

POLAND IN WORLD WAR II IN THE CONTEXT OF GERMAN AND SOVIET EASTERN EUROPEAN POLICY

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Abstract: *The article examines the Polish Resistance Movement during World War II in the broader context of German and Soviet policies in Central and Eastern Europe. It highlights that, after World War I, both Germany and the Soviet Union emerged as major threats to the region's territorial order. The Weimar Republic pursued a "Prussian" policy aimed at revising Poland's interwar borders and reclaiming former Reich territories. Hitler's temporary halt on these revisionist aims is seen as a strategic move to advance his plan of territorial expansion in Central Europe. Germany's ambitions were facilitated by anti-communist sentiment and fears of Soviet expansion among Central and Eastern European nations. The authors argue that Stalin's distrust in the Western resistance to Hitler, his reluctance to confront Germany directly, and various miscalculations contributed to the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, which divided Poland and other territories between Germany and the USSR. In response, the Polish Resistance, backed by London and Moscow, launched operations, culminating in the Warsaw Uprising and Operation Tempest in 1944.*

Keywords: *Second World War, German policy, Soviet Union policy, Polish Resistance Movement.*

Rezumat. *Polonia în cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial în contextul politicii germane și sovietice în Europa de est. Articolul analizează mișcarea de rezistență poloneză din timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial în contextul mai larg al politicilor Germaniei și Uniunii Sovietice în Europa Central-Estică. Se evidențiază faptul că, după Primul Război*

Mondial, atât Germania, cât și Uniunea Sovietică au devenit amenințări majore la adresa ordinii teritoriale din regiune. Republica de la Weimar a urmat o politică „prusacă”, având ca scop revizuirea granițelor interbelice ale Poloniei și recâștigarea unor teritorii ale fostului Reich. Oprirea temporară a acestor obiective revizioniste de către Hitler este văzută ca o mișcare strategică pentru a-și avansa planul de expansiune teritorială în Europa Centrală. Ambițiile Germaniei au fost sprijinite de sentimentul anticomunist și de teama de expansiunea sovietică resimțită de națiunile din Europa Central-Estică. Autorii susțin că neîncrederea lui Stalin în capacitatea Occidentului de a se opune lui Hitler, reticența sa de a înfrunta direct Germania și o serie de erori de calcul au contribuit la semnarea Pactului Ribbentrop-Molotov în 1939, prin care Germania și Uniunea Sovietică au convenit să-și împartă Polonia și alte teritorii. Ca reacție, Rezistența poloneză, sprijinită de Londra și Moscova, a lansat o serie de operațiuni, culminând cu Revolta de la Varșovia și Operațiunea Furtuna din 1944.

INTRODUCTION

Literature review. The author's research draws on the authoritative opinions of historians from the United States, Poland, and Ukraine on a wide range of issues concerning Central and Eastern Europe during World War II and the Resistance movements that arose in these regions against German occupation (and, in some countries, Soviet occupation). It would not be an exaggeration to say that one of the most effective Resistance movements was organised in Poland. The author's reasoning follows the research by Joseph Rothschild and Nancy Wingfield,¹ Timothy Snyder,² Tony Judt,³ Barbara Jelavich⁴ (a broad range of issues related to the beginning, course, and end of World War II; the national Resistance movements and their comparative features), Ronnie Landau⁵ (the problems surrounding the Nazi Holocaust), Norman Davies⁶ (the drama of the 1944 Polish uprising); Polish historians Krystyna Kersten⁷ (the establishment of

¹ Joseph Rothschild, Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity. A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*. Third Edition, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

² Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 2003.

³ Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2005.

⁴ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans. Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, 1983.

⁵ R. S. Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust*, in “Slavonic and European Review”, London, 1993 (Oct. 1), vol. 71, no. 4, pp. 39–50.

⁶ Norman Davies, *Rising '44. The Battle for Warsaw*, New York, Viking Penguin, 2004.

⁷ K. Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy. Polska 1943 – 1949* [The birth of the system of

communist rule in the occupied territory of Poland and its priority tasks, guided by the Soviet leadership), Jan Ciechanowski,⁸ Łukasz Mieszkowski,⁹ Andrzej Chmielarz, Włodzimierz Borodziej, Andrzej Friszke, Krzysztof Kunert¹⁰ (the drama and heroics of the Warsaw Uprising), Andrzej Werblan¹¹ (a perspective on the post-war history from a representative of the Polish communist elites); Ukrainian historians Serhii Plokhii¹² (the issues of the international post-war settlement of Central-Eastern Europe), Leonid Zashkilniak¹³ (the factual account of events in the Polish Resistance movement), Larysa Shvab¹⁴ (establishment of communist power in Poland) and others. The research on this brief period of history, from 1939 to 1945, in Central and Eastern Europe, and even in Poland

power. Poland 1943 – 1949], Warszawa, Libella, 1986; *Ibid.*, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem Polska 1944 – 1956* [Between liberation and enslavement Poland 1944 – 1956], Warszawa, Aneks, 1993.

