revolution

3.1 Was International Revolution Possible?

Throughout the Polish-Soviet War, the desire to establish international socialist revolution dominated Soviet ideology and the conviction of the Soviet leadership that this was not only possible, but was immediately achievable, directly influenced their conduct during the conflict. How realistic, then, was this objective?

As Marxists, the Soviet leaders sincerely believed that the October Revolution of 1917 would ignite the spark of revolution in more industrially advanced countries and on 26 December that year, awarded two million roubles to the *NKID* to assist left-wing, internationalist labour movements across the world to this end.¹⁷⁰ With the conclusion of the Great War in late 1918, it appeared to many that the international tide was turning in the Soviets' favour. As D'Abernon noted, "...circumstances were particularly favourable to revolution. The minds of men were so weakened by the terrific strain of the years of war that they had become a ready prey to any subversive doctrine.... Bolshevism... was still a gospel of hope".¹⁷¹ Following the Red Army drive westwards, by December 1918, Soviet Republics had been established in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. Civil war had broken out in Finland, Germany was facing a power vacuum, and Kiev was occupied by February 1919.¹⁷² The previous month, a radical left-wing regime, under Kurt Eisner, was proclaimed in Bavaria and Workers' and Soldiers' Councils emerged throughout the German State.¹⁷³

The year 1919 witnessed the pinnacle of communist optimism. This was not without foundation. In January 1919, the Red Army occupied large areas of both Latvia and

¹⁷⁰ J. Degras, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, 1917-24*, vol. 1, (London, 1951), p. 22.

¹⁷¹ E. D'Abernon, p. 12.

¹⁷² J. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p. 129; M.K. Dziewanowski, "Joseph Piłsudski, the Bolshevik Revolution and Eastern Europe" in *The Polish Review*, vol. 14, no. 4, (1969), p. 16.

¹⁷³ T. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology: the origins of Soviet foreign relations, 1917-1930*, (London, 1979), p. 60; L.D. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, vol. 1, (London, 1973-1974), p. 62.

Lithuania, including the cities of Riga and Wilno, and a Spartacist Uprising, a spontaneous workers' movement, which aimed to overthrow the German Socialist Government and later attracted communists, took place in Berlin.¹⁷⁴ Unrest, as a result of war-weariness, hunger and shortages, spread throughout the Allied countries and waves of strikes took place in France, Italy and Britain.¹⁷⁵ According to a British *Report (Political and Economic) of the Committee to collect Information on Russia*, compiled in May 1920, "The outbreak of the revolutions in Germany and Austria-Hungary inspired in them [the Soviet leaders] the belief that revolutions would shortly take place in Great Britain and France".¹⁷⁶ On 27 February, the Lithuanian and Belorussian Soviet Republics united to create the Soviet Socialist Republics of Lithuania and Belorussia (*Litbel*) and on 21 March 1919, a Hungarian Soviet Republic, led by Béla Kun, was established.

This revolutionary upsurge induced the Soviet regime to establish the Third Communist International (*Comintern*) in Moscow, the principal task of which was to help establish Communist parties abroad and to direct and lead the developing insurrections.¹⁷⁷ Euphoric optimism led Trotsky to write on 5 August 1919 that, "In Poland, as it appeared, the revolution was developing at a rapid pace".¹⁷⁸ By November 1919, Lenin felt sufficiently confident to argue that, "The victory of Soviet power throughout the world is assured. It is only a question of time".¹⁷⁹

This positive outlook continued in Soviet Russia during the first half of 1920. One month before the Polish offensive towards Kiev, Lenin stated, "...never has the international position of the Soviet Republic been as favourable and as triumphant as it is now".¹⁸⁰ Confidence in the emergence of a Polish revolution by mid-1920 was displayed in a speech given by the Soviet leader to Moscow workers and Red Army men on 13 May 1920, in which he unequivocally stated, "We... think that the Polish proletariat, together with the proletariat of Lithuania and Byelorussia, will see to it that the Polish bourgeoisie and nobility are driven out of the country".¹⁸¹ This conviction led the Soviet regime to endorse the establishment of the *Polrevkom* two months later.

¹⁷⁴ T. Uldricks, p. 60.

¹⁷⁵ L.D. Trotsky, *First Five Years*, p. 62.

¹⁷⁶ NAS, GD 193/327/64, p. 78 (restricted).

¹⁷⁷ According to Trotsky, uprisings swept Europe during the 1st and 2nd Comintern congresses, March 1919-July 1920, L.D. Trotsky, *First Five Years*, p. 62.

¹⁷⁸ J. Meijer, (ed.) *The Trotsky Papers, 1917-1922*, vol. 1, (The Hague, 1964), doc. 347, p. 625. This was not the reality in Poland. Instead, he was clearly carried away by events on the continent.

¹⁷⁹ *Bednota*, no. 478, 7 November 1919.

¹⁸⁰ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, pp. 166.

¹⁸¹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, pp. 120

Belief in the future Polish socialist revolution was shared by Tukhachevsky. Even after the Soviet defeat, he remained convinced of Polish and European revolutionary potential, reporting to the Moscow Military Academy in 1923, “What was the condition of the proletariat in Western Europe? Was it prepared for revolution?... the answer to this question was definitely in the affirmative”.¹⁸² He further asserted,

The situation in Poland was favourable to revolution. A powerful movement among the proletariat, and a no less threatening movement among the agricultural workers, were placing the Polish bourgeoisie in an extremely awkward position... all our experience in the part of Poland we occupied was entirely in favour of the socialist offensive and showed general readiness to support it.¹⁸³

In response Piłsudski remarked,

...in his [Tukhachevsky's] imagination, there was a state of class tension in Poland which was reflected in a general simmering and ferment of unrest among the population... such contradictions, so evidently opposed to the “réalité des choses” could be reconciled only in the mind of a doctrinaire.¹⁸⁴

In reality, the revolutionary upsurge had already long since passed in much of Europe by the time the Soviets crossed the ethnographic Polish border in July 1920.

3.2 The Failure of International Revolution

As early as 5 August 1919, Trotsky had acknowledged privately to the CC RKP(b) that, “...the European revolution appears to have withdrawn into the background”.¹⁸⁵ January 1919 had witnessed the brutal suppression of the Spartacist Uprising in Berlin, resulting in the murder of the German Communist Party (KPD) leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. The Bavarian Soviet Republic lasted only six weeks, before being overthrown by Freikorps and Reichswehr units. In Austria, the revolutionary upsurge of the summer was quickly extinguished, and Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic fell in August 1919. The communist governments hastily established in the Baltic states during

¹⁸² M.N. Tukhachevsky, *Pochód za Wisłę*, p. 195. He argued that, “...the tempest would not have stopped at the Polish frontier. Like a furious torrent it would have swept over the whole of Western Europe”, p. 217.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 195. Contradicting Lenin's admission in his September secret speech, Tukhachevsky argued, “The belief in a Polish revolution... had real foundations and but for our failure the revolutionary movement would have been completely successful”, *ibid*, p. 243.

¹⁸⁴ J. Piłsudski, *Rok*, p. 107.

¹⁸⁵ J. Meijer, *Trotsky Papers*, vol. 1, doc. 347, p. 625.

the winter of 1918-1919 crumbled by mid-1919.¹⁸⁶ In Italy, Antonio Gramsci's efforts to establish a socialist "United Front" against fascism ended in failure. In the United States of America, in 1919, the Socialist Party under Daniel de Leon was persecuted and the long anticipated British and French revolutions failed to materialise.

The tide of public opinion, worldwide, had clearly rejected socialist revolution. With the establishment of an apparently durable peace at Versailles, the European nations increasingly turned their back on international concerns, focusing attention on domestic issues. The *Comintern* proved ineffective in uniting and directing the international movement. As Lenin was forced to concede in December 1919,

...from the point of view of the speed of the development [of world revolution], we have endured an exceptionally difficult period; we have seen for ourselves that the revolution's development in more advanced countries has proved to be considerably slower, considerably more difficult, considerably more complicated.¹⁸⁷

This dramatic shift in international opinion was conveniently overlooked by the Soviet leaders and failed to shake their confidence in a Polish revolution, with fatal consequences in August 1920.¹⁸⁸

4. Conclusion

The Allied Powers, in turn, were deeply shocked at the change of events.¹⁸⁹ They misunderstood both the intention and ability of the Soviet regime to launch an offensive into Poland and had underestimated the capability and determination of the Polish Army and nation to defend their state from foreign aggression during the summer of 1920. For their part, the Allies had failed to provide any concrete assistance to the Poles, despite promises to this effect. Indeed, this culminated with the British Prime Minister, desirous of reestablishing British-Russian trade relations, encouraging the Poles to accept humiliating peace terms at the beginning of August 1920.¹⁹⁰ Those Allied statesmen based in Poland were not, however, slow to acknowledge the great significance of the Polish victory. Rumbold informed the British Foreign Secretary on 24 August,

¹⁸⁶ Estonia gained its independence in February 1919; *Litbel* collapsed in April, in part due to the Polish offensive, and the Latvian Soviet Republic fell in May, R. Service, *Lenin: a political life*, vol. 3, (Basingstoke, 1995), p. 103.

¹⁸⁷ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 39, p. 388.

¹⁸⁸ Lenin failed to heed the concerns of Trotsky, Dzierżyński, Marchlewski and Radek regarding the likelihood of revolution in Poland in late summer 1920, I.I. Kostiusko, vol. 1, doc. 107, pp. 179-180.

¹⁸⁹ N. Davies, *White Eagle*, pp. 220-225.

¹⁹⁰ TNA, FO 688/6, p. 47.

In my view the issue at stake was nothing less than the final ruin and probable disappearance of Poland... a great deal of anxiety has incidentally been removed from the shoulders of the allied statesmen.... Once again the flood of barbarism which threatened to overwhelm Central Europe has been rolled back.¹⁹¹

The diplomatic leader of the Allied Military Mission recorded that it had been a privilege to take part in this episode, in which reality so far outran expectation.¹⁹² Nevertheless, the Western Allies could claim no plaudits for the Polish victory: credit was due to the exertions of the Polish civilian population and military forces alone.

For Soviet Russia, the Battle of Warsaw signified a devastating defeat for the new regime, which it was unable to either forgive or forget.¹⁹³ It also marked a turning point in Soviet ideology as the state increasingly began to direct its resources towards its internal consolidation. The focus became, very assuredly, inward looking. The spread of international revolution, that driving Soviet objective throughout the war, receded temporarily, into the background.

For the Polish Republic, victory over the Red Army at the gates of Warsaw secured the independence of the state, removed the threatened installation of a puppet Soviet regime and laid the foundation of Polish-Soviet relations for the next 25 years. It secured, furthermore, the European continent from the onslaught of Soviet forces until the outbreak of World War Two. A Soviet victory, as noted by Lenin, would have shattered the international system established by the Allies at the Paris Peace Conference.¹⁹⁴ The Battle of Warsaw was, indeed,

...a battle no less decisive than Sedan and the Marne in its influence on the culture of the world, on its science, religion and political development.... had the Soviet forces overcome Polish resistance and captured Warsaw, Bolshevism would have spread throughout Central Europe, and might well have penetrated the whole continent.¹⁹⁵

The stage was set for the concluding chapter of the Polish-Soviet War. At last, diplomacy was to have its day.

¹⁹¹ Ibid; see also, NAS, GD 433/2/15, p. 8.

¹⁹² E. D'Abernon, p. 16.

¹⁹³ P. Stachura, *Poland between the Wars, 1918-1939*, (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 47.

¹⁹⁴ J. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p. 218.

¹⁹⁵ E. D'Abernon, pp. 7-9.

Chapter 6: The Treaty of Riga

1. Introduction

The Polish-Soviet War advanced along its well-established path from mid-August 1920, when military action on the battlefield was accompanied by the pursuit of diplomatic discussion at the negotiating table. Piłsudski's attack, launched on 16 August, was followed the next day by the opening of peace talks at Minsk. The discussions were, however, stillborn.

Both camps were intent on awaiting a favourable military outcome to ensure that the peace would be negotiated from a position of strength.¹ D'Abernon reported to Curzon on 23 August 1920, that he had been informed by captured soldiers of the 16th Soviet Division that,

It was common talk in the Army that the Minsk Conference was not serious, but had only been arranged to pacify the *Entente* and to impress the political parties in England with the Bolsheviks good intentions. The whole Army understood that no peace was intended before Warsaw was captured.²

That this policy was indeed pursued by the Soviet regime can be clearly observed in a recently published archive document. On 17 August 1920, Chicherin suggested to Lenin the feasibility of protracting negotiations with the Poles, remarking,

The change in the situation at Warsaw... leaves in Minsk only two alternatives... 1) we can send an ultimatum with demands for an immediate signing of a peace and afterwards we can refuse to tear it up, 2) or we can go to protracted negotiations, drawn out by the Poles. The first path places us in the odious position of razing the negotiations to the ground. Although an ultimatum would have the aim of soon concluding a peace, the wide masses would only understand that we broke off the negotiations. With the new situation our main aim must be our agitational influence in the West... with long drawn out negotiations the situation becomes more flexible.³

As a result, no questions were satisfactorily settled in the official discussions held between the Polish and Soviet delegations in the Belorussian city from 17 August until 2 September 1920.

Minsk had been carefully chosen by the Soviet authorities as the location for the peace conference which they were so keen to prolong. Not only was this the headquarters of

¹ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, A.12.P.1/3, doc. 8, p. 16 (hereafter Polish Institute).

² The National Archives, FO 688/7, p. 273 (hereafter TNA).

³ I.I. Kostiushko, *Pol'sko-Sovetskaia voina 1919-1920: ranee ne opublikovannye dokumenty i materialy*, vol. 1, (Moscow, 1994), doc. 123, pp. 196-197.

M.N. Tukhachevsky, but it was also a most unsuitable spot at which to conduct negotiations. It was, according to one member of the Allied Military Mission, "...inaccessible by telegraph or radio. Messages never seem to get through, cars are stopped by broken bridges, while messengers, with the now uncertain moving front, are more likely to be shot than to arrive at their destination".⁴

In an attempt to dishearten the Polish delegation, thereby making them more amenable to the Soviet peace terms, and to prevent them from discovering the outcome of the military campaign, the Soviet regime practically imprisoned the delegates in their lodgings and prevented them from communicating by radio with the Warsaw Government. The accommodation provided was extremely uncomfortable.⁵ As one Polish delegate, Stanisław Grabski, later recorded,

The Bolshevik authorities did not make the Polish delegation's path easy. We only arrived at Minsk on the third day, when the retreat of the Soviet armies had already begun. Everything possible was done to prevent us learning the result of the battle. We were accommodated in a house with a garden surrounded by a high board-fence. Outside were sentries who did not allow the local population to come into the least contact with us. We were not allowed to go into the town. We were "de facto" interned. The Russian newspapers which reached Minsk contained no war news at all.⁶

This account was confirmed by a report of Prince Eustachy Sapieha, Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, on 31 August 1920, which recounted close observation by the Soviet authorities and the imposing of severe regulations forbidding the Polish delegation from circulating without an armed escort.⁷ Indeed, the previous day, Sapieha had radioed Chicherin directly to complain about this "intolerable situation".⁸ Crucially, it now appears that this was not the work of the local Soviet authorities, but was instead directed by the Russian leadership itself. Trotsky, as Soviet Commissar for War, was personally involved in the decision and, on 19 August, sent a note to I.T. Smilga and Chicherin regarding the condition of the delegation at Minsk, in which he questioned, "Is it impossible to

⁴ TNA, FO 688/7, pp. 262-263, reported by Edgar D'Abernon to the British Foreign Office, 20 August 1920.

