WAR CABINET

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs "Possible ways for the settlement of the Polish-Soviet conflicts”

My colleagues may be interested to see the annexed memorandum to the possible lines of a Polish-Soviet settlement, by which I would propose to be guided should it prove practicable to take this question in the future

A.E.

# Foreign Office, 22 November 1943

ANNEX

Our view has been that the main difficulty is the question of frontiers. We consider that the only possible solution, which would in fact be in Poland’s own interest, is for the future frontier to be based on the Curzon line[[1]](#footnote-1). This is more favourable to the Poles than the Molotov-Ribbentrop Line [[2]](#footnote-2), for which the Soviet Government will no doubt press, in that it includes in Poland the Bialystok area in the north, whose inhabitants are manly racial Poles. We should try as part of a comprehensive settlement to persuade the Russian to be generous and allow the Poles to keep Lvov. It would, I think, be out of the question to press for Vilna for the Poles[[3]](#footnote-3), except possibly as an opening bargaining gambit. We should, I think, suggest that such a settlement should be accompanied by transfers of populations, more particularly in Eastern Galicia, to remove, so far as possible racial minorities from each side of the frontier.

In return, the Poles should have a definite assurance from the Soviet Union and His Majesty’s Government, and, if possible, the United States Government, that they will receive in compensation East Prussia, Danzig, and the Oppeln district of Upper Silesia. This arrangement would also be accompanied by transfers of population if this were considered desirable.

The Poles, however, fear that what is at stake is not so much the frontiers but the future existence of Poland. Their anxieties are (1) that Russia’s long-term aim is to set up a puppet Government in Warsaw and turn Poland into a Soviet Republic; (2) that disorders would be provoked on the entry of Soviet forces; (3) that it will then be impossible to maintain the present instructions of the Polish Government restraining the Polish population from taking action against the Russians; and (4) that all the leading resistance elements in Poland will be disposed of by the Soviet forces of occupation.

It is therefore necessary to secure from the Russians, in return for our undertaking to impose on the Poles a frontier settlement on the above lines, assurances to the following effect:

1. Diplomatic relations should be restored at once between the Soviet and Polish Governments;
2. Arrangements should be made on similar lines to those contemplated for our other European Allies for the Polish Government to return to Poland and be associated with the Administration of the country as soon as military necessities permit;
3. The Polish Government should submit themselves to the approval of the Polish people as soon as possible and the latter should be free to chose own Government without any outside pressure.
4. The Polish Government should at once be encouraged to accede to the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty, as provided for under the Protocol attached to the treaty, thus institute a tripartite system of security in Eastern Europe, for which Poland will be one of the main beneficiaries.
5. These arrangements should be formally approved by His Majesty Government and, if possible the United States Government. They might be associated with them in whatever way is considered most

appropriate, e.g., either through some public declaration, participation in the Tripartite Treaty ([…], or through arrangements to be worked out in the London Commission[[4]](#footnote-4).

 I submit that our approach to the Russians should be based upon the consideration that Anglo-Soviet relations having now been placed upon a footing of mutual confidence by the Anglo-Soviet Treaty and the Moscow Conference and that we are most anxious to remove any possible source of friction. Having regard to our treaty and other obligations to Poland and to the outstanding part played by Poles at home and abroad in resistance to Germany since 1939, His Majesty’s Government and British public opinion are bound to do all in their power to ensure that a strong and independent Poland emerges from the war. This they also feel to be in the general European interest as well as in the interest of good Anglo-Polish and Anglo-Soviet relations. Any failure to achieve a reasonable settlement would inevitably become a running sore in Anglo-Soviet relations, and this His Majesty’s Government are determined to make every effort to avoid.

[TNA, PREM 3/355/6]

Keywords: Poland

1. Curzon Line - the border, first proposed by the British Foreign Minister, George Curzon, in 1919. The Line as a whole coincided with the ethnic borders of Poland. Although during the Polish-Soviet war this border was rejected by both parties, Stalin insisted on it in the negotiations during the Second World War. (Feis, Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin, pp. 657-659). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Referring to the line of the Soviet-German partition of Poland agreed by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. It generally coincides with the Curzon line, but in the North and the South, more territory was handed to the Soviet Union. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. From 1920 to 1939, the city of Vilna was under de facto Polish control. In earlier documents, Eden also mentioned that "Polish claim to Vilna, to which they also attach the greatest importance, would be unrealizable, if only for geographical reasons” (WP (43) 438, Memo by Eden, 05/10/1943 // TNA, CAB 66/41). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Refers to the European Advisory Commission in London (originally composed of representatives of the USSR, the USA and the UK), the establishment of which was decided at the Moscow Conference 1943. See: Moskovskaya konferentsiya. Pp. 322-323. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)