⁸ J. M. Ciechanowski, *Powstanie Warszawskie. Zarys podłoża politycznego i dyplomatycznego* [Warsaw Uprising. Outline of the political and diplomatic background], Pułtusk-Warszawa, Bellona, 2009.

⁹ Ł. Mieszkowski, *Tajemnicza rana. Mit czołgu-pułapki w Powstaniu Warszawskim* [Mysterious wound. The myth of the tank trap in the Warsaw Uprising], Warszawa, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2014.

¹⁰ A. Chmielarz, W. Borodziej, A. Friszke, K. Kunert, *Polska Podziemna 1939–1945* [Underground Poland 1939–1945], Warszawa, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1991.

¹¹ A. Werblan, *Władysław Gomułka. Sekretarz Generalny PPR* [Władysław Gomułka. Sekretarz Generalny PPR], Książka i Wiedza, 1988.

¹² S. Plokhii, *Yalta: tsina myru* [Yalta: The Price of Peace], Kharkiv, Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2019.

¹³ *Istoriia Tsentralno-Skhidnoi Yevropy* [History of Central-Eastern Europe], Lviv, Lvivskyi natsionalnyi universytet imeni Ivana Franka, 2001.

¹⁴ L. Shvab, M. Shvab, *Formuvannia i funksii orhaniv derzhavnoi bezpeky u Skhidnii Polshchi v 1939–1941 rokakh* [Formation and functions of state security bodies in Eastern Poland in 1939–1941], in “Wojna – Wojsko – Bezpieczeństwo poprzez stulecia i epoki. Studia i materiały” [“War – Military – Security through the Centuries and Eras. Studies and Materials”], Oswiecim, 2020, pp. 244–265; L. Shvab, Larysa Shvab, *Polska robotnycha partiia v borotbi za vladu v 1943 rotsi (na materialakh peremovyn mizh Polskoïu robotnychoïu partiïeu ta Delegaturoïu urïadu Respubliky Polshcha)* [The Polish Workers' Party in the struggle for power in 1943 (based on the materials of negotiations between the Polish Workers' Party and the Delegation of the Government of the Republic of Poland)], in “Naukovyi visnyk Volynskoho natsionalnoho universytetu imeni Lesi Ukrainky” [“Scientific Bulletin of Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University”], 2014, no. 7, pp. 130–136; L. Shvab, A. Shvab, M. Shvab, “Zeligowski Mutiny” as a Polish Way to Solve the “Vilnius Problem”, in “Codrul Cosminului”, 2021, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 129–149.

alone, is virtually limitless. The selection of authors was primarily driven by subjective choice and the authors' impressions from the studies mentioned above.

Problem formulation. Before delving into the research of the identified issues, let us place the resistance movements against the German occupation into a broader historical context and answer this question: was World War II an isolated episode in tragic world history or part of a larger process? If we accept the latter statement as accurate, we would have to agree with some Western historians, who suggest that the period from 1914 to 1945 can be defined as Europe's second Thirty Years' War, but, in terms of its overall impact, it is entirely different from the original Thirty Years' War of the 17th century. Europe emerged from that crisis as an absolute master of its own destiny, despite the war's devastating nature, internal fragmentation, and strife. In contrast, the Great War only put Europe into an internal deadlock, necessitating a decisive economic intervention by the United States and the British Empire's dominions outside Europe to find a way out. An attempt to establish an effective power balance within Europe during the Interbellum period failed. The small countries newly formed in 1918 after the collapse of old territorial empires were poor, vulnerable, and unstable. Furthermore, they disrespected their neighbours rather than sought support from one another, as they should have in the face of external threats. The Interbellum in Europe saw numerous revisionist states: the Soviet Union, Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria, all of which had been defeated in the Great War and were waiting for a chance to reclaim territory. International stability did not recover after 1918, and neither did the balance between countries – it was only a break from exhaustion. Military violence did not stop. Instead, it became part of internal politics, incorporating national discourse, racist prejudice, class opposition, and civil war.¹⁵

Joseph Rothschild and Nancy Wingfield argue that the theory of a 30-year war cycle in the early 20th century is too problematic. Those who persistently promote it have a clear goal: to downplay the relevance of the sovereignty of Southern and Eastern European countries. Hitler failed to comprehend the aspirations of the countries in the region. His promises to uphold their sovereignties within his hegemony, as in the case of Ukrainians or Slovaks, were left unfulfilled, leading to the rise of Resistance movements in those nations.¹⁶ Considering the conflicts and interstate confrontations,¹⁷ the unprecedented

¹⁵ Tony Judt, *Postwar...*, p. 37.

¹⁶ Joseph Rothschild, Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity...*, p. 30.

¹⁷ I. Homeniuk, *Provisnyky Druhoi svitovoi viiny. Prykordonni konflikty v tsentralno-Skhidni*

economic turmoil, and the internal discord among political leaders, it is evident that a catastrophe was inevitable.