⁵ Rumbold noted, "...twenty persons were confined in a house which had no canalisation. The food was bad", TNA, FO 417/9/44, p. 65.

⁶ S. Grabski, *The Polish-Soviet Front*, (London, 1943), p. 24. For further details of the conditions facing the Polish delegation in Minsk from 23 August-2 September see, Piłsudski Institute 23/4/1/1/33 a-d; TNA, FO 417/9/52, pp. 74-76; TNA, FO 417/9/56, pp. 80-81; J. Dąbski, *Pokój Ryski: Wspomnienia. Pertraktacje. Tajne układy z Joffem. Listy*, (Warsaw, 1931), pp. 53-60.

⁷ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 43, p. 170, "A special permission indicating the streets to be passed, was necessary.... All relations with private persons were prohibited".

⁸ Ibid, pp. 170-171.

accommodate [the Polish delegation] in the town and to surround it with a sharp fence around a well-known square, prohibiting them from leaving...?”⁹

Despite the Polish delegation having taken a portable wireless transmitter with them to Minsk to facilitate continuous communication with their Government, they reported that, “...at the hours appointed for our talks “atmospherics” invariably caused such disturbances as to make communication impossible”.¹⁰ On 22 August, in response to Sapieha’s communication, Chicherin informed the Polish Foreign Minister that,

We are not responsible for the quality of your wireless apparatus and state that all telegrams which the Polish Government sent to Moscow for your delegation and the latter’s telegrams to the Polish Government have been transmitted without delay.¹¹

In this, Chicherin was disingenuous. On 17 August, Danishevskii admitted that the Polish delegation could not communicate with Warsaw and the rest of the world due to the Bolshevik wireless station’s policy of deliberately interfering with their communication channels.¹² Indeed, the opening of Russian archives reveals that on 21 August, Chicherin himself demanded that the radio-transmitter of the Polish delegation be sealed up.¹³ In this instance, it was again a leading Soviet statesman who was directly responsible for the policy of consciously isolating the Polish delegates as the Battle of Warsaw continued.¹⁴

2. The Minsk Negotiations

2.1 Soviet Peace Terms and Reaction

As a result, the diplomatic initiative at Minsk rested primarily with the Soviet Russian-Ukrainian delegation, which submitted its peace proposals to the Poles at the first plenary session on 17 August.¹⁵ The continued optimism of the Soviet regime in the possibility of a Red Army victory at Warsaw was reflected in the extremely severe fifteen-point proposal

⁹ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 128, p. 201, notes that, “V.I. Lenin was in agreement with this”.

¹⁰ S. Grabski, p. 24.

¹¹ TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 128; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 37, p. 155.

¹² TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 127; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 39, p. 161.

¹³ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 1, doc. 128, p. 201.

¹⁴ The Polish delegation only learned of the reversal of fortunes on the battlefield on 21 August, when a Polish wireless operator, “...succeeded in catching part of a war communiqué broadcast from Warsaw. From it we learnt that the Bolsheviks were in full retreat”, S. Grabski, p. 24.

¹⁵ For the full text see, J. Dąbski, pp. 48-53; V. Kluchnikov & A. Sabanin, *Mezhdunarodnaia politika noveishev vremeni v dogovorakh, notakh i deklaratsiakh*, (Moscow, 1928), vol. 3, part 1, p. 47. For details of the delegations membership, see TNA, 688/2/10, p. 127. The Soviet terms were announced by Moscow radio on 21 August, TNA, FO 417/9/36, pp. 55-56.

it laid before the Polish delegation. The first three conditions initially appeared to be both diplomatic and conciliatory, promising that the Russian and Ukrainian Soviet Republics recognised the independence of the Polish Republic, that they would not demand payment of an indemnity and designating Poland's eastern frontier as the line fixed by Curzon on 11 July. In addition, Poland would be awarded districts to the east of Białystok and Kholm.¹⁶ The following five terms aimed, however, at the reduction, indeed almost complete annihilation, of the Polish Armed Forces, demanding that,

- ... 4) Poland will demobilise her army to 50,000 men. For the maintenance of order a citizens' militia of workmen will be formed.
- 5) The above demobilisation is to take place within one month from the date of signing of the Peace Treaty.
- 6) Poland retains enough arms and war material for the above-mentioned army; the remainder will be handed over within one month to Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine....
- 7) Poland will cease to manufacture arms and war material. Munitions factories are to be demobilised.
- 8) Poland undertakes not to allow the passage through her territories of men, horses and war material for states which are hostile to Russia and Ukraine.¹⁷

Military operations were to cease 72 hours after the signing of the armistice and a neutral zone between the states measuring 50 *versty* was to be created. The proposed peace envisaged that the combined Russian and Ukrainian forces would, at 200,000 men, number four times the Polish Army.¹⁸ Furthermore, the Polish Government was to undertake to return all material taken from Soviet territory formerly occupied by the Poles, repair all bridges and give land to the families of Polish citizens killed or wounded during the Polish-Soviet War.¹⁹ Free transit of goods through Poland was to be awarded to Soviet Russia and Ukraine, the railway line Wolkowsk-Białystok-Grajevo placed at their disposal and Poland was to grant complete amnesty to all.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, though ironically, the head of the Soviet delegation was keen to present these terms as both reasonable and generous. In an interview given to the *Manchester Guardian*, Danishevskii argued that the Soviet authorities had no wish to interfere in Poland's internal affairs or to dictate in any way their form of government.²¹

¹⁶ TNA, FO 417/9/36, p. 55.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 56.

¹⁹ Ibid. The last condition was clearly a propaganda move, designed at securing Polish support for the Soviet regime.

²⁰ Ibid. These terms were based on: Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 14 and 16 of the draft *RVS*R proposal of 30 July; Articles 22-23 of the *Narkomindel* proposal of the same date, and on Articles 1, 8, 10, 11 and 25 of the draft peace treaty from 12 August 1920, I.I. Kostiuszko, vol. 2, doc. 123, p. 197.

²¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 August 1920, p. 7. However, the formation of the *Polrevkom* directly contradicted this assertion.

When asked if the Soviet demand to arm the Polish workers could be interpreted as interfering in the domestic life of Poland, Danishevskii replied,

By no means. It means, and actually is, a concession, not an interference. We have two alternatives: disarm Poland or leave arms in the hands of the workers, who we may trust will never use them against Russia.... As a matter of fact, our proposal increases, not diminishes, the armed forces of Poland.²²

Moreover, when the Soviet diplomat was asked if it was intended to be a dictated peace, he responded,

No, not at all.... We are ready to listen to the Polish delegates. We are sincerely determined that this conference should lead to peace. There is not going to be any dictation, and no condition is meant as an ultimatum. Our only aim is to secure our own safety from Polish aggression.... All the talk about our desire to secure a way for our army west is nonsense.²³

Adolph Joffe supported this interpretation on 14 September 1920, when he informed the Latvian newspaper *Latwijas Kareiwis*, that the Soviet Republic did not consider her peace conditions as categorical.²⁴

A less diplomatic indication of the Soviet view of the negotiations can, however, be observed in an order, posted on the streets of Minsk by M.N. Tukhachevsky, Soviet Western Front Commander, on 20 August. In this publication, the Polish delegation was denounced as being, "...composed exclusively of spies and counter-espionage agents", whose sole objective was "...to utilise its position for the purposes of espionage".²⁵ On 23 August, Chicherin was forced to state that, "Insulting pranks of such a kind create an atmosphere in which negotiations are completely impossible... it is necessary to abstain from tricks".²⁶ Even the *Politburo*, Soviet Russia's highest decision-making body, felt the need to condemn this blatant propaganda move as, "...worse than a tactless order, undermining the policies of the party and government", and ordered the *RVSR* to repeal it immediately.²⁷

What then was the Polish reaction to the Soviet peace terms? The vast majority of Poles were horrified at the Soviet communication. According to Stanisław Grabski, the

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. In truth, spreading socialist revolution to the West was the principal Soviet objective during the entire Polish-Soviet campaign.

²⁴ TNA, FO 688/8, p. 223.

²⁵ S. Grabski, p. 25.

²⁶ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 2, doc. 135, pp. 207-208. Chicherin had, himself, used trickery to encourage Polish isolation, notably by preventing Polish telegrams being processed but, in this instance, the order was too obviously undiplomatic and threatened Soviet diplomacy too overtly for Chicherin to let it pass uncensored.

²⁷ Ibid. See, V.I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaja khronika*, vol. 9, (Moscow, 1979), p. 210.

Soviet draft peace, "...would have made Poland into a political vassal of the Soviet Union".²⁸ In defining their own demands for the negotiations, the Poles had attempted to demonstrate moderation.²⁹ On 19 August, Jan Dąbski, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, had informed the conference that, guided by the desire to secure a "...lasting, equitable and democratic peace", the fundamental conditions of peace presented by the Poles was simply the assurance of the independence and integrity of Poland without interference in her internal affairs.³⁰

Upon learning of the Red Army defeat at the Battle of Warsaw, the Polish delegation wasted no time in categorically rejecting the Soviet peace terms at the third meeting of the Minsk conference on 25 August 1920.³¹ All fifteen Soviet demands were refused.³² Jan Dąbski, head of the Polish delegation, opened proceedings by condemning the Soviet Government's three-fold objective. He argued that the Soviets aimed to: reduce the Polish Armed Forces, thereby preventing Poland from defending herself against a future attack; obtain special rights enabling the Soviet regime to interfere in the internal legislation of the Polish Republic, and to take upon itself the role of special protector of the Polish working class against the State.³³ As a result, he declared,

It is evident that these conditions are not dictated by peaceful designs, but are the result of an imperialistic spirit.... Such peace can be dictated only by the victor to a nation which is on its knees and which is forced to complete capitulation.... The Polish Delegation declares that the principles of peace which have been presented by the Russian Delegation cannot be accepted.³⁴

Dąbski then proceeded to systematically reject each of the Soviet terms, outlining Poland's reasons for refusal. For example, Article 4, calling for the establishment of a civil militia in Poland, was most vehemently refuted by the Polish delegation which declared that it,

...rejects categorically the intention of the Russian Government to force on Poland a one-sided undertaking to reduce her armed forces, and expresses its surprise that such a condition has been put forward which touches the dignity of the Polish nation.... The proposal for a partial substitution of the armed forces through a workmens' militia aims evidently at a violation of the

²⁸ S. Grabski, p. 24.

²⁹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 39, p. 161; TNA, FO 688/6, p. 49.

³⁰ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 41, p. 165.

³¹ J. Dąbski, pp. 60-69. Wandycz dated the Polish rejection to 23 August, P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations, 1917-1921*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 247. British Foreign Office papers dated it to 29 August, TNA, FO 688/2, enclosure no. 551, p. 152.

³² TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 37, p. 56; TNA, FO 417/9, enclosure 41, pp. 58-60; TNA, FO 688/2, enclosure 551, pp. 152-159.

³³ TNA, FO 417/9, enclosure 41, p. 58.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 58-59.

principles of sovereignty which would result in intervention in the internal problems of Poland: it, therefore, cannot be even discussed.³⁵

This forthright rejection of the Soviet terms convinced Danishevskii that the Polish delegation had learnt of the Red Army defeat at Warsaw and he desperately tried to redeem the situation. Firstly, he expressed regret at the tactless publication of Tukhachevsky's order and secondly, conceded that the Soviet draft treaty was simply a starting point for future peace talks.³⁶ In reality, however, the negotiations had reached a stalemate.

2.2 From Minsk to Riga

The arrival in Minsk of Karl Radek, a Polish Jewish communist, to conduct semi-official talks with the Polish delegation, led to a joint decision being taken by the Soviet and Polish diplomats to transfer the negotiations to a neutral country.³⁷ This relocation was widely desired by both camps. For the Poles, Minsk symbolised involvement in humiliating peace negotiations, in spite their military superiority and the continued advance of their army eastwards. For the Russians, weakened by both the resounding defeat of the Red Army and the failure of the Polish revolution, it was desirable to sue for peace in a less hostile environment.

On 29 August 1920, the Polish delegation communicated to Sapieha that their radio had been destroyed under suspicious circumstances and that, consequently, they considered it absolutely essential that the conference immediately be transferred to Riga.³⁸ As a result, the following day, the Polish Foreign Minister telegraphed Chicherin and reported that,

...in order to avoid delays I addressed myself to the Government of Latvia with a view to obtaining their agreement to transferring the peace negotiations to Riga.... At the same time I draw your attention to the fact that your proposal, suggesting Esthonia was received by the Polish Government after the transmission of our telegram to the Latvian Government. The latter's reply, accepting our proposal with regard to Riga, having arrived this morning (August 30) I propose so as to avoid any loss of time that you accept

³⁵ Ibid, p. 59. On 11 September 1920, Rumbold reported, "M. Lukasiewicz said that there had been one really amusing episode in the negotiations.... M. Dombksi [sic] remarked, if Poland accepted a militia of workmen, would Russia agree to arm her bourgeoisie? M. Lukasiewicz said that he would never forget the Russian delegates look of bewilderment when this proposal was translated to them", TNA, FO 417/9, doc. 52, p. 75.

³⁶ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 44, p. 175. On 26 August, the Soviet Government agreed to remove contentious Article 4, TNA, FO 418/54, doc. 54, p. 236. The *NKID* had been widely censored, even by Soviet sympathisers, for its inclusion, *Manchester Guardian*, 27 August 1920, p. 6.

³⁷ S. Grabski, p. 25.

³⁸ TNA, FO 688/2/10, p. 196.

Riga as affording all advantages for both sides in the way of communications and conditions of living.³⁹

On 1 September, the Governments of the *RSFSR* and Ukrainian *SSR* informed the Polish Government of their agreement to conduct further negotiations in Riga and the following day witnessed the final meeting of the Polish-Soviet negotiations at Minsk.⁴⁰ An important juncture in Polish-Soviet diplomacy had closed. The final chapter, which opened on 17 September in the Latvian capital, was to finally draw the Polish-Soviet War to a conclusion six months later.

3. The Riga Negotiations

3.1 The Riga Conference Opens

The Polish-Soviet diplomatic negotiations, commenced at Minsk, and continued at Riga, had developed against a background of continued military operations. It was only in October, with the final victory of the Polish Army over its Red counterpart at the Battles of the Niemen and Szczara, that fighting between the belligerents ceased to accompany the peace talks.⁴¹ Even then, Piłsudski, intent on securing complete victory, wanted his troops to pursue the Soviet army further eastwards. He was prevented from achieving this objective, however, by the Allies failure to support Polish claims in the *kresy*. A direct territorial agreement with the Soviet Republics now proved essential.⁴² Likewise, Soviet Russia's precarious military, domestic and international situation, weakened by the Civil War and the Polish-Soviet War, forced the hand of its leaders to seek an immediate peace. As Lenin reported on 15 October 1920, "The position of the Soviet Republic is most grave, which made us hurry to conclude peace before the winter campaign set in".⁴³ For the final time, the diplomats of Poland and Russia took centre stage.

Preparations for the transferred negotiations began immediately in both states. The Polish delegation, once again headed by Jan Dąbski, comprised representatives of the six parties in the Diet and three delegates chosen by the Head of State and Commander-in-

³⁹ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 43, p. 171. Thus, the Poles presented the relocation as a *fait accompli*.

⁴⁰ TNA, FO 417/9/62, pp. 88-98.

⁴¹ M. Tarczyński (ed), *Bitwa Niemenska 29 VIII-18 X 1920. Dokumenty operacyjne*, (Warszawa, 1998); N. Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: the Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20*, (London, 2003), pp. 226-241.