The sovereignties of the mentioned countries were formally restored after World War II. Still, now they came under the control of the Soviet Union, whose leaders compelled the region to undergo a profound socio-economic transformation. This transformation became possible due to multiple factors, including the fatigue and disgust of Central-Eastern European peoples with the Nazi occupation—the sentiment among the war-torn nations was “anyone but the Germans” (this explanation is very often found in Polish historiography).¹⁸ As such, the years of German conquest and the steps taken towards communisation exhibit a certain evolutionary and even causal continuity in this region’s development. On the other hand, there exists a significant divergence between this two-part period and the earlier interwar decades. Therefore, historians tend to characterise this period as fundamentally different in terms of its goals and outcomes. Their reasoning is as follows: the Central and Eastern European peoples sought self-determination, whereas Germany and the USSR sought hegemony in the region. The USSR government, led by Stalin, hatched plans to expand the Soviet empire by exporting socialism. Italy’s fascist regime made territorial claims in the Balkans and North Africa. Finally, Japan exhibited imperial ambitions in the Far East. The newly formed League of Nations proved ineffective in preserving peace. The uncoordinated actions of France and the UK, along with the U.S. isolationism, contributed to the revival of Germany’s revanchist aspirations in the mid-1930s.¹⁹ The countries of Central and Eastern Europe were placed in a very precarious position by the objectives of their adversaries to the north and east. Each of the two dominating aggressors had its plans for Poland: Germany intended to take back the Polish Corridor (Danzig Corridor), which encompassed the territory of the former Province of West Prussia (excluding the Free City of Danzig), forming Pomeranian Voivodeship, the second aim was Silesia,

Yevropi [Harbingers of the Second World War. Border conflicts in Central-Eastern Europe], Kharkiv, Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2017, pp. 6–8.

¹⁸ A. Brzezecki, *Lekcje historii PRL w rozmowach* [Lessons from the history of the Polish People’s Republic in conversations], Warszawa, W. A. B., 2009.

¹⁹ K. Grygajtis, *Polska polityka zagraniczna 1926–1939: od koncepcji „międzymorza” Aleksandra Skrzyńskiego do idei „Trzeciej Europy” Józefa Becka* [Polish foreign politics 1926–1939: from conception of “isthmus” of Oleksandr Skrzyńskiego to the idea of “Third Europe” of Józefa Becka], in “Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe”, Kraków, 2006, no. 2, pp. 173–176; *Istoriia Tsentralno-Skhidnoi Yevropy...*, p. 459.

and had been transferred to the Republic of Poland under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, while the USSR laid claims to the western Ukrainian and western Belarusian lands, which had also become part of Poland after Soviet-Polish War 1919-1920, ended by Riga Peace in 1921. Thus, the sovereignty of the Polish state was particularly threatened under these circumstances. Venturing into a "big game" of land division on the German side in the late 1930s, the country failed to secure itself against future aggression. In fact, the exiled Polish government managed to organise an effective resistance movement against German and Soviet occupation.

Purpose and objectives. The purpose of this study is to understand the distinct characteristics of the Polish Resistance movement's organisation during German and Soviet occupation; the aim is to identify its strengths and the external factors that contributed to its weakening.

Methods. Research methods. A fair, verified, and correlated interpretation of a historical phenomenon is a difficult task. The historical phenomenon, interpreted as the object of research, is, in fact, the subject of study in historical science, as it concerns a community of people pursuing a common (or different) goal at varying levels of responsibility. The object of historical knowledge is the lived human experience, which is recorded in the individual and collective memory of social generations and transmitted through stories and narratives, written records, and other forms of memory. In the long run, collective knowledge is based on the accumulated experience that forms historical research. In essence, the acquisition of historical knowledge as "objective-subjective"²⁰ becomes "subjective-subjective." The Polish Resistance movement during World War II is a case study examined in this research. However, the preconditions for its realisation are closely related to the medium-term events that were defined in 1938. Therefore, the object of analysis and interpretation of the Resistance movement in Poland is also the structural preconditions for its emergence in the context of Germany's and the Soviet Union's interests. This approach made it possible to synchronise, compare, find analogies and parallels, and compare historical events. The conclusion about the effectiveness of the Polish Resistance movement as one of the most organized and effective in the struggle against the German occupation among the countries of Central-Eastern Europe is made by

²⁰ Z. Stezhko, H. Stezhko, *Problemy metodolohii istorichnykh doslidzhen* [Problems of historical research methodology], in "Scientific notes of Kirovohrad National Technical University. Series: historical sciences", 2018, no. 11, p. 179.

comparing it with the resistance movements of other countries known to the authors, for example, the Bulgarian one as a movement of “avoiding responsibility, the Romanian policy of double standards, the Albanian policy of compromise, etc. The Polish Resistance movement achieved many tactical successes but lost its strategic aim; in the collective memory of Poles, it became a model of struggle against the enemy and created a strong national need for liberation, which was achieved in 1989.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A common opinion is that World War II started with the liquidation of the sovereign state of the Republic of Poland on September 1 and 17, 1939 (this statement is likely to be argued by the Czechs and Slovaks, whose territory was sacrificed in the name of “peace” in Europe in 1938). Immediately after enforcing the 1939 pact, through the simultaneous invasion and partition of Poland by Germany and the USSR (September 1 and 17), the former annexed the part of Poland that had belonged to Prussia between 1795 (the Third Partition of Poland) and 1807 (the Treaty of Tilsit) and the parts in central and southern Poland.