⁴² P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, p. 251, Piłsudski argued that his hand was also forced by the "...lack of moral strength of the nation".

⁴³ V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 41, (Moscow, 1965), p. 363, (hereafter PSS).

Chief, Piłsudski.⁴⁴ This delegation aimed to represent the widest possible spectrum of Polish political and military life. The Soviet delegation, led by the experienced diplomat Adolf Joffe, and representing both the *RSFSR* and Ukrainian *SSR*, was selected by the *Politburo* at its meetings on 1 and 6 September.⁴⁵

The talks opened at the Blackheaded Hall, in the Latvian capital, on 21 September 1920.⁴⁶ Six days later, the Soviet peace terms were presented to the Polish delegation by Joffe.⁴⁷ Given the weakened Soviet position following the resounding defeat of the Red Army, what did the Russian authorities hope to achieve at Riga? As had been the case throughout the conflict, Lenin continued to wield a tight grasp of Soviet conduct at the conference, exchanging telegrams and supervising the daily activity of his delegation.⁴⁸ He also remained inherently suspicious of Poland and the Allies, arguing less than six weeks before the signing of the Treaty of Riga, that France desired to push Poland into a fresh war with Russia.⁴⁹

However, the results on the battlefields forced his hand and he acknowledged on 22 September 1920, “We are now faced with the question of war or peace with Poland. We want to avoid a winter campaign that will be hard on us and are again offering Poland a peace that is to her advantage and our disadvantage”.⁵⁰ In order to achieve this objective, he was quite prepared to make further concessions to the Poles at the Riga conference.⁵¹ This was of vital importance for Soviet Russia. Joffe stated on 14 September 1920, that the conclusion of peace with Poland, would successfully free Russia from a series of endless wars.⁵² Furthermore, of significant benefit would be, “...the renewal of political-economic relations with the West, without which the restoration of Russia is in some respects

⁴⁴ Representing the Diet were Grabski (People’s National Union); Kiernik (Peasant Party); Barlicki (PPS); Wichliński (Christian Democracy); Mieczkowski (Christian-Nationalists); Waszkiewicz (National Labour Party). Representing Piłsudski were Wasilewski, Kamieniecki and General Kuliński, TNA, FO 417/9, appendix 4.

⁴⁵ I.I. Kostiusko, vol. 2, doc. 141, p. 8; doc. 145, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁶ *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii Sovetsko-Pol'skikh otnoshenii*, vol. 3, (Moscow, 1965), p. 568.

⁴⁷ *Izvestiia*, 1 October 1920; *League of Nations Treaty Series, Treaties and international engagements registered with the Secretariat of the League of Nations*, vol. 4, (Lausanne-Geneva, 1921), p. 7, (hereafter *LNTS*).

⁴⁸ Polish Institute, KOL 104/3, p. 199.

⁴⁹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 42, p. 313.

⁵⁰ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, p. 283-284. This was the reality. The Red Army could no longer continue to fight, L.D. Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed: the military writings and speeches of Leon Trotsky*, vol. 3, (London, 1981), p. 241.

⁵¹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 42, p. 354-356. He believed that this temporary measure would be invalidated by the future spread of the socialist revolution to the West, I.I. Kostiusko, vol. 2, doc. 213, p. 146 & doc. 224, pp. 167-168.

⁵² TNA, FO 688/8, p. 233.

hampered".⁵³ This new willingness to make concessions on the part of the Soviets was recognised and appreciated by the Polish delegates. According to Grabski,

There [in Riga] we met a very different delegation, composed of much more qualified persons under the chairmanship of the practised diplomat Joffe, and provided with a totally different set of instructions.... Moscow sent to Riga a delegation prepared for a really reasonable compromise.⁵⁴

What then were the aims and objectives of the Polish delegation at the Riga Conference? According to Grabski, when the federalist plans of the Head of State failed to materialise, Piłsudski did,

...relinquish it sincerely and boldly.... When the realisation of this project turned out to be impossible... he recognised the necessity of basing the security of Poland, not on its separation from Russia by buffer states such as an independent Ukraine and White Ruthenia would have been, but by a permanent peace with Russia.⁵⁵

In reality, unlike Lenin, Piłsudski largely withdrew from the negotiating process, disillusioned as he was by the failure of the Polish and borderland populations and the *Entente* to support his federalist programme.⁵⁶ His position was further weakened by the constant opposition he faced in the *Sejm*, particularly from the National Democrats over the peace settlement.⁵⁷

It was the National Democrats which crucially directed the Polish conference agenda.⁵⁸ Consequently, on 14 November 1920, the Polish Press Agency in Riga issued *Information Bulletin, no. 57: Rzqd i wojsko*, which reported that,

Poland shall say in Riga, that she will not demand for herself anything but her ethnographical frontiers.... It will not allow her great territories but will secure the solidity of a peace that will guarantee to Poland and Eastern Europe the conditions for a democratic and civilised development.⁵⁹

This desire not to retain large numbers of non-Polish inhabitants within the Polish borders was guided by Dąbski and Grabski, as Chief Polish delegate and Chairman of the Polish territorial commission at Riga, respectively. The Polish representatives were heavily criticised by many Poles for their failure to prolong the peace talks until the Polish Armed

⁵³ Ibid, p. 226.

⁵⁴ S. Grabski, p. 26.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 28. Rumbold was sceptical of these claims, TNA, FO 688/6, pp. 338-339.

⁵⁶ TNA, FO 417/9/50, pp. 73-74; TNA, FO 417/9/90, pp. 153-155.

⁵⁷ Piłsudski Institute 23/4/1/1/13; TNA, FO 417/9/67, pp. 106-108; TNA, FO 417/9/68, pp. 108-109; TNA, FO 417/9/78, p. 127; TNA, FO 417/9/79, p. 128.

⁵⁸ Piłsudski Institute 23/4/1/1/45.

⁵⁹ TNA, FO 688/8, p. 238.

Forces had reached the December 1919 frontline, especially as the Soviets would most likely have agreed to this line.⁶⁰

Poland's peace terms, almost identical to those proposed at the Minsk conference, were presented to the conference on 24 September 1920. They called for,

- a) The termination of the struggle between Poland and Russia for the territories in dispute between them, and the establishment of a basis for good neighbourly relations. The state frontier should not be determined by reference to historical claims, but by a just harmonisation of the vital interests of both negotiating parties.
- b) The just solution of questions of nationality in the above said territories in accordance with democratic principles.
- c) The permanent assurance of each of the negotiating states against the possibility of attack by the other.⁶¹

Crucially, on 5 October, Joffe and Dąbski signed a protocol which stated that agreement had been reached on the principal conditions for a Preliminary Peace Treaty.⁶²

3.2 The Preliminary Peace Treaty, 12 October 1920

The Preliminary Peace Treaty and Armistice which ended the Polish-Soviet War was finally signed at Riga on 12 October 1920.⁶³ The opening text of this document closely followed the Soviet draft document presented by Joffe on 27 September, reading as follows,

The Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic on the one side and the Polish Republic on the other... to work out terms which should be made the basis of a stable, honourable peace, equally acceptable to both sides, have decided to enter into negotiations with the object of concluding an armistice and the preliminary conditions of peace.⁶⁴

The importance of the question of the Polish-Soviet border can be clearly observed, forming as it did the first Article of the Treaty. The Soviet Republics accepted, without alteration, the frontier line proposed by the Poles, whilst Poland recognised the independence of Ukraine and White Russia. It was agreed that those areas currently in

⁶⁰ S. Grabski, p. 27. This line had been proposed by Soviet Russia to Poland as an acceptable international border in January 1920. In his defence, Grabski argued that, "...it seemed to us incontrovertible that, if one of those States should incorporate districts, a considerable majority of whose population desired to break away from it and unite with the other, the resultant situation would be an ever-smouldering source of conflict and sooner or later would lead to open war".

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 29.

⁶² *D & M*, vol. 3, p. 569. See, J. Dąbski, pp. 29-129; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2.

⁶³ TNA, FO 417/9/83, enclosure 3, pp. 141-145.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 141. The only divergence from the Soviet draft was that the word "prolonged" was removed from the description of the peace sought.

dispute between the Poles and Lithuanians to the west of the boundary would be settled by Poland and Lithuania alone without outside interference.⁶⁵ In return, transit through Lithuania for the Soviet Republics was guaranteed and the final treaty would not appear as a Polish *diktat*.⁶⁶

In direct response both to the prolonged Soviet propaganda onslaught conducted during the War and to the establishment of the *Polrevkom* and local *revkomy* throughout Poland, aimed at the overthrow of the Polish Government, Article 2 of the treaty addressed these crucial security issues. It further reflected Soviet concerns that Poland, as a puppet of the *Entente*, was a spearhead aimed at the heart of the regime in Russia. By this extremely important condition,

Both contracting parties mutually confirm complete respect for their State sovereignty and abstention from any kind of interference in the internal affairs of the other side. Moreover, both [undertake]... an obligation neither to create nor to support organisations which have as their aim an armed struggle against the other contracting party, which have as their aim the overthrow of the State or social order of the other side... as well as of organisations assuming the rôle of a government of the other side.⁶⁷

The following two conditions allowed individuals to freely choose Polish, Russian or Ukrainian citizenship, and guaranteed nationals the right of free development of their culture, language and religion.⁶⁸ Article 5 stipulated that both parties mutually renounced the repayment of war expenses and indemnities for war losses, while the following four provisions concerned the exchange and safety of prisoners of war, civilian hostages, exiles and refugees, and the reciprocal granting of full amnesty by Poland, Ukraine and Russia.⁶⁹ By Article 10, the contracting parties reciprocally recanted all rights to the State property of the other side. It was agreed that, "...archives, libraries, works of art, historical war trophies, antiquities and the like", removed to Russia following the Polish partitions, as well as all moveable Polish property forcibly or voluntarily taken to Russia after 1 August 1914, with the exception of war booty, be returned to the Polish Republic.⁷⁰

Negotiations were to commence immediately to secure conventions on commerce, navigation, sanitation, communication, post and telegraph, whilst the exchange of goods,

⁶⁵ TNA, FO 417/9/83, enclosure 3, pp. 141-142. For details of the Polish-Lithuanian conflict which continued to rage during the Riga negotiations see, TNA, FO 417/9; Piłsudski Institute 23/4/1/1/9.

⁶⁶ S. Grabski, p. 70.

⁶⁷ TNA, FO 417/9/83, enclosure 3, p. 142.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 142-143.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 143-144.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 143-144. Furthermore, Russia and Ukraine were obliged to recognise Polish citizens as most favoured in the restitution of property and indemnity for losses suffered during the Russian Revolution and Civil War.

and the right of transit for Poles, Russians and Ukrainians in each three states was guaranteed.⁷¹ Article 15 determined that immediately upon the signing of the preliminary peace, all parties would enter into negotiations for the conclusion of a final treaty.⁷²

Crucially, the 13th condition of the preliminary peace invoked "...a special agreement for an armistice".⁷³ The resultant Armistice Agreement, also signed on 12 October at Riga, was integral to the preliminary peace treaty and had the same binding force. It stated that,

One hundred and forty-four hours after the signature of the treaty of the preliminary conditions of peace i.e. at midnight, 18 October 1920, mid-European time, both contracting parties are compelled to cease all military activities by land, air and water.⁷⁴

The armistice terms could be renounced by either side if 48 hours notice was given.⁷⁵ As reported by an Official Polish Military Communiqué on 15 October 1920, the Peace Preliminaries and Armistice came into force 144 hours after it was signed.⁷⁶ The Polish-Soviet War, thereby, ended at 24.00 hours on 18 October 1920.⁷⁷ Both documents were ratified by Ukraine on 21 October, by the Polish *Sejm* the following day, by the *RSFSR* on 23 October and by Piłsudski on 27 October.⁷⁸

3.3 Riga Negotiations, October 1920-March 1921

Following the signing of the Preliminary Peace Treaty and Armistice, both the Polish and Russian delegations returned to their respective capitals to organise the diplomats selected to negotiate the Treaty of Riga.⁷⁹ It was expected that, as the preliminary settlement had established Polish-Soviet agreement on the main questions of peace, the final treaty would be drafted and signed relatively quickly. This hope was soon dashed.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 144.

⁷² Ibid. The agreement was subject to ratification and would come into force when the documents were exchanged at Libau, within fifteen days of its signing.

⁷³ TNA, FO 417/9/83, annex no. 2 "Armistice Agreement", enclosure 3, pp. 145-146.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 145.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 146.

⁷⁶ Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, p. 110.

⁷⁷ A. Zamoyski, *The Polish Way: a thousand year history of the Poles and their culture*, (London, 1987), p. 338, incorrectly dated the armistice to 16 October 1920.

⁷⁸ I.I. Kostiushko, vol. 2, docs 182-183, pp. 92-94 & doc. 186, pp. 97-110. Slusser and Triska incorrectly dated the Polish ratification to 26 October, R. Slusser & J. Triska, *A Calendar of Soviet Treaties, 1917-1957*, (Stanford, Calif., 1959), p. 14. The acts of ratification were exchanged at Libau on 2 November 1920.

⁷⁹ Dąbski and Joffe continued to head the delegations but each were supported by three new delegates, TNA, FO 417/9/134, p. 224. For Soviet preparations see, *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii*, f. 63, op. 1, d. 315, (hereafter *RGASPI*).

As with Polish-Soviet diplomacy throughout the war, the peace negotiations, driven by suspicion and mistrust, developed into a protracted affair. The Soviets, in particular, launched an international diplomatic offensive against the Polish State for alleged violation of the preliminary peace and armistice. Militarily defeated, *agit-prop* remained their only available weapon.⁸⁰ On 29 October, for instance, a Soviet diplomatic note, signed by Obolenskii and sent to Dąbski, accused the Poles of violating point 5 of the Armistice Treaty.⁸¹ Krasin, on 1 November, protested to the British Government about Poland and the *Entente* arming the troops of Balachowicz and Petlura in their conflict with White Russia and Ukraine in the *kresy*.⁸² Rumblings of discontent continued to be heard, however, throughout the months of the conference.⁸³

What then was achieved by the diplomats of Poland and the Soviet Republics between November 1920 and March 1921? Firstly, on 14 November, a Military Agreement, signed by Dąbski and Joffe, laid down conditions for the evacuation of the Polish-occupied zone as required by the preliminary peace treaty.⁸⁴ At the next meeting of the conference, two commissions were appointed to elaborate the conditions for the exchange of hostages and prisoners of war, and to study the outstanding economic questions, respectively.⁸⁵

In an attempt to facilitate agreement, one unconventional, some would argue undiplomatic, method adopted was the decision of the two chairmen to meet privately to discuss matters of crucial importance. This action greatly facilitated the work of the Riga conference, allowing them to dispense with diplomatic formalities.⁸⁶ The diplomats no longer had any need to showboat to an international audience. Sapieha reported on 20 October 1920 that,

In his private conversations with M. Dąbski.... M. Joffe had said on numerous occasions that if any particular demands were pressed by the Poles he would have to give way, as he was not in a position to resist, but that his object was to make a peace which would have the appearance, and so far as

⁸⁰ I.I. Kostiuško, vol. 2, doc. 190, pp. 115-116.

⁸¹ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 247, pp. 465-467.

⁸² Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 20, p. 48. In response, on 21 October the Polish High Command ordered the breaking of all military contact with these armed forces, Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/1, doc. 22, p. 55.

⁸³ On 25 November, the Poles accused the Russian Government of spinning out negotiations, "...for propaganda purposes", TNA, FO 417/9/134, p. 224.

⁸⁴ TNA, FO 417/9/134, p. 224.

⁸⁵ TNA, FO 417/9/134, p. 224, the latter was presided over by Strasburger for the Poles and Obolenskii for the Soviets. For a detailed examination of the legal, political and financial protocols settled by the economic commission, see, *RGASPI*, f. 63, op. 1, d. 190. Economic and financial questions proved to be the most difficult to reconcile during these talks, Polish Institute, KOL 104/3, p. 203.

⁸⁶ See, J. Dąbski, pp. 104-110 & 176-181.

possible the substance, of a genuine compromise between conflicting interests, and not that of terms imposed by the victor on the vanquished.⁸⁷

Joffe may have been negotiating from a weaker bargaining position, following the defeat of the Red Army, but he was the more experienced diplomat. Stephen Tallents, head of the British Relief Mission to the Baltic States in 1919-1921 spoke to his Foreign Office on 28 September 1920, of "...the superiority which, in the opinion of all neutral observers that I have met, M. Joffe has established over M. Dąbski in the course even of the three mainly formal sessions which have so far been held in Riga".⁸⁸

By February 1921, both camps were increasingly desperate to sign a final treaty. On 8 February, Dąbski informed Witos that, "...the date of the Upper Silesian plebiscite hangs over him like a nightmare".⁸⁹ It was absolutely essential that peace be secured before this date. Failure to do so may discourage the inhabitants of Upper Silesia from rejoining with Poland. Similarly, domestic unrest within Russia, in particular at Kronstadt and Tambov, pushed the *Politburo* on 21 February 1921, to resolve to secure peace as quickly as possible.⁹⁰ Three days later the Polish and Soviet delegations signed a reparations agreement, a protocol to extend the armistice treaty, a supplementary protocol of the preliminary peace conditions and a protocol regarding a mixed border commission.⁹¹ The following month, the full treaty of peace between Poland and the Soviet Republics was finally signed.

4. The Treaty of Riga

4.1 The Treaty of Riga, 18 March 1921

At 7pm on 18 March 1921, the Polish-Soviet War formally ended with the signing of the Treaty of Riga between Poland, the *RSFSR* and Ukrainian *SSR*. It was signed on behalf of *Rząd Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* by Jan Dąbski, Stanisław Kauzik, Edward Lechowicz, Henryk Strasburger and Leon Wasilewski.⁹² The Soviet delegates accorded the honour of

⁸⁷ TNA, FO 417/9/89, pp. 151-152.

⁸⁸ TNA, FO 417/9/63, p. 99.

⁸⁹ Polish Institute, KOL 104/3, p. 205.

⁹⁰ R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919-1924*, (London, 1994), p. 192.

⁹¹ *D & M*, vol. 3, doc. 267, pp. 502-514.

⁹² Polish Institute, A.11.76/30, p. 2.

witnessing the peace were Adolf Joffe, Jakub Fürstenberg-Hanecki, Emmanuel Kviring, Leonid Obolenskii and Jur Kotsubinskyi.⁹³

The opening preamble stated that all three contracting parties sought the conclusion of, "...a final, lasting and honourable peace based on a mutual understanding and in accordance with the peace preliminaries signed at Riga on October 12, 1920".⁹⁴ A cessation of the state of war between the two camps was announced in the first Article, followed by recognition of the independence of Ukraine and White Ruthenia, and an extremely detailed description of the frontier between Poland and her eastern neighbours.⁹⁵ The frontline coincided roughly with the Polish-Russian border of 1793-1795, splitting the ethnically mixed *kresy* between the signatories. By Article 3,

Russia and the Ukraine abandon all rights and claims to the territories situated to the West of the frontier laid down by Article 2 of the Present Treaty. Poland, on the other hand, abandons in favour of the Ukraine and White Ruthenia, all rights and claims to the territory situated to the East of this frontier.⁹⁶

Again, concern over the establishment of alien institutions and the dissemination of agitation-propaganda in their respective territories was expressed in the fifth Article.⁹⁷ The parties undertook neither to create nor protect organisations formed to encourage armed conflict against the other party or to undermine its territorial integrity. They further agreed not to subvert by force the political or social institutions of the contracting parties and to prohibit both military recruiting and the entry into their territory of armed forces, munitions and war material destined for any such organisations.⁹⁸ Minority, religious and educational rights were granted to national minorities by Article 7.⁹⁹ The Treaty, of crucial importance for the peace of continental Europe, was ratified by the Polish Government on 15 April and by the Soviet Republics one week later.¹⁰⁰

What was the public reaction to this event? How was the peace settlement received in both Poland and Soviet Russia? This was not a treaty imposed by a victor state on its

⁹³ *Polish-Soviet Relations, 1918-1943: official documents*, (Washington, 1968), doc. 3, p. 74 (hereafter, *Official Documents*).

⁹⁴ *Official Documents*, p. 73. For the full text see, Polish Institute, A.12/76/30, pp. 2-33; *LNTS*, vol. 6, pp. 51-169.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 74-78. Thirty-three paragraphs outlined the Polish-Soviet border.

⁹⁶ *Official Documents*, p. 4, the territory to the West of the borderline subject to dispute between Poland and Lithuania, was to be resolved solely by those two states, p. 78.

⁹⁷ It stated that both parties "...mutually undertake to... refrain from all agitation, propaganda or interference of any kind", *ibid*, p. 78.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁰ The documents of ratification were exchanged at Minsk on 30 April 1921, S. Dąbrowski, "The Peace Treaty of Riga", *The Polish Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, (1960), p. 34.

vanquished opponents and its compromise nature was greatly stressed by the Chairmen of both the Polish and the Soviet delegations. Dąbski, stated,

By common agreement we have traced the frontiers and have decided that neither party shall interfere in the internal affairs of the other; we have granted every privilege to national minorities; we offer the greatest possible faculties for the choice of citizenship; we have come to an understanding on many complicated questions concerning economics and the settlement of accounts; we have laid the foundations for future relations both economic and political; we have endeavoured to solve all questions in a fair and just manner; we have each made concessions, not only in order to reach agreement, but to render our future relations easier.¹⁰¹

Similarly, Joffe stressed the conciliatory atmosphere in which the negotiations were conducted, which rendered it much easier to reach a conclusion acceptable to both parties.¹⁰² As a result, he believed that they had, "...signed a peace which entirely satisfies all the essential, vital and just demands of the Polish people".¹⁰³ It could be argued that both sides abated their extreme claims in an attempt to find common ground. In reality, however, Soviet Russia's catastrophic military defeat gave her little alternative.

The Riga settlement was certainly a territorial compromise. For the first time since the outbreak of the Great War, the Treaty delimited the frontier between the Polish and Soviet states. It thereby succeeded in achieving an objective which the Treaty of Versailles had failed to secure almost two years earlier. Nevertheless, it was never going to be easy to resolve the extremely complex and diverse Polish-Soviet border issues. Despite the best efforts of the peace delegations to take into account economic, political, geographic, ethnic and local factors, the resultant settlement was unsatisfactory to many. In an attempt to establish future peaceful relations with Soviet Russia, the Poles agreed to terms which, "...were exceedingly moderate and restricted to territories essential to safeguard her economic and strategic independence".¹⁰⁴

The new frontline, which ran 50 to 100kms west of the border proposed by the Soviet Government in April 1920, rested between the Curzon and Borisov Lines and between the Russian frontier of 1914 and the Polish border prior to the 1772 partition. It also ran

¹⁰¹ *Official Documents*, pp. 1-2. Dąbski wanted Poland to act as a bridge between East and West, J. Dąbski, pp. 188-190; Polish Institute, A.12.P.2/2, doc. 45, p. 176.

¹⁰² J. Degras, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, 1917-24*, vol. 1, (London, 1951), pp. 242-244.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, pp. 243-244, he did acknowledge, however, that, "...peaceful relations between the peoples are not concluded at the signing of a peace treaty but are only then begun".

¹⁰⁴ *Official Documents*, pp. 2-3.

further west than the line proposed by Soviet Russia on 28 January 1920.¹⁰⁵ The *Kresy*, between the Rivers Dnieper and Dwina in the east, and the River Bug in the west, was thus divided between the Poles and Soviets.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, Poland renounced claims to 120,000 square miles of territory, annexed by the partitions.¹⁰⁷ This land was less than that claimed by Dmowski at the Paris Peace Conference, but more than the Allies recognised as being indisputably Polish territory.¹⁰⁸ The Poles retained control of the historic cities of Wilno and Lwów, but lost huge areas previously retained by the Polish Commonwealth. The national census of 1921 recorded that Poland controlled 389,000kms of territory, making her the sixth largest country in Europe.¹⁰⁹

In turn, Soviet Russia was forced to concede territory far to the east of the Curzon Line, including all of Eastern Galicia.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, only 150,000 Russians were recorded as residing on Polish territory in 1921.¹¹¹ Moreover, Russia retained the territory acquired by the Tsarist authorities at the second partition and succeeded in achieving a border more favourable than that proposed by the Poles at the Versailles Conference.¹¹²

Neither did the Treaty of Riga represent a political victory for either belligerent. Instead, both sides were forced to concede their inability to secure the war aims defined by their leadership at the onset of the conflict. The peace settlement failed to realise Piłsudski's goals both of re-establishing Poland as a great European power and of creating a federation of East European states to act as a defensive barrier against the Poles' traditional Russian opponent. Whilst the Polish terms were to a large degree formulated by the annexationist National Democratic Party, they too were unable to fully dictate the final settlement, being forced to forfeit the border sought at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Likewise, the Soviet leaders were forced to concede failure in their attempts to sovietise Poland, through a dual diplomatic-propaganda and military offensive. Their

¹⁰⁵ Polish Institute, A.12.76/30. The 28 January line ran 60-90 miles in the north-east sector and 30-50 miles in the south-east sector to the east of the Treaty of Riga line, *Official Documents*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ The border was finally and fully delimited by a Soviet-Polish agreement on 28 November 1922, K. Radek, *Put' kommunisticheskogo internatsionala*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Official Documents*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Zamoyski states that over two million Poles were left outside the state border, A. Zamoyski, *Polish Way*, p. 338. Wandycz gave this figure as three million, P. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, p. 284.

¹⁰⁹ P. Stachura, *Themes of Modern Polish History: proceedings of a symposium on 28 March 1992 in honour of the centenary of General Stanisław Maczek*, (Glasgow, 1992), pp. 18-19.

¹¹⁰ Poland received a *sui generis* mandate which allowed her to take over the whole of Eastern Galicia up to the River Zbrucz, Polish Institute, A.11.49/SOW/20, p. 1. She, thus, gained 42,471 square miles and a population of four million beyond the Curzon Line. Russia retained Dneiper Ukraine.

¹¹¹ *Official Documents*, p. 4.

¹¹² P. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies, 1919-1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno*, (Westport, Conn., 1974), p. 179.

ultimate objective of breaking out of isolation by spreading socialist revolution west, across the Polish bridge, to industrialised Germany, failed to materialise despite social unrest across the continent in 1919 and 1920. Indeed, the single most important political gain achieved by the Soviets through the Treaty of Riga was the Polish granting of *de jure* recognition of the Russian communist regime.

4.2 Reaction to the Peace Settlement

Was there, therefore, dissatisfaction in Poland and Russia at the signing of the Treaty? On the contrary, the immediate response in Poland was of general and widespread relief. According to the Polish diplomat Roman Debicki, “Poland’s acceptance of the Treaty of Riga as the solution to the conflict was genuine and sincere”, whilst Aleksandra Piłsudska believed that, “Poland was rid of the menace of Russia for the time being at least”.¹¹³ The National Democrats, in particular, felt that they had achieved a great success over the federalists. In Poland, it was hoped that the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet War would usher in a period of stability and peace, during which attention could be turned to the pressing domestic concerns facing the country.

Nevertheless, many Poles, including Piłsudski, remained deeply suspicious of Soviet intentions and the longevity of the Riga settlement. He argued that, “When she [Russia] is weak she is ready to promise anything.... But she is equally ready to break those promises the moment that she feels herself strong enough to do so”.¹¹⁴ A soldier first and foremost, Piłsudski’s distrust of diplomacy as a tool of international relations was reinforced by the events of the Polish-Soviet War. Of the Riga settlement he commented, “For centuries men have proclaimed peace with their lips and yet continued to make war.... Why should we suppose that human nature is going to undergo a complete change?”¹¹⁵

In Russia, the Treaty was regarded as a Soviet diplomatic victory. In March 1920, Lenin had written that,

The idea of compromises must not be renounced. The point is through all the compromises which are sometimes necessary... to be able to preserve, strengthen, steel and develop the revolutionary tactics and organisation... of the working class and its organised vanguard, the Communist Party.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ R. Debicki, *Foreign Policy of Poland, 1919-39: from the rebirth of the Polish Republic to World War II*, (London, 1963), p. 44; A. Piłsudska, *Piłsudski: a biography by his wife*, (New York, 1941), p. 302.

¹¹⁴ A. Piłsudska, p. 308.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 326.

¹¹⁶ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 40, p. 290.

This was, indeed, the Soviet reaction to the peace settlement. Although the conditions of peace were “very burdensome” to Soviet Russia, Trotsky acknowledged that its most important outcome was the avoidance of a winter campaign, essential for the revival of the Soviet economy.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the Poles could have achieved better conditions in March and April 1920 before the Kiev offensive.¹¹⁸ This point was also stressed by Lenin, who argued that,

...the peace terms give them less territory than was previously offered.... We have emerged from this war by concluding a favourable peace. In other words, we have won. Anyone who examines the map will see that we have won, that we have emerged from this war with more territory than we had before it started.¹¹⁹

However, theoretically the Soviets did not measure victory by the territory acquired, given their belief that international borders were transitory and would be unnecessary upon the victory of a worldwide socialist revolution. As a result, the front defined by the Treaty was never acknowledged by the Soviet regime as a permanent solution to the Polish-Soviet conflict. In September 1939, the establishment of the Riga frontiers were to be once again questioned by the armed forces of the Soviet regime.

5. Conclusion

Upon the signing of the Treaty, the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mayerovitch, argued that,

This treaty is of great importance not only to Poland and Russia, but to the whole of Europe – in particular to Eastern Europe. The Peace Treaty of Riga is a fundamental condition for the closer approach and union between the nations of Eastern Europe.¹²⁰

Was this hope realised? Did the peace of Riga resolve the age-old Polish-Soviet conflict?

The history of hostile relations and mutual suspicion between the Poles and Russians ensured that the implementation of the Treaty was not easily achieved. Attempts were certainly made to establish a level of cooperation between the two states and many contemporaries, desperate to facilitate the establishment of cordial relations between the

¹¹⁷ L.D. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, vol. 3, p. 241-242.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 242-243.

¹¹⁹ V.I. Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 41, pp. 345-347. Radek argued that at Riga, “...not a single vital interest of Russia had been injured by its terms”, K. Radek, *Pravda*, 15 October 1920. This view was shared by Chicherin and Marchlewski, Polish Institute, A.11.49/SOW/20, p. 26.

¹²⁰ H.W. Henderson, *An Outline of Polish-Soviet Relations*, (Glasgow, 1943), pp. 9-10.