Like no other, the Poles managed to organise underground army and state apparatus activities that extended beyond the borders of the General Government to most of the territory Poland had held during the Interbellum.

The Polish resistance movement involved approximately 600,000 people, who were united under four organisations: Home Army, Peasant Battalions, National Armed Forces, and People’s Army/Guard. The Home Army was the most prominent clandestine organisation: its armed struggle spanned the entire territory of Poland, extending even into Hungary and Berlin. It united the most numerous prewar powers: socialists, peasants, the Sanation Movement, and the various nationalist factions. A very significant portion of the military personnel were engaged in military administration. The Home Command alone consisted of 4,000 personnel in 1944, while the Home Army’s budget amounted to millions of dollars. The Home Command was responsible for intelligence gathering, sabotage and diversions, and extensive propaganda campaigns (“black propaganda”), carried out with varying intensity during 1942–1944. Next to the Home Army, the second-biggest clandestine organisation was the Peasant Battalions (the armed forces of the People’s Party). Even after being incorporated into the Home Army, the Peasant Battalions remained a significant independent force organised into People’s Protection Guards. As the Peasant Battalions lacked sufficient personnel, financial, and material resources, their sabotage actions were less extensive than

those of the Home Army. The Peasant Battalions mainly operated in rural areas. The National Armed Forces were a faction of nationalistic forces that never fully aligned with the Home Army. They were the most active in armed resistance to communist influence on Polish lands.²¹ Their struggle did not yield the desired result – the restoration of Poland’s sovereignty. In fact, it was the members of the People’s Guard and People’s Army who, whether consciously or not, contributed to the country’s rebuilding as a communist state heavily reliant on the USSR. The Polish Resistance movement culminated in the Warsaw Uprising, which began on August 1, 1944, and lasted 63 days. The rebels aimed to liberate the capital before the arrival of the Red Army, reinstate the legitimate government, and thwart the recognition of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, established in Moscow, as the incumbent governing body. The Warsaw Uprising was the largest military operation conducted by any European resistance movement during World War II. Deployed on the eastern bank of the Vistula River, in the Praga District, the Soviet army did not fire a single shot to help the insurgents (despite Winston Churchill’s efforts to persuade Stalin that their assistance was vital). The Polish Resistance movement did not fulfil its primary purpose of liberating Poland from German and Soviet occupation and restoring the prewar political *status quo*. However, the movement became an example of heroism and dedication to the Polish state during its critical moment of survival.

DISCUSSION

World War II began with the liquidation and partition of Poland by two totalitarian states – Germany and the USSR. On August 23, 1939, these countries signed two documents: a publicly known non-aggression pact and a secret territorial agreement. Due to the significance of the former document, it is worth citing its key articles. Article I obliged the two countries to “desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other Powers.”²² Article II enabled German aggression in Poland: “Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third Power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third Power.”²³ Article III stipulated that “the Governments of

²¹ Norman Davies, *Rising '44...*; M. Ciechanowski, *Powstanie Warszawskie...*, p. 926.

²² *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939–1941: Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office*, R. James, J. S. B. Sontag, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1948, p. 76–77.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

the two High Contracting Parties shall [...] maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests.”²⁴ Article IV contradicted the secret protocol of the Anti-Comintern Pact in that it obliged each party not to “participate in any grouping of Powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party”²⁵. Finally, the two states agreed to settle any future conflicts “exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.”²⁶

In their secret treaty, Germany and the Soviet Union agreed to divide Poland and the Baltic states and to stipulate the USSR’s right to annexe Bessarabia. The specific provisions stated that, in the event of territorial and political reorganisation in the territories of the Baltic states (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), the northern border of Lithuania would be considered the border between the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR. Thus, each party recognised Lithuania’s interest in the area around Vilnius. In the event of territorial and political reorganisation in the territories belonging to the Polish state, the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR would be precisely delimited along the Narew–Vistula–San line.²⁷ The issue of harmonising the interests of both parties regarding the feasibility of establishing an independent Polish state was to be addressed in accordance with future political developments. In any case, the two states were obligated to resolve this issue through a peaceful settlement.

In Southern and Eastern Europe, the USSR expressed interest in Bessarabia. The German party maintained it had no interest in those territories.²⁸

These political arrangements were accompanied by economic agreements, under which the Soviet Union provided Germany with the raw materials it required to wage war. The German government procured timber, cotton, food grains, phosphates, platinum, fur, and oil. In return, Germany supplied vehicles, technological equipment, machinery, and weaponry, including aircraft, tank models, and military patents. In this way, Germany contributed to the Soviet army potential, which might seem contradictory to its own interests; however, considering that its industry had already been catering to military needs, the decision was logical.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76–77.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁷ Barbara Yelavich, *History of the Balkans...*, p. 222.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 222, 225.