East European states, were keen to stress these achievements. For instance, a collection of official Polish Government documents reported that,

From 1921 to 1939... relations developed normally and were gradually extended and improved. Thus, during the years that followed the signing of the peace treaty, a number of conventions were concluded in a spirit of good neighbourhood.¹²¹

These included the regulation of passenger and freight travel on the Moscow-Warsaw railway, the establishment of a sanitary convention and the signing of a postal and telegraphic arrangement.¹²²

However, the peace signatories consistently complained after March 1921 that their counterpart had failed to meet its commitments.¹²³ Many remained sceptical about securing a Polish-Soviet rapprochement after 1921.¹²⁴ These problems were compounded by the failure of the Allied Powers to recognise the Treaty of Riga for almost two years. Only on 15 March 1923, did the Conference of Ambassadors accord British, French, Italian and Japanese recognition of the Peace Settlement.¹²⁵ The United States of America granted its acceptance on 5 April 1923.¹²⁶ Given consistent Allied procrastination throughout the War, the accordance of Allied recognition so late was not surprising.

In truth, relations between the two states fluctuated greatly. For the Poles, Russia incited historical, political, geographic and ideological opposition. The Soviets, too, remained suspicious of Poland for historic, national, social and ideological reasons. The Polish-Soviet War had deepened antagonism between the two states, which the remaining inter-war years were unable to overcome. Severe Soviet humiliation at the outcome of the War made it inevitable that once Soviet Russia regained its stability and strength to redress the situation, its attention would turn once more to its Polish neighbour. The Treaty of Riga, as with the earlier Versailles Settlement, had failed to provide either a concrete or enduring solution to Polish-Soviet relations.

¹²¹ *Official Documents*, p. 5. The Treaty of Riga was again ratified in the preamble of the Polish-Soviet Treaty of Non-Aggression, signed on 25 July 1932, *LNTS*, vol. 86, p. 41.

¹²² R. Debicki, p. 46.

¹²³ Polish Institute, A.12.P.4/1, doc. 2, p. 5; National Archives of Scotland, GD 193/330, p. 18.

¹²⁴ Debicki feared that, "All Polish conciliatory moves, no matter how disinterested, were interpreted by Moscow as signs of weakness", R. Debicki, p. 45.

¹²⁵ TNA, FO 93/129/4, pp. 1-5; Polish Institute, A.12/76/30.

¹²⁶ Polish Institute, A.12/76/30. Officially, the reason given for the delay was the undefined status of Eastern Galicia.

Conclusion

The Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921 was a direct consequence of the ideological objectives pursued by the belligerents. The Soviet regime in Russia was united, guided and driven in every decision it made and every action it took, throughout the conflict, by the desire to implement the Marxist doctrine of international socialist revolution. The Poles, in contrast, were led by two opposing and contradictory ideologies: a federalist programme vigorously pursued by Piłsudski and an annexationist agenda desired by Dmowski. Although at the two peace conferences which delimited the war: Paris in 1919 and Riga in 1921, Dmowski dominated the Polish programme, it was the war aims of Piłsudski which ultimately directed Polish policy towards its eastern neighbour during the war.

Ideology shaped the political agenda and war aims of both states, and was implemented through the foreign policy, diplomatic negotiation and military engagements pursued. It also proved to be *the* principal obstacle to securing cordial relations between the newly-established, infant regimes. This indisputable fact has become abundantly clear through the examination of, in particular, the Soviet dimension in greater detail than it has previously received. The motivations and objectives of the regime, and the victories secured and defeats suffered by it in the political, foreign policy, diplomatic and military spheres, stemmed from the unflinching goal of the RKP(b) leadership to implement the principles of Marx and to pursue a socialist agenda in its relations with Poland and the wider international community. However, what was developed with the export of socialist revolution is something which historians would distinguish as Marxist-Leninism.

As demonstrated, ideology directed both the participant's perception of the conflict and was responsible, in part, for their failure to agree upon its definition or nature, or even to reach agreement about its date of commencement. The unannounced and unplanned conflict developed and escalated as the hostilities became of greater importance for the safety of the respective regimes, but it is clear that it must be dated from the earliest days of February 1919. From this time it was of crucial importance for the security of the new, and fragile, Polish state.

For Lenin and his fellow communists, the hostilities were initially viewed as a continuation and extension of the Russian Civil War, by which domestic and foreign opponents had sought to overthrow the Soviet regime, since its foundation in October 1917. During the course of the war this altered and it came to be regarded as a means of

exporting the revolution westwards. In this way, the Civil War could be transformed into an international war between the classes, directed not only against Poland, but also against the *Entente* and the wider capitalist world. This transformed it from a domestic affair into a conflict with much wider implications.

Conviction that socialist revolution was impossible if confined to one country drove Soviet policy. As a result, Lenin advocated a three-stage revolutionary process: the separation of nations, the establishment of socialist revolutions within each state, and their voluntary reunification into a Soviet Socialist Republic. This thesis has argued that, fundamentally, Lenin regarded the Polish-Soviet War as representing the second stage in this process. This fact is absolutely critical for our understanding of the policies which the *Politburo* endorsed and implemented in its Polish policy in 1919-1921. It is now certain that the Red Army offensive into Poland in July 1920 aimed not only at the sovietisation of Poland, but also at spreading the military campaign further westwards, in particular to Germany, Britain and south-western Europe. Lenin was convinced that the offensive would ignite revolutions across Europe, drawing fresh recruits into the ranks of the Red Army as it had during the Russian Civil war. War with Poland, the linchpin of the Treaty of Versailles, thus provided the Soviet regime with a unique opportunity to influence politics not only in Poland, but in all of Europe, and was as a result, viewed as the initial engagement in a war to overthrow the Versailles settlement.

In contrast, for the Poles, regardless of their political persuasion, the war was first and foremost a national conflict against a traditional foreign adversary. Piłsudski's resultant promotion of a federalist programme sought to safeguard Polish independence, provide an essential buffer between Poland and Russia and resolve their traditional conflict for control of the *kresy*. Interestingly, both he and Lenin, demonstrated great practical flexibility in pursuit of their ideological objectives: Piłsudski regarded socialism as a medium to be used in the fight to secure Poland's independence in exactly the same way that Lenin viewed national self-determination as a means to assist the establishment of worldwide socialist revolution.

There can be no doubt that the historical context of the war proved crucial not only for its outbreak, but also for its development and eventual settlement. The Great War and the resultant Paris Peace Conference facilitated the establishment of the world's first socialist state in Russia in October 1917 and the reestablishment of Poland's independence thirteen months later. It further laid the foundations for a resumption of traditional Polish-Russian

hostilities. Ideology, again, had lasting implications for the treatment of both states at Paris and the resultant conflicting policies pursued by the peacemakers greatly intensified difficulties for Poland and Russia in the international arena.

The Poles, guided by Dmowski's annexationist agenda, were criticised as nationalist and imperialist and Britain, under Lloyd George, in particular, sought to limit Polish claims at every turn. Ultimately, the Conference failed to implement the border proposed as Poland's eastern frontier and, lacking willing armed forces to defend its decisions, was unable to prevent Piłsudski's military drive eastwards. Soviet endorsement of Marxist ideology prevented the regime from seeking any diplomatic representation at Paris. Abhorrence of Soviet ideology, in turn, prevented the Allies from allowing any official Russian representation in Paris, or from recognising the Soviet regime *de facto* or *de jure*, largely at the insistence of Clemenceau and the French delegation. Yet although the Conference was unable to formulate a coherent, consistent and coordinated Russian policy, fear of Soviet ideology influenced decision-making in Paris at every turn. Russia's absence was one of the Conference's greatest failings, making it impossible to resolve any Russian-related issues and compounding her isolation in the international arena.

The Treaty of Versailles embodied the insurmountable problems facing the Conference in its Polish and Russian policies and demonstrated its absolute inability to influence the escalation of hostilities between the neighbouring states. Both states, thereafter, recognised that the Allies lacked any real authority to enforce their wishes on the war and its outcome, and this influenced their relations with the western states for the duration of the conflict. Procrastination became the defining characteristic of western policy. Thus, although a new territorial settlement was urgently needed in central and eastern Europe, the Conference ensured that relations between the neighbouring states could only be decided by the diplomatic negotiation and military engagement of the Polish-Soviet War.

In the resultant conflict, and in conjunction with military directives, both diplomatic negotiation and foreign policy were utilised to implement the respective states' ideologies. The decision-making process employed by the Soviet regime was of crucial importance for its Polish policy. Although in theory the formulation, elaboration and implementation of foreign and diplomatic policy rested with state organisations, in practice it was governed almost exclusively by the RKP(b) and ultimately by its *Politburo*, presided over by Lenin. This enabled the latter to centrally elaborate and direct the implementation of Soviet

ideology at all levels. As a result, under his direction, the conduct of Soviet foreign policy became an extremely well-defined process.

As Marxist theory provided no blueprint for the role diplomacy would play in a socialist society, the Soviet regime was forced to develop its own unique diplomatic measures to regulate relations with the Poles and the outside world during the war. A two-pronged offensive was adopted: the utilisation of open, revolutionary diplomacy directed towards the Polish and *Entente* populations, and reliance on traditional diplomatic methods directed towards their opponents' governments. Although on paper these policies, embodied in the *Comintern* and the *NKID* respectively, were diametrically opposed, both organisations were united in their promulgation of Marxist ideology and, as such, were utilised, as required, by Lenin and the *Politburo*. Both sought to spread international revolution, protect and consolidate Soviet Russia and separate Russia's enemies: Britain from France and the *Entente* from Poland.¹ These shared war aims united and strengthened the resolve of all Soviet institutions throughout the conflict.

Soviet recognition that traditional diplomatic practices had aroused public suspicion during the Great War led the regime to instigate revolutionary diplomatic measures. This was a new, unorthodox, high-profile and widely disseminated political weapon against which the Poles were unable to defend themselves for much of the war. Indeed, Soviet diplomacy and propaganda were virtually synonymous. Both initiatives deliberately and consistently coincided with intensified Red Army activity against the Poles. By embroiling Poland in a carefully constructed diplomatic offensive whilst concurrently pursuing military objectives, the Soviet authorities sought to foster international socialist revolution, influence Polish and *Entente* public opinion, reduce support for the Polish war effort and remove Poland as an obstacle to the sovietisation of central and eastern Europe. Yet, the regime was flexible in its diplomatic manoeuvres, not hesitating to rely on traditional and, on occasion, secret diplomacy, despite initial promises to the contrary, if this presented the best opportunity to achieve its aims. The theory and practice of Soviet diplomacy were, thus, often very different.

Likewise, the formulation of a coherent diplomatic agenda and realistic foreign policy were vitally important for the infant Polish state. By creating an inextricable link between Polish politics and the military, Piłsudski, like Lenin, was able to ensure that throughout

¹ This last objective reaped rewards when Soviet *agit-prop* successfully influenced the treatment accorded by Britain to Poland at the Paris Conference.

the war, the strategic moves of the armed forces directly responded to the state's foreign policy objectives. The latter sought to safeguard Polish independence, protect her inhabitants from the impending Red Army advance, and facilitate her geographic, political, economic and social reconstruction. Here too, despite the absence of clear blueprints to follow, it quickly became clear that diplomacy would play a crucial role in the establishment of relations with her ideological eastern opponent. Diplomacy further provided a breathing space to enable the Polish leaders to reach a compromise on which of the opposing ideological agendas of Piłsudski and Dmowski would be pursued at the international conference in Paris. Although throughout the war the former remained inherently distrustful of diplomacy as a medium, like Lenin, he was tactically astute in recognising the temporary benefits which it could accord to his state.

In the first year of the war, both Russia and Poland regarded it as highly unlikely that hostilities could be resolved purely by military engagements: intermittent diplomatic negotiation was therefore central to the foreign policy of both from the outset. Commencing as early as October 1918, before Polish independence was even established, communication was greatly hampered by the fact that the Poles had no wish to recognise the Soviet regime, which the establishment of formal diplomatic relations would have implied. This remained the situation for the duration of the war. Militarily, 1919 saw the Poles initiate and maintain a clear advantage over Soviet Russia, freeing the entire area gained by Russia at the 3rd partition of 1795. As the latter was enmeshed by domestic considerations in the Civil War, it lacked both the time and resources to direct a great deal of military attention on the Poles. As a result, during this year, the Soviet regime relied heavily upon diplomatic conduct to secure the infant state.

In direct contrast, Piłsudski's belief that Russia was the primary threat to Poland's independence in 1919 ensured that the attention of his armed forces was directed on the Soviet regime. Yet, even so, he refused to advance further eastwards at the end of the year, accurately recognising that a White victory in the Civil War would favour Poland's independence even less than a Red success. Instead, it was decided to await the outcome of Russia's domestic contest before attempting to establish firm relations with Poland's opponent.

In the diplomatic field, the first Soviet attempt to send skilled revolutionaries to direct revolutionary *agit-prop*, encourage socialist revolution and provide the Polish revolutionary movement with experienced leadership – Lenin's acknowledged second

stage in the revolutionary process – saw the despatch of a Russian Red Cross Mission to Poland at the beginning of 1919. This process would culminate with the establishment of the *Polrevkom* in July 1920. It was also the initial step in Russia's diplomatic offensive, providing the NKID with its first opportunity to play to an international audience, and start the process of isolating Poland internationally and removing *Entente* support for the Polish war effort. Tactically, it was an astute move.

In sharp contrast, Piłsudski's continued military advance, taken in direct contravention of Allied wishes, lost much international goodwill for the Poles. During 1919, to commence implementing his federalist ideology, Piłsudski secured the strategically important cities of Wilno, Lwów and Minsk, and presented events to the world as *fait accompli*. This action led to the temporary suspension of diplomatic contact with Russia, but as Soviet hands remained tied domestically, the regime was soon forced to resume talks at Białowieża in June to stabilise relations. Invariably, as with all negotiations during the conflict, these were marred by mutual distrust and collapsed the following month.

With Piłsudski's order to halt the military advance in August 1919, secret negotiation came to the fore at Mikaszewicze from October to December 1919. This was in accord with the wishes of both Poland and Russia: France was pushing for a joint Polish-White offensive against Soviet Russia, whilst a demonstration that Poland was willing to negotiate would invalidate Soviet propaganda assertions the state was an *Entente* puppet. By securing a temporary armistice until the defeat of Denikin was assured, these talks prevented the military escalation of the war at the end of 1919. In all other areas, though, compromise remained out of the question.

Therefore, although militarily the Poles maintained a clear advantage over Russia in 1919, with the latter's focus directed towards domestic concerns, the Soviet regime clearly won the majority of the diplomatic battles. Led by able and experienced diplomats and skilled propagandists, the *NKID* and *Comintern* successfully pursued a two-pronged attack, enmeshing the Poles in tactically complex negotiations and creating irrevocable tensions between them and their western allies.

Intermittent recourse to a dual diplomatic-military offensive continued to be pursued by the Poles in 1920. The Soviet regime, too, intensified its three-pronged drive: traditional and revolutionary diplomacy; *agit-prop* and military engagement as the year progressed. The policy of proposing harsh terms from a position of military strength was consistently

employed by both belligerents during the war, so that either Russia or Poland was in the diplomatic ascendancy at any one time. However, although for the first part of the year the Soviet regime fought from a weaker military position, its diplomats again succeeded in maintaining a clear advantage over their opponents. Utilising their former experience as underground revolutionaries, the Russian and Polish communists proved skilled at composing appeals designed to raise the sympathy of the international working class. The tactical astuteness of Lenin and his colleagues as players in the international arena was, at this time, clear for all to see.

Furthermore, the Poles were constrained in their actions and at the outset of the year were obliged to consult the *Entente* governments for advice on the Soviet peace offer of January 1920. Once more they received divided counsel from Britain and France, as first witnessed at the Paris Peace Conference. This placed them in an extremely difficult position. The Poles remained dependent upon the *Entente* for supplies and equipment and were greatly concerned at the propaganda onslaught which diplomatic negotiation with the Soviets would undoubtedly facilitate. Despite these misgivings, however, Lloyd George's advice made it impossible for the Poles to resort purely to military measures, and in March the latter duly began talks to meet with a Soviet delegation at Borisov.

These talks failed to materialise. The Allies wished, as was the norm, to avoid any responsibility for facilitating peace talks, preferring to watch the drama unfold from a safe distance. The Soviets cleverly utilised the debate over the meeting place to prolong the talks, allowing them to simultaneously prepare a Red Army counter-offensive and to play to a large international audience. In this, the NKID and Chicherin undoubtedly came out on top. Neither, however, were the Poles blameless. Piłsudski knew that the Poles were in a strong position militarily and was secretly preparing to launch an offensive into Ukraine. He, too, saw no reason to sue for peace or to accede to Soviet demands. Both states now favoured a military dénouement.

Thus, the temporary truce secured at Mikaszewicze was observed only until Denikin had been removed as a threat in April 1920. Once this had been achieved, Piłsudski, again driven by his ideological programme, launched an offensive on Kiev, transforming, through his approach towards ethnographic Russia, the scale and intensity of the war. Although he sought to resolve the border states' territorial issues without having to take into account allied wishes, by overestimating the strength of the Polish Armed forces, misinterpreting Ukrainian support for his federalist programme and underestimating the

resources of the Red Army, his action lost further international goodwill for the Poles and brought the Polish state close to collapse.

In turn, the Soviet vision of Ukraine as a socialist bridge to south-western Europe set the two states ideologically, politically and militarily on a crash course. The Kiev offensive proved a crucial turning point for Russia's perception of the war and had important implications for Soviet ideology as its leaders were forced to acknowledge the potential support to be gained by playing the national card. For the first time, the Soviet regime directly and officially petitioned Russian nationalist sentiment for the war effort, to great effect. This temporary ideological shift demonstrated both a great flexibility in policy to secure the widest possible support for the war effort, and highlighted Lenin's abilities as an excellent tactician. It also indicated just how much the RKP(b) was willing to bend its beliefs in the very short-term to achieve the vital long-term goal of securing the world's first socialist state. This was fully in-keeping with Marxist-Leninist doctrine that ideology must be re-evaluated in response to changing circumstances.

The Red Army's quick response resulted in a dramatic reversal in the fortunes of the protagonists. The Poles were swept ever westwards along the entire front, so that by late July, Piłsudski had lost all territory acquired the previous year. It also presented the *Politburo* with a unique opportunity to implement its war aims. The Soviet decision, taken on 17 July 1920, to cross the ethnographic border, in direct contravention of Marxist doctrine, irreversibly altered the complexion of the war, culminating politically with the establishment of the *Polrevkom* and militarily with the Battle of Warsaw. This was one of *the* pivotal turning points of the conflict, as it represented a major ideological shift by Lenin and the *Politburo*.

Until this point, Soviet action was governed by the Marxist doctrine that the socialist revolution must be the work of each nation's own proletariat and it was to this end that Russia's revolutionary diplomacy, in combination with their well-planned *agit-prop* offensive, were directed prior to July 1920. Marx argued that it was the responsibility of communists to guide and direct the process of overthrowing the capitalist system through international socialist revolution, but that the working class must emancipate itself. It was thus essential in the Polish war that the regime wait to allow its *agit-prop* to incite the local population, before supporting a genuine Polish workers movement, if and when it developed. Socialist revolution must not be imposed from outside through the use of

military force. The Red Army, at most, should assist the efforts of the Polish working class. It should not be used as a decisive instrument in bringing about political change.

Confidence, however, was high in the *Politburo* that if successful, transforming the Polish campaign into a revolutionary war would not only secure Russia's socialist state, but would spread the revolution westwards to Germany and south-westwards to Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia. This would provide a viable international alternative to capitalism and would be the first step in overthrowing the Paris settlement. Most importantly, the sovietisation of Poland would crucially implement the third stage of Lenin's ideological programme, drawing Poland into the Soviet federation of states. The regime was, thus, confident that the Red Army would act as a necessary catalyst for a Polish workers' and peasants' led socialist revolution.

It was this error of judgement which was ultimately responsible for the unprecedented defeat of the Red Army at Warsaw the following month. The Soviet regime overlooked a fundamental Marxist dictum and tried, in July 1920, to impose revolution on the Poles by force. Lenin's insistence that the Red Army be used to test Poland's 'ripeness' for revolution in July 1920, demonstrated a profound lack of judgement and a fatal misreading of the situation in Poland, for which his country ultimately paid the price of defeat. Poland was demonstrably not ready for socialist revolution.

This misjudgement continued to direct Soviet policy for the remainder of the war. Indeed, so convinced were the RKP(b) leaders that the Polish workers and peasants would support the advancing Red Army, that it supported the establishment of the *Polrevkom*, earmarked as the first Soviet Polish Socialist Government, in the same week that the ethnographic border was crossed. This proved to be one of the most significant events of the war. Through it, Polish communists sought to lead the socialist revolution in their native country, implementing in practice the second stage of the revolutionary process pursued by Lenin: the establishment of revolution in each state encouraged by the work of local communists. The importance of this organisation cannot be underestimated. It left no doubt about Lenin's ultimate objective in the war with Poland. If the Polish-Soviet War formed part of the Soviet leaders' earliest venture to export revolution by military force westwards, the *Polrevkom* was their first attempt to predetermine the nature of the future

Polish government, establishing a Socialist Soviet Republic on ethnographic Polish territory. It was, ultimately, the political culmination of Soviet ideology in Poland.²

The Committee was not established, as has been suggested, in response to a spontaneous workers' movement. Instead, it was created in direct response to communist recognition of the need to establish an organisation to direct the sovietisation of Poland and to mobilise Polish communists to direct the revolutionary process in their country. As such, it was the definitive attempt by the communists of Poland and Russia to impose their ideological programme, not simply through diplomatic overtures or agitation and propaganda, but through decisive, concrete and practical action.

Established on the initiative of Polish communists, who defined its programme, the Committee received very little direct instruction from Moscow. Indeed, policy disagreements arose between the *Polrevkom* and Lenin. Yet it was dependent on the RKP(b) for funds and fully shared with the Soviet regime, the Marxist objective of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat in Poland. As a political instrument, capable of exporting socialist revolution abroad, Lenin was extremely interested in its activities, requesting daily reports about its work in the Polish political struggle.

More than any other event of the war, the establishment, activities and conduct of the *Polrevkom* graphically demonstrated that which the Soviet regime hope to achieve in Poland and beyond. As such, it provided a clear indication of the measures which would have been implemented had the Red Army been victorious at the Battle of Warsaw later in the month. Led by individuals intimately associated with the Soviet decision-making process in Russia, it carried out a wide range of tasks aimed at implementing Soviet ideology in Poland and was deeply committed to the dissemination of Soviet propaganda and agitation to the local population. Mirroring Soviet policy, it directly addressed its working class target audience, over the heads of the Polish Government. In fact, the measures it introduced broadly replicated those which the Bolsheviks had themselves undertaken three years earlier in Russia to initiate the transition to a Marxist economy.

Crucially, however, although both its members and the Soviet leaders were keen to stress its independence from the Russian regime, the *Polrevkom* was ultimately dependent upon the advancing Soviet armed forces for its continued survival. Without the Red Army

² The Battle of Warsaw later in the month would represent the military culmination of this policy.

it could not have functioned, nor controlled the local *revkomy* in the occupied Polish lands. Herein lay its fundamental weakness. It was utterly dependent upon the Soviet military to control the areas over which it sought to establish authority, so that its influence only ever extended as far as the Soviet frontline.

The reception of its ideological programme by Polish inhabitants was crucial to its fate and its failings were those of the entire Soviet foreign policy-diplomatic agenda pursued during the war. The local population in Poland ultimately held its fate in its hands. This also proved *the* vital factor in determining the eventual outcome of the war. Contrary to the Committee's expectations, the local population refused to support it in sufficient numbers required to guarantee its survival. The peasantry remained largely passive to its work, initial working class support soon waned as it failed to deal with the ever-increasing problems it faced, Polish socialists, its potential allies, regarded it as part of an imperialist Russian invasion, and it failed to coordinate its activities closely with the one party which unreservedly supported it: the KPRP.

The majority of Poles, including the workers the Committee claimed to represent, regarded national independence and security as more important than the adoption of an alien Soviet ideology. The *Polrevkom* failed to establish the longed-for socialist government because fatally, it failed to win the support of the local population, who refused to be inspired by Marxist ideology. In reality, socialist revolution had no real support base in Poland and neither did the *Polrevkom*. This fundamental truth sealed the fate not only of the Committee, but also of the entire Soviet policy pursued by Lenin during the war.

Whilst the *Polrevkom* was working to foster socialist revolution in Poland, July and August witnessed the climax of both Soviet and Polish diplomatic offensives and *agit-prop* drives, as the military situation intensified. Although both states continued to play to an international audience, *Entente* intransigence, founded on an unwillingness to accept any direct responsibility for the progress of events, first witnessed at the Paris Peace Conference, reached its zenith. Chicherin took the opportunity, through the Baranowicze negotiations, to secure a temporary truce to strengthen the position of the Red Army and to allow the work of the *Polrevkom* and the widely disseminated Soviet *agit-prop* to bear fruit in Poland. The Poles, too, sought to gain time to facilitate a military solution to the conflict. Piłsudski was also confident of victory.

The talks, therefore, served as a smokescreen behind which military preparations for the decisive battle of the war were made. Quite simply, it was not in the interest of either party to negotiate seriously until the lines on the battlefield had been drawn. Conviction that the Polish socialist revolution was imminent and that the Red Army would be victorious at Warsaw, removed any pressing need for the Soviets to negotiate before its objectives had been achieved. The *Polrevkom* resided in the wings, ready to grasp political power as soon as the Polish Army was defeated. There was no incentive for Lenin and his colleagues to negotiate with a Polish Government, soon to be replaced by an ideologically allied socialist government.

Instead, Baranowicze enabled the Soviet diplomats to play to an international audience. Once more, the diplomats of the *NKID* won the diplomatic contest, and began to reap rewards for their consistent diplomatic offensive, as the Allied states increasingly began to question Polish policy. The extremely severe Soviet terms proposed to the Poles also succeeded, once again, in splitting British and French reaction and advice. The tactical superiority of the Soviet statesmen and diplomats, thus, continued to reap rewards for the Russian regime right up until the commencement of the battle.

The Battle of Warsaw was of decisive importance for Soviet Russia, Poland and the wider world. If successful, Soviet Russia would undoubtedly have sought to spread its ideology, on the back of the Red Army, not only to Poland, but to the rest of Europe and beyond. For the Poles, the battle represented the final stand in the struggle to consolidate and secure their infant state. Until this date, they had lagged behind the Soviet regime in the proficiency of their *agit-prop*, but once the Red Army threatened their capital, the Poles adopted the Soviet methods of appealing directly to their own population and to the western Allies, to great effect. Polish patriots, incensed at the approach of their historic opponent towards their capital city, displayed steely determination to fight to the end. Piłsudski alone devised the successful military strategy and commanded the Polish Army to impose the first military defeat, by a foreign adversary, on the Soviet Russian Republic. The Allies could claim no plaudits for the victory.

Privately the Soviet regime was forced to acknowledge the catastrophic implications of this for the international socialist movement. As Lenin admitted, it proved a turning point not only for the Polish-Soviet War, but for the entire world. Following the Great War it had appeared that the tide was turning in the Soviets favour as revolutionary movements were established throughout the continent. Crucially, however, 1919 witnessed the pinnacle of

this international activity. Following the conclusion of the peace settlement at Versailles in mid-1919, the European nations increasingly began to turn their backs on international concerns, as amply demonstrated by Allied intransigence in dealing with both Poland and Russia throughout the war. By the time the Soviet regime ordered the Red Army to cross the Polish border and endorsed the establishment of the *Polrevkom* in July 1920, the revolutionary upsurge had long since passed in most of Europe. Their action was a year too late. The Soviet regime's inability to take this shift in international opinion into account had fatal consequences in August 1920.

Following these dramatic events, Soviet Russia, too, began to turn its focus inwardly, and the implementation of international revolution receded temporarily into the background. For the Polish Republic, victory at Warsaw secured the independence of the state and removed the threat of the installation of a puppet Soviet regime. It also laid the foundations of Polish-Soviet relations for the next two decades. A Soviet victory would have been the first step in shattering the international system established at Paris. Europe was saved, by the Polish-Soviet War, from a Soviet onslaught, until the outbreak of the Second World War.

The final diplomatic enactments of the conflict, staged in neutral Riga, saw the Soviet diplomats skilfully manoeuvre, for the last time, to gain the upper hand at the negotiating table, despite being militarily defeated. As throughout the war, Lenin maintained a tight grip on Soviet proceedings, whilst Piłsudski, disillusioned by the failure of his federalist programme, largely withdrew from the negotiating process. As a result, the National Democrats, as in Paris, directed the Polish agenda. This time though, the delegates proposed more conciliatory terms in the hope of avoiding a future war with Russia. Military engagements ended at 2400 on 18 October 1920, but mutual suspicion once again forced the negotiations to become a protracted affair. It was only on 18 March 1921, with the signing of the Treaty of Riga, that the Polish-Soviet War formally ended.

This compromise peace, for the first time, delimited the Polish-Soviet frontier, successfully achieving an objective which the Treaty of Versailles had failed to secure two years earlier. Neither state could, however, realistically claim the Treaty as a victory. In practice, both failed to secure the war aims defined by the ideological programmes of their respective leaders at the outset of the conflict. The Poles renounced enormous areas of land which had belonged to the pre-partition state and neither Piłsudski's federalist programme nor Dmowski's annexationist agenda were implemented in full. Likewise, the Soviet

leaders were forced to concede their inability to sovietise Poland and spread revolution to central and western Europe. Importantly, though, the Riga settlement provided a much-needed temporary breathing space for Russia and Poland, enabling them to turn their attention to the pressing domestic concerns threatening their states.

Thus, in conclusion, from 1919-1921, Polish–Soviet relations alternated between an intermittent pursuit of military offensives and recourse to diplomatic negotiation as domestic and international conditions dictated, and was acknowledged as such by their respective leaders. In reality, although both sides were willing to provide their diplomats with opportunities to secure the states’ foreign policy objectives by peaceful means, neither leadership hesitated to employ military force as and when the need arose. Mutual distrust of their opponent’s motives was heightened by the Soviet regime’s adept use of revolutionary diplomacy and widespread dissemination of *agit-prop* materials.

With the establishment of the Polish state in November 1918, Poland and Soviet Russia were set on a crash course. Ideologically, western democracy and Russian Marxism battled it out in the Polish-Soviet War. This was the principal obstacle to the establishment of cordial relations between the neighbouring states in 1919-1921. The war which followed was inevitable. The uncompromising and diametrically opposing war aims of both ensured that it was impossible for either to secure their objectives through diplomacy alone. The very nature of the war, the ideological and traditional opposition of both states, and their directly conflicting aims and objectives, ensured that only the military defeat of one protagonist would force the signing of a peace.

All policies pursued by Lenin and the *Politburo* in the war with Poland stemmed from their mistaken conviction that Poland was ripe for the second Marxist stage: socialist revolution. The Soviet’s longed-for Polish revolution failed to materialise, despite the best efforts of its diplomats, statesmen, agitator-propagandists, Red Army men and the *Polrevkom*. By consistently overestimating the revolutionary potential in Poland and, contrary to all Marxist teachings, by utilising the Soviet military to enforce revolution on Poland, Lenin inadvertently signed the death-warrant of the socialist revolution in that state at the beginning of the twentieth century. Communist ideology, ultimately failed to inspire the vast majority of the Polish population.