According to the second article of the secret treaty, Nazi Germany was to gain control of the territory that encompassed the most considerable portion of the Polish industry and had an ethnic Polish population. As a result, Germany assured itself of the ability to attack Poland without risking a two-front war.

The Soviet Union took Western Ukrainian oil fields. In 1941–1944, Western Ukrainian and Western Belarusian territories were administered by the Germans. In 1944, the Soviet Union once again annexed these territories and, at the expense of Germany, made compensations to Poland in the west by transferring most of Western Pomerania (Pomorze Zachodnie), a substantial part of Brandenburg, the entire Poznan region, and Silesia (with the border running along the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers). In the postwar period, East Prussia was divided between Poland and the Soviet Union. Only after the Soviet Union's re-annexation of Vilnius did Stalin decide against establishing the Polish Soviet Socialist Republic or the Polish Autonomous Republic. In 1945, he ordered the shift of the Polish border westward and the resumption of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (which was established in July 1940) with Vilnius as its capital, while the Poles were deported to communist Poland. This is how the dominance of Polish culture in Vilnius²⁹ ended after World War II.³⁰

The signing of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty on September 28, 1939 (the Soviet Union gained Lithuania, while Germany gained Lubelszczyzna), paved the way for new redistributions. The Soviet Union dissolved the independence of the Baltic countries and assimilated them into its territory. It also waged war against Finland, seeking a similar outcome. Having secured its rear with this treaty, Germany regrouped its forces and dealt a crushing blow to Western Europe. By the spring of 1941, Germany had conquered the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, and part of France. Germany and Italy occupied Czechoslovakia, Albania, Yugoslavia, and Greece.³¹

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe found themselves in particularly challenging circumstances. The guarantees of their independence turned out to be fictional. The Little Entente and the Balkans collapsed. Germany and Italy asserted territorial claims on numerous countries in the region under the Tripartite Pact of September 27, 1940, and either eliminated their sovereignty or assumed the role of “arbiters” in their territorial disputes (widely researched

²⁹ Polish Spisz and Orawa were occupied by Slovakia during World War II.

³⁰ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations...*, p. 89.

³¹ *Istoriia Tsentralno-Skhidnoi Yevropy...*, p. 459.

in: *Homeniuk, 2017*). Hungary seized part of the Slovak territory, Transcarpathia, Northern Transylvania, and Vojvodina. Bulgaria reclaimed Southern Dobruja and took part in the occupation of Macedonian and Thracian lands. Lands in the east were promised to Romania. Slovaks were allowed to establish their state after the collapse of Czechoslovakia, and Croats were allowed to establish the Independent State of Croatia after the occupation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After that, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia took Germany's side.

A "new order" was established in 11 European countries, regulating the lives of 140 million people. It eliminated these countries' sovereignty by replacing legitimate democratic governing bodies with occupational ones, engaging collaborationists in governance, prohibiting political activity, inflicting terror and persecution, exterminating the Jewish population and the intelligentsia, and extensively using forced labour. An appearance of sovereignty was maintained in the satellite countries, but authoritarian regimes were established there, and their armies fought alongside the Germans. The enslaved populations suffered under the regime's reign of terror, while Germany entirely controlled the economies.³² NKVD terror was unleashed in the countries and lands that became part of the Soviet Union.³³

Various segments of the population opposed the German occupiers and their allies, sparking a widespread Resistance movement. In the beginning, it lacked clear organisation and was guided by London and Moscow. London was the seat of the emigrant governments of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. They were in contact with various clandestine groups in their home countries, formed military formations, such as the Chetniks in Yugoslavia and the Home Army in Poland, and developed plans for the countries' postwar reconstruction. After the German attack on the USSR, the Comintern issued a directive to the communist parties to launch an active armed struggle against the occupiers and representatives of pro-fascist authoritarian regimes in the satellite countries: Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

Immediately after enforcing the 1939 pact, through the simultaneous invasion and partition of Poland by Germany and the USSR (September 1 and 17). Germany annexed the former Polish territories along its eastern border: West Prussia, Poznań, Upper Silesia, and the former Free City of Danzig. In the rest of German-occupied Poland, the so-called General Government was established. The

³² *Ibid.*

³³ L. Shvab, M. Shvab, *Formuvannia i funktsii orhaniv derzhavnoi bezpeky...*, pp. 244–256.

remaining part of Nazi-occupied Poland, encompassing the territory between these eastward-spanning borders and the German-Soviet demarcation line (the line was moved to the east; firstly, it was mainly on Vistula and then it was moved on Bug, in exchange for Lithuania to the Soviet Union), was designated as the General Government, omitting any reference to its original historical name, as an attempt to eradicate its presence from the map of Europe. A significant part of the Poles and Jews residing in the territory directly annexed to the Reich were deported to the General Government. In the annexed territories, the Polish intelligentsia was nearly exterminated. Germany intended to remove all industrial equipment from the area and prevent its repopulation. Eventually, Polish workers were deported to the Reich for slave labour, whereas the Jews were rounded up from across Europe and transported to several death camps. There were six of these death camps: Auschwitz, Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor, Kulmhof, and Majdanek.³⁴ The Nazis planned to eradicate all Jews and Roma and reduce the Polish population, leaving only those who could be engaged in slave labour. The Polish intelligentsia was also to be physically exterminated. After the Battle of Stalingrad (July 17, 1942–February 2, 1943), Governor General Hans Frank proposed measures to enlist the support of the Poles as potential helpers in the war effort against the Soviet forces, which were now on a constant counteroffensive. However, Hitler and Himmler dismissed the proposal. The Poles had already spurned the Nazis by then for their brutal atrocities.

Like no other, the Poles managed to organise underground army and state apparatus activities that extended beyond the borders of the General Government to most of the territory Poland had held during the Interbellum. Only Yugoslavia could match it in the scope of its struggle. Six million Polish citizens were murdered, half of whom were Jews.³⁵ All the infrastructure built between the wars was destroyed. The Polish Resistance movement culminated in the Warsaw Uprising, which lasted from August 1 to October 2, 1944 (detailed research about the Warsaw Uprising.³⁶ There are accounts of Jewish uprisings in the Warsaw ghetto from April 19 to May 16, 1943,³⁷ and in the ghettos of Bialystok and Vilnius

³⁴ R. S. Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust*, in "Slavonic and European Review", London, 1993 (Oct. 1), vol. 71, no. 4, p. 40.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁶ A. Chmielarz, W. Borodziej, A. Friszke, K. Kunert, *Polska Poziemna 1939–1945* [Underground Poland 1939–1945], Warszawa, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1991.

³⁷ I. Gutman, *Żydzi warszawscy 1939–1943* [Jews of Warsaw 1939–1943], Warszawa, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Rytm", 1993, p. 256.

in September 1943.³⁸ Significant Polish groups fought abroad in North Africa, Italy, and Normandy.³⁹ Poland was the only country occupied by the Axis forces that had no traitors in the war.

In the Soviet part of former interwar Poland, which Moscow controlled from September 1939 till the German offensive in 1941 and then during the entire period from 1944 to 1991, the governing authorities, unlike their German counterparts, displayed greater caution and formally acknowledged the principle of national self-determination. First, they waited until September 17, 1939, when it became evident that the German armies, which had initiated aggression against Poland on September 1, had won the campaign. In this way, Moscow avoided backstabbing the still viable Polish defence, securing itself from possible losses. Second, the Soviet Union made extensive efforts to publicly assert that its interest in eastern Poland was the protection of the Ukrainian and Belarusian populations from Polish oppression. Third, on October 22, 1939, the Soviet occupation authorities organised a plebiscite and held elections for the People's Assemblies of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, which expressed a desire for their regions to join the UkrSSR and the BSSR. On November 1 and 2, 1939, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR approved these requests, granting Soviet citizenship to all residents.⁴⁰ Finally, the Soviet authorities transferred the Vilnius region to Lithuania, which was still independent at the time, as a demonstration of their seemingly disinterested benevolence.

However, their policy was harsh and even brutal. Private property was nationalised, and the land was collectivised. Ethnic Poles were excluded from civil and professional life, with 1.25 to 1.5 million people deported to Siberia, the Russian Arctic Zone, and Soviet Central Asia. Half of these people died. Russian repressions targeted the Polish elite and intelligentsia: aristocracy, professionals, clergy, civil servants, and interned military officers, but also Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews and other nationalities were harassed and deported. "From the onset of the undeclared war, the fate of the prisoners became a pressing issue. The

³⁸ B. Engelking, *Pamięć: historia Żydów polskich przed, w czasie i po zagładzie* [Memory: the History of Polish Jews before, during and after the Holocaust], Fundacja Shalom, 2004, p. 178.

³⁹ In 1940, in Norway in Narvik, all French campaign 1940, battle for Britain 1940, battle for Atlantic 1940-1945, Low States campaign 1945 and Germany 1945.

⁴⁰ V. Baran, V. Tokarskyi, *"Zachystka": politychni represii v zachidnykh oblastiakh Ukrainy u 1939-1941 rr.* ["Purge": Political Repressions in the Western Regions of Ukraine in 1939-1941], Lviv, 2009, pp. 43-84.