The entrenchment of this ideological divergence between Polish western democracy and Russian Marxism after the war ensured that lasting compromise proved unattainable.

For the Poles, Russia continued to incite historical, geographic, political and ideological opposition. Russia too remained suspicious of Poland for identical reasons. Mutual antagonism, deepened by the Polish-Soviet War, developed further in the inter-war years. Soviet humiliation at the outcome of the conflict made it inevitable that, at a future date, the regime would seek to redress the balance. The terms agreed at Riga failed to provide an enduring solution to Polish-Soviet hostility, and were once more questioned by the armed forces of Soviet Russia in September 1939. The peace lasted less than twenty years.

Appendix A: Biographical Notes

Babel, Isaak (1894-1941)

Born in Odessa, Ukraine, to a Jewish family, he joined the RKP(b) in 1917. During the Polish-Soviet War, he served as a political commissar in the Red Army. A collection of his stories based on his war experiences, *Konarmia*, was published in 1926.

Balfour, Arthur (1848-1930)

Born in East Lothian, Scotland and educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. Balfour entered the House of Commons in 1874 as the Conservative MP for Hertford. He became British Prime Minister in 1902, a post he held until 1905, and remained leader of the Conservative Party until 1911. In 1916, David Lloyd George, appointed him Foreign Secretary, a post from which he resigned in 1919 following the Paris Peace Conference.

Brusilov, Aleksei Alekseevich (1853-1926)

Born in Tiflis, the son of an aristocrat, Brusilov was educated in the Imperial Corps of Pages. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army by the Provisional Government. Brusilov offered his services to the Soviet regime in 1920. Involved in the Red Army march to Warsaw in 1920, he retained largely staff positions, initially as a military consultant and then as an inspector of cavalry.

Chicherin, Georgii Vasil'evich (1872-1936)

Born in Tambov province, into a family from the Russian lower nobility, Chicherin was the son of a retired diplomat. A graduate in history and philology from the University of St. Petersburg, he entered the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1898. In 1904, he resigned from the diplomatic service to settle in Berlin, where in 1905 he joined the RSDRP. A Menshevik, he was expelled from Germany in 1907, moving to Paris and, from 1914-1918, to England. He returned to Russia in January 1918 and joined the RKP(b). In March, he was named Commissar for Foreign Affairs, retaining the post until 1930, and as such was Soviet Russia's highest ranking diplomat during the Polish-Soviet War. However, he was never invited to join Soviet Russia's chief policy-making body, the *Politburo*.

Clemenceau, Georges (1841-1929)

Born in Mouilleron-en-Pareds, France, he trained as a doctor. In 1871, he became a member of the National Assembly and in 1876 was a leader of the extreme left in the Chamber of Deputies. Clemenceau held the post of French Premier, 1906-1909, and again in 1917-1920 and presided over the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Curzon (of Kedleston), George Nathaniel, (Marquis) (1859-1925)

Born at Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire, Curzon studied at Oxford, became an MP in 1886, and was appointed Viceroy of India, 1899-1905. He became a member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet in 1916 and held the post of British Foreign Secretary 1919-1924, a post he had long coveted.

Dąbski, Jan (1880-1931)

Born in Kukizów, near Lwów, Dąbski was a member of the Polish Legions during the Great War, 1914-1918. He was Vice-President of PSL (*Piast*), and as Deputy Foreign Minister, 1919-1923, was the chief negotiator at the Polish-Soviet peace negotiations, which concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Riga in March 1921.

Danisheskii, K./Daniševskis, Jūlijs Kārlis (1884-1938)

The son of a Latvian farmer, Danisheskii joined the Latvian Social Democratic Party in 1900. Arrested and exiled to Siberia in 1914, he became a member of the Moscow Soviet in 1917 and was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Latvian SSR in 1919. He was a political member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic in 1920, attached to the Western Front and in August 1920, led the Soviet peace delegation at the Minsk negotiations.

Daszyński, Ignacy (1866-1936)

Born at Zbaraż, Galicia, to an aristocratic family. In 1882, Daszyński became leader of the PPS in Galicia. In 1891, he co-founded the Galician Social Democratic Party and was a member of the Austrian *Reichsrat* (Parliament), 1897-1918. Elected as Premier of Poland, December 1918-January 1919, from 1919-1929, he was leader of the PPS in the *Sejm* and was Vice-Premier of Poland from June-December 1920.

Dmowski, Roman (1864-1939)

Born in a small town near Warsaw, Dmowski attended the University of Warsaw, studying biology. From 1906-1912, he was elected a deputy to the Russian *Duma*, was Chairman of

the Polish National Committee in Paris from 1917-1919, and the leading Polish delegate at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. As leader of the National Democratic Party, he was a principal opponent of Józef Piłsudski during the Polish-Soviet War and in July 1920 was a member of the Council of State Defence.

Dzierżyński, Feliks (1877-1926)

Born in Dzierżynskowo, Wilno gubernia, the son of a Polish landowner. Co-founder of the SDKPiL in 1899, he was elected to the CC of RSDRP(b) in 1917. A principal organiser of the October Revolution, he was appointed Chairman of the *Cheka* on 7 [20 n.s.] December 1917, a position he held until his death. From 1917, he was elected a Presidium member of All-Russian CEC, a RKP(b) CC member, from 1917-1926, and an *Orgburo* member, from March 1919-April 1920. In May-July 1920, Dzierżyński was appointed Rear Commander of South-West Front, from May-September 1920, was a political member of the Western Front and was unofficial head of the *Polrevkom*. He was People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, 1920-1922.

Grabski, Stanisław (1871-1949)

A Polish politician, co-founder of the PPS and Professor of Economics at Lwów University, 1910-1939. From 1918-1919, Grabski was a representative on the Polish National Committee in Paris and was a member of the Polish peace delegation at the Riga Conference with Soviet Russia.

Grabski, Władysław (1874-1938)

Born in Borowo near Łowicz, like his brother Stanisław, he was a Polish politician and economist. He served as a National Democratic Deputy in the Russian *Duma*, and as the Polish Prime Minister from July-August 1920 and again from 1923-1925.

Joffe, Adolf Abramovich (Krymskii, Viktor) (1883-1927)

Born in Simferopol', the son of a wealthy Crimean merchant, and educated as a doctor, Joffe joined the RSDRP(b) in June 1917. Chairman of the Soviet delegation during the peace negotiations with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk in 1918, he was appointed Soviet Ambassador to Germany the same year. Joffe headed Soviet peace delegations to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and was a delegate at the 2nd Congress of the *Comintern* in 1920. From September 1920-March 1921, he was Chairman of the Soviet delegation to the Riga Peace Conference with Poland.

Kamenev, Lev Borisovich (Rosenfeld) (1883-1936)

Born in Moscow, the son of a railway engineer, Kamenev joined the RSDRP in 1901. When the party split in 1903, he supported the Bolshevik faction, becoming a leading member. In April 1917, he was elected a CC member of RSDRP(b), and was a delegate to the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations. At the 2nd Congress of the *Comintern* in 1920 he represented, with Lenin, the RKP(b) on the commission for national and colonial questions. He was a *Politburo* member, 1919-1925, and an *Orgburo* member from March 1919-April 1920. In 1920-1921, he headed a Soviet trade delegation to Britain.

Kautsky, Karl Johann (1854-1938)

Born in Prague, Kautsky was a leading theoretician of the German Social Democratic Party and 2nd International, and a critic of Bolshevism.

Kerr, Philip Henry (11th Marquis of Lothian) (1882-1940)

As David Lloyd George's private secretary, 1916–1921, he was active at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Kon, Feliks (1864-1941)

A Polish Communist and journalist, Kon joined the PPS (*Lewica*) in 1904, before becoming an RSDRP(b) member in 1918. He was a *Polrevkom* member from July-August 1920.

Krestinskii, Nikolai N. (1883-1938)

Born in Mogilev, to Ukrainian peasants, he graduated in law from St. Petersburg University in 1907. A member of the RSDRP in 1903, of the RKP(b) CC, 1917-1921 and from 1919-1921, he was a member of the central Secretariat and *Politburo*. Krestinskii was appointed Commissar for Finance, 1918-1922.

Lapiński Pawel (Pawel Lewinson) (1879-1937)

Joining the PPS in 1904, he was appointed to its CC from 1906-1918. Lapiński became a member of the Central Executive Committee of the PPS-*Lewica* in Russia, and one of the organisers of the Polish Commissariat in the Commissariat for Nationalities, in December 1917. Between 1918 and 1920, he was a consultant to the *NKID* and in 1920-1927, headed the Diplomatic Information department of the *NKID* RSFSR in Berlin.

Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich (Ulianov) (1870-1924)

Born in Simbirsk, the son of a school inspector, Lenin studied law at Kazan' and St. Petersburg Universities. In 1894, in St. Petersburg, he organised the illegal "Union for the Liberation of the Working Class". Arrested in 1895, for the next 22 years he remained in exile, becoming a member of the RSDRP CC and leading the Bolshevik wing of RSDRP, in 1903. He was one of the principal organisers of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 and was elected Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. An advocate of immediate peace with Germany, he pushed through the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany in March 1918 and was chief instigator in founding the *Comintern* in March 1919. During the Polish-Soviet War, he was Soviet Russia's leading statesman and chief policy-maker: Chairman of *Sonvarkom*, 1917-1924; CC member of the RKP(b) and its titular head; leading figure in the *Politburo*; head of the Council for Workers' and Peasants' Defence, November 1918-April 1920, and of the Council for Labour and Defence, April 1920-January 1924.

Leszczyński, Julian (Leński) (1889-1939)

Leszczyński joined the SDKPiL in 1905. In November 1917, he became Commissar for Polish Affairs and in February 1919, Commissar for Education in the Lit-Bel SSR. During the Polish-Soviet War, he was a representative of the *Polrevkom* on the South-Western Front.

Lloyd-George, David (1st Earl of Dwyfor) (1863-1945)

Born in Manchester, he studied law in Wales and, in 1890, became an MP for Carnarvon Boroughs, a seat he held for 55 years. As British Prime Minister, at the head of a coalition government, dominated by Conservatives, he held office from 1916 to 1922, and led the British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Marchlewski, Julian Juzefovich (Karski/Kujawski) (1866-1925)

Born in Włocławek, Poland, to a family from the petty nobility, Marchlewski was a diplomat, politician and writer. He became a well-known activist in the Polish and German social democratic movements and was elected a candidate member of the CC RSDRP in 1907. In June 1918, he went to Moscow and was appointed a member of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and a member of the *NKID*. As leader of the Polish communists in the USSR, 1919-1920, he signed the founding document of the *Comintern*, returning to Moscow as representative of the Polish Communist Party. During 1919-1920, he was entrusted by Lenin as a principal adviser on Polish affairs, chief diplomatic

negotiator in secret talks with the Poles and was nominated official Chairman of the *Polrevkom*.

Paderewski, Ignacy Jan (1860-1941)

Born in Kurylowka, Podolia, Paderewski was a world famous concert pianist and composer. Following the outbreak of the Great War, he lobbied internationally for the establishment of a free Poland, was a representative of the Polish National Committee in Paris and was a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference, signing the initial peace treaty for Poland. He became Polish Prime Minister and Secretary for Foreign Affairs from January-November 1919.

Patek, Stanisław (1866-1945)

A Polish statesman and lawyer, he was appointed Pilsudski's representative with the Polish National Committee in Paris, in 1919. Patek was Minister for Foreign Affairs from December 1919-June 1920.

Petlura, Simon Vasil'evich (Semen) (1879-1926)

Born in Poltava, the son of a coachman, he was a Ukrainian nationalist leader and politician. After the February Revolution in 1917, he organised the Ukrainian Military Committee, becoming Minister of Defence in the Ukrainian *Rada*, in 1918. He was Chairman ('Ataman') of the Ukrainian Directory, set up in Kiev in March 1917 as an autonomous government, transformed in November 1917 into an independent regime, and was supported by the German occupiers from March-November 1918. Fighting against both the Red Army and Denikin's White Army, in alliance with Poland, Petlura was defeated at the end of 1919. He reached Kiev with the Poles in the spring of 1920, but emigrated to Poland after the Polish retreat.

Piłsudski, Józef (Klemens) (1867-1935)

Born in Zulów, near Wilno to a minor gentry family, he was educated at Wilno University. In 1892, he co-founded the PPS, becoming the first editor of its newspaper *Robotnik*. In 1906, he became leader of a right-wing faction of the PPS, establishing paramilitary organisations (*Strzelcy*), which in August 1914, became the *Polish Legions* in the Austrian Army. He was appointed Minister of Defence under the Regency Council in 1917, and was imprisoned from July 1917-November 1918 in Magdeburg Castle. In November 1918, upon his release, he declared Poland's independence, becoming the country's first Chief-of-State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. In spring 1920, he was appointed

Marshal of Poland and was the principal military leader, statesman and policy-maker in Poland during the war with Soviet Russia.

Preobrazhenskii, Evgenii Alekseevich, (1886-1937)

Born to a priest's family, in Bolkhoz, central Russia. An economist and party activist, he was elected to the regional RKP(b) committee in the Urals

Próchniak, Edward (1888-1937)

Born in the town of Pulawy, Poland, he was an SDKPiL member from 1903 to 1917, a member of the KPRP from 1918, and a member of the RKP(b) in 1917-1918 and 1920-1926. In 1920, he was nominated a member of the *Polrevkom*.

Radek, Karol Berngardovich (1885-1939)

(Bernhardovich/Sobelsohn/Sobelson/Parabellum/Bremer/Struthahn)

Born in Lwów, Galicia, into a lower middle class family. He was a member of the Polish and German Social Democratic Parties and, from 1917, of the RSDRP(b). After the October Revolution, he became Head of the Central European Department of the *NKID* and was a Soviet delegate at the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations. At the 8th RKP(b) Congress in March 1919 he was elected, in absentia, a member of CC and at the 2nd *Comintern* Congress in July-August 1920 was elected a member of the ECCI, becoming a secretary to the *Comintern*, from 1919-1924. He was valued highly by the Soviet leadership as an adviser on Polish and German affairs and participated in the Polish-Soviet negotiations at Minsk in October 1920.

Rumbold, Horace (1869-1941)

Born in St. Petersburg, the son of the Secretary to the British Embassy, he was a professional diplomat, 1888-1933. Rumbold was appointed British Minister to Poland October 1919-November 1920.

Sapieha, Prince Eustacy (1881-1963)

Sapieha was a Polish statesman, appointed Chairman of the Committee for the Defence of the Borders, in 1919. From July 1919-June 1920 he was Polish Minister in London and Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs from June 1920-June 1921.

**Stalin, Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili/Jugashvili/Soso/Stalin/Joseph/
I.Besoshvili/David/Kato/Koba/Ivanovich/Vasil'ev/K. Stefin)
(1879-1953)**

Born in Gori, Tiflis Province, Georgia, to a shoemaker and washerwoman. He joined the RSDRP in 1898, and after the party split in 1903, supported the Bolshevik faction.

After the October Revolution, he was appointed: a CC member of the RKP(b); an All-Russian CEC member; a *Politburo* member, 1917-1952; a member of the *Orgburo* and Commissar for Nationalities, 1917-1923. From 1918-1920, he was a political commissar with the Military Revolutionary Council, being sent to the Southern, Western and South-Western Fronts and was a member of the Council of Workers' and Peasants' Defence. In March 1919, he was with the RKP(b) delegation at the founding congress of the *Comintern* and in July 1920 was elected an alternate member of the ECCI.