Pravda newspaper wrote in an operational summary that from September 17 to 20, 1939, Red Army units had disarmed three infantry divisions, two cavalry brigades, and many small groups of the Polish army. While the data is far from complete, it is estimated that over 60,000 soldiers and officers were captured. On September 19, Lavrenty Beria, the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR, signed Order No. 0308, which established the organisation of Prisoner of War Camps and the creation of a Prisoner of War Department under the USSR NKVD." Oleksandr Suprunenko was appointed head of the department.⁴¹

According to the order, eight camps were created to hold prisoners of war: Ostashkov (7,000 people), Yuhnov (5,000), Kozelsk (7,000), Putyvl (7,000), Kozelshchany (5,000), Starobelsk (5,000), Yuzha (3,000), and Oranky (2,000). Of these POW camps, the first five were to accommodate 10,000 people each, and the remaining – 8,000, 6,000, and 4,000 people. The camps were headed by Pavel Borisovets (Ostashkov), Filipp Kadzhiev (Yuhnov), Vasiliy Korolyov (Kozelsk), Nikolai Smirnov (Putyvl), Vasiliy Sokolov (Kozelshchany), and the remaining ones – by Berezhkov, Kiy, and Sorokin. Operational and Chekist services for prisoners of war were entrusted to the Special Department of the NKVD of the USSR and its local bodies.⁴² Finally, most of the private POWs were deported to the Gulag, when military officers were primarily concentrated in Kozielsk and Starobielsk camps and police, border guard, military police, and Border Protection Corp (not only officers but also privates) in Ostashkov. Nearly all POWs from those 3 camps were murdered during the Katyń crime.

In September 1939, Moscow claimed that the Polish state had ceased to exist and thus refused to recognise its exiled government, which at first had relocated to Romania, then to Paris, and after the capitulation of France, to London. Polish historiography has extensively covered the challenges faced by the Polish government during its stay in London. In particular, Polish People's Republic History Lessons in Conversation by Andrzej Brzezicki⁴³ notes that Polish government officials in London were treated with disdain because none of them spoke English, only French. The emigrant government supported the Polish Resistance and maintained close contact with it, officially advocating the return of all prewar lands to Poland. The British government, though it could not openly express its distaste for the Poles, maintained a public distance from the Polish

⁴¹ V. Baran, V. Tokarskyi, *"Zachystka" ...*, pp. 51–53.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ A. Brzezicki, *Lekcje o PRL-u w rozmowach* [Lessons about the Polish People's Republic in Conversations], Warszawa, W.A.B., 2009.

protests against the USSR's annexation of eastern Poland. On September 26, 1939, Edward Wood, 1st Earl of Halifax, who at the time served as British Foreign Secretary, pointed out that the Soviet territorial claims were mainly in line with what Lord Curzon had said was reasonable in his recommendations on the border back in 1920. Throughout the war, Winston Churchill sought to facilitate reconciliation between the exiled Polish government and the Soviet government. However, Britain always maintained its stance regarding the Curzon Line as the border between Poland and the Soviet Union. Thus, it turned a blind eye to Poland's territorial losses, pursuing the strategic goal of establishing and maintaining the formidable Soviet Union as a rival. On July 30, 1941, after Nazi Germany had attacked the USSR on June 22, 1941, the Polish and Soviet governments restored diplomatic relations – even though the latter did not commit to reinstate the prewar borders. When the Wehrmacht launched its offensive and the front moved farther from the disputed borders, the exiled Polish government agreed to temporarily set aside the unresolved territorial issue and focus on implementing agreements to form a Polish army in the USSR, composed of captured Polish officers and soldiers.⁴⁴ Even though all these efforts yielded results, they quickly became a major disappointment. Many of the surviving Polish citizens were emaciated and sick, rendering them virtually unable to take up their duties. The newly formed Polish units lodged accusations against the Soviet authorities, claiming they were subjected to starvation rations and received inadequate provisions of weapons and uniforms. In turn, the Soviets accused the Poles of reluctance to fight at the front, using this as justification for their claims. In August 1942, the Polish army retreated to the Middle East via Iran to take part in the Italian campaign. Władysław Anders led the army. Soviet representatives viewed this withdrawal as a desertion on the eve of the Battle of Stalingrad. However, an alternative interpretation of this fact suggests that Stalin may have seen the deployment of the Polish army to the Mediterranean theatre of war as desirable since it effectively eliminated the possibility of Poland reclaiming its territories with an army outside complete Soviet control.⁴⁵

The foreboding disappearance of thousands of Polish officers who had been captured in 1939 shortly led to a new deterioration of Soviet-Polish diplomatic relations. On April 13, 1943, the Germans announced the discovery of mass graves

⁴⁴ Where was a problem of lack of officers, who – as it had not been known for that time – had been murdered in Katyń crime.