Trotsky, Lev Davydovich (Bronstein/Trotsky, Leon) (1879-1940)

Born in Ianovka, Kherson Province, Ukraine, the son of a Jewish estate manager. He joined the editorial staff of the RSDRP newspaper, *Iskra*, and at the 2nd Party Congress in 1903, sided with the Menshevik faction. He officially joined the RSDRP(b), as part of the *mezhraiontsy* faction, in August 1917. Was elected to the CC, in absentia, at the 6th Party Congress and as Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Committee, was the principal organiser of the October Revolution in 1917. He became a member of the All-Russian CEC; the *Politburo*, 1917-1926, and the *Orgburo* from March 1919-April 1920. Trotsky was appointed Commissar for Foreign Affairs, October 1917-February 1918, leading the Soviet delegation at the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations. He became Soviet Commissar for War, March 1918-January 1924. In January 1919, he signed the appeal for the founding congress of the *Comintern* and was elected an alternate member of the ECCI.

Tukhachevsky, Mikhail Nikolaevich (1893-1937)

Born in Smolensk guberniia, the son of a nobleman and a peasant woman. He graduated from the Aleksandrovskii Military Academy in 1914, before joining the exclusive Semenovskii Guards Regiment. Became a member of the RKP(b) and joined the Red Army, in April 1918. He was appointed Commander of Caucasian Front on 31 January 1920. On 29 April 1920, was appointed Commander of Western Front, leading the Soviet invasion of Poland, which was halted just before Warsaw.

Unszlicht, Józef (Unshlikht, Iosif Stanislavovich) (1879-1938)

Born in Mława, Płock Province, Poland. He joined the SDKPiL in 1900 and was an active participant in the October Revolution in 1917, as a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee. Unszlicht was a Collegium member of the *Cheka* from December 1917 and a member of the CEC of SDKPiL in Russia. In March 1919, he was elected a member of the CC of the Communist Party of Lithuania and Belorussia and appointed Commissar of Military Affairs in the Lithuanian-Belorussian Soviet Republic. He was a representative of the Polish Communist Party to the founding congress of the *Comintern*, in March 1919. From April 1919, he was a member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Western Front, Political Commissar of XVI Army and a *Polrevkom* member.

Wasilewski, Leon (1870-1936)

Born in St. Petersburg, a member of the PPS and close associate of Piłsudski, he was the architect of Polish foreign policy in the east. Appointed first Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, November 1918-January 1919.

Weygand, Maxime (1867-1965)

Born in Brussels, he was Chief-of-Staff to Foch, 1914-1923 and France's military representative on the Inter-allied Mission to Poland, July-August 1920.

Wilson, Thomas Woodrow (1856-1924)

Born in Staunton, VA, he studied at Princeton and John Hopkins Universities, becoming a lawyer and University professor. He was elected President of USA, 1913-1921. Wilson led the American delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, but the US Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles. Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919.

Witos, Wincenty (1874-1945)

Born in Wierzasławice, Galicia, he was employed as a woodcutter, carpenter, and a landowner. Witos became leader of the PSL (Piast) Party and was a Deputy in the Vienna *Reichsrat*, from 1911–1918. He was appointed Prime Minister of Poland in 1921, 1923 and 1926.

Zinoviev, Grigorii Evseevich (Radomysl'skii, Apfelbaum) (1883-1936)

Born in Elizavetgrad, Kherson Province, to a lower middle class Jewish family. Member of the RSDRP from 1901, he was elected Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, December 1917-January 1926, a candidate member of the *Politburo* in 1919 and a full *Politburo*

member from 1921-1926. He held the post of Chairman of the *Comintern* Executive Committee, March 1919-October 1926.

Appendix B: Variant Place-names

Baranowicze; Baranovich; Baranavichy

Białystock; Belostok; Belastok; Bialistok

Białowieża; Belaveskaia Pushcha; Belovezhskaia Pushcha

Borisov; Borisów

Brest-Litovsk; Brześć nad Bugiem; Brześć Litewski

Kiev; Kijów

Kraków; Krakov; Cracow

Lwów; Lvov; L'vov; Lviv; Lemberg

Mikaszewicze; Mikashevichi

Minsk; Mińsk

Moscow; Moskva; Moskwa; Maskva

Riga; Ryga

Warsaw; Warszawa; Varshava

Wilno; Vilna; Vilnius

Abbreviations and Glossary

CC	Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (<i>TsK: Tsentral'nyi komitet rossiiskikh kommunisticheskikh partii (bolshevikov); Centralny Komitet Rosyjskiej Komunistycznej Partii (bolszewików)</i>)
CEC	(All-Russian) Central Executive Committee of the Soviet (VTsIK: <i>Vserossiiskii tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet; Centralny Komitet Wykonawczy</i>)
Cheka	All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Struggle against Counter-Revolution and Sabotage/Soviet Secret Police (<i>Vserossiiskaia chrezvichainaia komissia po bor'be s kontrrevoliutsiei, spekulatsiei i prestupleniem po dolzhnosti pri SNK RSFSR; Nadzwyczajna Komisja do Walki z Kontrrewolucją i Sabotażem</i>)
Comintern	Communist International (<i>Kommunisticheskii internatsional</i>)
DBFP	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1918-1945</i>
D & M	<i>Dokumenty i materialy po istorii Sovetsko-Pol'skikh otnoshenii.</i> Vols. 1-3
DVP	<i>Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR.</i> Vols. 1-3
Konarmia	Soviet 1 st Cavalry Army
KPRP	Communist Workers Party of Poland (<i>Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski</i>)
Kresy	Borderlands lying between Poland and Russia
MSZ	Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<i>Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych</i>)
NKID	People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (<i>Narodnyi komissariat po inostrannym delam</i>)
NAS	National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh
Nat. Dems.	Polish National Democratic Party (<i>Stronnictwo Narodowo-Demokratyczne (endecja)</i>)
Ober-Ost	Supreme Command of Eastern Front (<i>Ober Kommando Ostfront, Oberbefehlsheber Ost; Naczelne Dowództwo Wschodu</i>)
Orgburo	Organisational Bureau of the of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (<i>Organizatsionnoe biuro TsK RKP(b)</i>)

Pan	Soviet term for a Polish landowner
Piłsudski Institute	Archive of the Institute of Józef Piłsudski, London (<i>Archiwum Instytutu Józefa Piłsudskiego</i>)
Pol'buro	Polish Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (<i>Pol'skoe biuro RKP(b)</i>)
Polish Institute	Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum, London (<i>Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. Gen. Sikorskiego</i>)
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Russian Communist Party Central Committee (<i>Politicheskoe biuro TsK RKP(b)</i>)
Polrevkom	Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee (<i>Pol'skii vremennyi revoliutsionnyi komitet; Tymczasowy Komitet Rewolucyjny Polski</i>)
PPC	Paris Peace Conference
PPS	Polish Socialist Party (<i>Polska Partia Socjalistyczna</i>)
Revkom	Revolutionary Committee (<i>Revoliutsionnyi komitet; Rewolucyjny Komitet</i>)
RGASPI	Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, Moscow (<i>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii</i>)
RKP(b)	Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (<i>Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia (bolshevikov)</i>)
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (<i>Rossiiskaia sovetskaia federativnaia sotsialisticheskaia respublika; Rosyjska Socjalistyczna Federacya Republika Rad</i>)
Sejm	Polish Diet, Parliament
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars (<i>Sovet narodnykh komissarov</i>)
TNA	The National Archives, London

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GD372/132 *Letters from correspondents serving with the North Russian Expeditionary Force: letters from Major L.H. Marriage, Machine Gun Corps, near Archangel, 1919.*

GD433/2/18 *Letters to A.J. Balfour with some copy replies, 1918-1929,(33-65); situation in Poland 1920, (41-43); Lloyd George and Clemenceau, (57 & 63); Danzig, (64).*

GD433/2/136 *Diary kept by Alice Balfour, 1917-1928.*

GD433/2/224 *Diary kept by A.B. Balfour, 1898-1899.*

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FO 417/10 – *Part IV – Further correspondence respecting the affairs of Poland, January-June 1921.*

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FO 688/1 – *1919 (files 6-755).*

FO 688/2 – *1920 (files 3-10).*

FO 688/3 – *1920 (files 19-20).*

FO 688/4 – *1920 (files 20-44).*

FO 688/5 – 1920 (*files 49-75*).

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Fond No. 19

Opis 1, *Sovet narodnykh komissarov: protokoly*, 1917-1922.

Fond No. 63

Opis No. 1 - *Polish Bureau of Agitation and Propaganda CC RCP(b)*.

Delo 4 - *Resolutions of Polish Communists in Moscow, 9-11 September*

1919, about the creation of a Central Committee centre for party work among the Polish population.

5 - *Department of Agitation and Propaganda of Polish Bureau 1919-1923, Secret Department of the Bureau, 1920-1921.*

8 - *Protocols of Polish Bureau, 16-19 Feb 1921, with the participation and signature of J. Marchlewski.*

11 - *Documents and materials of the local Polish Bureau to the CC CP of Belorussia and Ukraine.*

13 - *Protocol of meeting of Polish Bureau leaving the front for Moscow – Dzierżyński, Kon, Marchlewski.*

14 - *Meeting of Polish Bureau for 1921 - Dzierżyński, Marchlewski, Kon, 5 January-29 December 1921.*

32 - *Letters to the CC about Communist Party organisation on Polish territory.*

36 - *Białystok - mood of Polish population in the town, 1 June – 19 October 1920*

40 - *Letters from CC CP of Lithuania and Belorussia about their conference, 22 July – 22 December 1920.*

43 - *Note from Narkomindel about the Polish Government note concerning the activities of Polish communists in Russia and speech by NKVD about the internal situation of Poland.*

44 - *Liquidation of the Polish Commissariat.*

- 69** - *Lithuanian and Belorussian CP protocol about military organisation of army and conduct of illegal work*
- 72** - *Letters from the Lithuanian and Belorussian CC about the distribution of Polish literature by Polish organizations.*
- 73** - *Conspiratorial letters from local underground communist organisations of Polish workers about the situation in Poland.*
- 86** - *Lithuanian and Belorussian CC CP notes, by Dzierżyński.*
- 88** - *Białystok Committee of KRPR – Polrevkom.*
- 134** - *Polrevkom.*
- 135** - *Lecture by Marchlewski on Polish history.*
- 172** - *Polish Bureau thesis about agitation and propaganda work in Middle Lithuania.*
- 186** - *Letter by Lenin on the work of the Polish military.*
- 190** - *Russian-Ukrainian Peace delegation's negotiations with Poland.*
- 191-193** - *From the Russian-Ukrainian peace delegation's negotiations with Poland, written by Dzierżyński.*
- 194** - *Letters about the peace negotiations between Russia and Poland at Riga.*
- 198** - *Russian Red Cross Mission.*
- 210** - *Statistics about the Polish population in Belorussia and the RSFSR.*
- 252-262** - *Work of Polish Bureau in Belorussia.*
- 266-285** - *Work of Polish Bureau in Ukraine.*
- 267** - *Work of the Polish Bureau of Agitation and Propaganda in Ukraine, January 1920-1922.*
- 286** - *Articles and press reports about the political situation in Poland and about the negotiations and relations between Soviet Russia and Poland.*
- 287-291** - *Foreign press reports about the situation in Russia, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.*
- 295** - *Protocol of the Secret Bureau of the Polish Bureau, 20 Nov 1920 – 22 March 1921.*
- 305** - *Underground, illegal work of the Polish Bureau in Białystok.*
- 314** - *Letter by Lenin to the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Bureau about the situation in Poland.*
- 315** - *Letter from the Polish Bureau to the Department of the Communist Party of Poland in Berlin.*
- 317** - *Conclusion of peace negotiations between Poland and Russia.*
- 395-532** - *Documents of the local Polish Bureau in Russia, Poland, Ukraine and Belorussia.*

- 535** - *Letters and notes of People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, G.V. Chicherin, to the Polish Government complaining about the Polish Army occupation of Belorussian and Ukrainian lands.*
- 536** - *Bobin'ski's letter to the Polish Bureau about Poland's internal situation and the need to conclude peace.*
- 539** - *Letter from a member of the Russian-Ukrainian peace delegation, V. Pan'skii, about the peace negotiations*
- 541** - *Letter by Vera Kotsheva about the need to establish contact with Karl Radek.*
- 577** - *Polish newspaper summary for October 1920 - March 1921.*
- 579** - *Material on peace negotiations with Poland, Polish-Russian relations and Poland, Lithuania, Belorussia and Ukraine.*

Fond No. 68 – Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland

Opis No. 1

- Delo 1** - *Polrevkom manifesto, signed by Dzierżyński, Marchlewski and Kon.*
- 3** - *Organisational meeting of Polrevkom with Dzierżyński, Marchlewski and Kon.*
- 4** - *Orders of Polrevkom for July-August 1920.*
- 6** - *Instructions of Polrevkom for the organisation of Revkomy in Poland, the land question, defence and the development of industry.*
- 8** - *Letter to Lenin from the Polrevkom about its formation, the situation in Poland, and about its work - signed by Dzierżyński.*
- 10** - *Note from Polrevkom to Revvoensovet about the organisation, activities and liquidation of Revkomy in Poland.*
- 12** - *Letters from Polrevkom to Head of Army and Staff of Western Front about the situation in Poland and about the peace negotiations between Poland and Russia.*
- 14** - *Information about the Białystok population.*
- 24** - *Letters from Polrevkom about the need to work among the young, European population and in professional unions, to establish revolutionary tribunals with the participation of Polrevkom members, and about the situation in Galicia.*
- 28** - *Civil, military and social institutions in Białystok and other towns.*
- 29** - *Mandates of Polrevkom.*
- 32** - *List of appeals of Polrevkom, 1-14 August 1920.*
- 34** - *Minutes of Polrevkom meeting.*

- 37** - *List of Białystok Committee's work, 6 August – 3 September.*
- 38** - *Letters from Białystok Revkom to CP of Lithuania and Belorussia.*
- 40** - *Velinski Revkom letters to CC Litbel re: Wilno situation.*
- 77** - *Letter from Doletsky to Polrevkom about the situation in the CP of Poland.*
- 78** - *Events in Poland and the Polrevkom written about by F. Kon.*
- 79** - *Photographs of members of the Polrevkom- Dzierżyński, Marchlewski, Kon, and others.*

Fond No. 70

Opis 5 - *Polskaia Komissii Istparta TsK VKP/b. Department for the collection and study of materials on the history of the October Revolution and the history of the RKP(b). Includes information about the Polish-Soviet War.*

Opis 101-114

Dela 488-554 - *Copies of State Archive for Foreign Affairs, 1913-1918.*

Dela 639-640 - *SDKPiL & PSS, 1914-1918.*

Delo 659 - *Diplomatic documents about Polish-Soviet Relations, 1919-1920. With letters by Feliks Dzierżyński and Róża Luksemburg.*

Fond No. 76

Opis 1 - *Felix Dzierżyński, 1896-1912.*

Opis 2 - *Politburo, Pol'bureau, Polrevkom, Party and State Commissions, 1917-1926.*

Opis 4 - *Felix Dzierżyński: biographical documents.*

Fond No. 135

Felix Kon, (1883-1944).

Fond No. 143

Julian Marchlewski, (1889-1937).

Fond No. 159

Georgii Chicherin, (1872-1936).

Fond No. 326

Karol Radek, (1885-1939).

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