⁴⁵ Joseph Rothschild, Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity...*, p 30.

of several thousand Polish officers in the Katyn forests west of Smolensk and provided evidence that said officers had been shot before the Wehrmacht arrived in this territory in the summer of 1941. On April 26, the exiled government requested the International Red Cross to inspect the grave site and provide relevant testimony; the Soviet Union broke off diplomatic relations and accused the Polish government of colluding with Hitler. Russia concealed the secret of the Polish citizens' murder by the Soviet NKVD until 14 October 1992, when Yeltsin officially recognised Katyn as a Soviet crime.⁴⁶ The Katyn crimes had heavy implications for Polish-Soviet relations during the socialist and post-communist period.⁴⁷

And once again, the Soviet government benefited from strained relations with the Polish government: nothing could better relieve it of its commitments while the Red Army was advancing westward. That effectively allowed Stalin to negotiate political agreements anew (in diplomatic practice, this is called “*de novo*”). He devised several options to use this opportunity. First, after the departure of the first Polish army created in the USSR, Stalin issued an order in 1943 for the recruitment of the remaining prisoners captured in 1939 to form a new army. This is how the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division, consisting of 14,380 personnel, was formed on May 14, 1943. The Division (at first the Division, then the Corps, and later even the 1st Army) was modelled after the Soviet army, with its political commissars and other attributes. The army was led by obedient officers of the interwar Polish army – Zygmunt Berling – was a lieutenant colonel of pre-1939 Polish Army, in the years of the II World War was POW in Soviet camps; Karol Świerczewski – was a Soviet citizen, but deputy commander of the Corp and then 1st Army, then commander of the 2nd Army; Aleksander Zawadzki—political officer of the Corp and then the 1st Army; and Antoni (Anton) Siwicki — the first chief of staff. On October 12, 1943, the division fought its first battle near Lenino, and in the Polish People's Republic (1950–1991), this day was celebrated as the Day of the Polish Army. Advancing westward with the Red Army, the division grew in size, eventually expanding to the scale of a corps and then an army through the inclusion of communist partisans and increased recruitment from various groups and individuals within the general Resistance movement.

⁴⁶ M. Tarczyński, *Postanowienie o wszczęciu śledztwa katyńskiego w Polsce* [The Decision to initiate the Katyn Investigation in Poland], in “Zeszyty Katyńskie”, Warszawa, 2005, no. 20, pp. 9–10.

⁴⁷ J. Pomianowski, *Ostatnia zagadka Katynia. Na wschód od zachodu. Jak być z Rosją?* [The Last Mystery of Katyn. East from West. How to be with Russia?], Warszawa, Rosner & Wspólnicy 2004, pp. 262–265.

Even those who were subordinate to the London government joined the army, recognising Poland's vulnerability in the absence of adequate military assistance from the West. Second, Stalin ensured the organisation of a Polish communist underground during the German occupation to compete with the initially much larger, truly nationalist, and overall, more effective general Resistance movement. Third, Stalin laid the foundation for an alternative Polish government by selecting Communist Party officials and leftist intellectuals who had resided in the Soviet Union and were now receiving political training within his apparatus. It was known as the Union of Polish Patriots, led by Wanda Wasilewska. According to unconfirmed reports, the Polish Workers' Party was formed in 1942.⁴⁸ In 1943, after Marcei Nowotko was murdered under unclear circumstances, the party was headed by Władysław Gomułka (with a break during 1948–1956, who led the Polish United Workers' Party until 1970. In its January 1943 manifesto, the party called for an armed struggle to accelerate the Red Army's liberation of Poland.⁴⁹ At the end of 1942, it had 8,000 members. In the spring of 1942, the party started creating partisan units of the People's Guard. Instructions to the party and units came from Moscow through the Comintern. The People's Guard accepted many Soviet prisoners of war escaping from concentration camps. The party failed to establish cooperation with the Delegation for Poland of the Government in London and the Home Army, as the latter was unwilling to compromise on the eastern border. That prompted the communists to found their own political bloc to take over the government in the future. On the night of December 31, 1943, to January 1, 1944, the Workers' Party held a meeting in Warsaw that brought together representatives from nineteen small organisations and established the State National Council⁵⁰ to represent the "democratic" forces within the Polish population. Former NKVD officer Bolesław Bierut headed the Polish National Council. The Council's declaration denied the London government's right to represent the interests of the Poles and promised to establish a "new government" in the future; it approved the charter of the "people's councils" and began forming them underground. A special decree of the Council established the People's Army,

⁴⁸ L. Shvab, *Polska robotnicza partia w borotbi za vladu...*, pp. 130–136.

⁴⁹ A. Werblan, *Władysław Gomułka...*, p. 176–177.

⁵⁰ *Dekret Nr 3 Krajowej Rady Narodowej z dn. 1 stycznsa 1944 r. O powołaniu organizacji Armii Ludowej* [Decree No. 3 of the State National Council of January 1, 1944. On the establishment of the organization of the People's Army], in *Pierwsze dokumenty odrodzonej Polski* [The first documents of the reborn Poland], Kraków, Nakładem Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Informacji i Propagandy w Krakowie, luty 1945, p. 2–3.

intended to unite all Polish formations. The People's Army was headed by Michał Rola-Żymierski (a Former Polish general who was a Soviet spy and was sentenced for corruption and reduced in rank in 1927), who resumed cooperation with Soviet intelligence. On July 22, 1944, the Polish Committee of National Liberation⁵¹ was established in Moscow, forming a provisional government of Poland under Edward Osóbka-Morawski. The Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation⁵² proclaimed the Committee's rule in the liberated territories, alignment with the USSR, the establishment of new borders determined by the allies, and democratic reforms. The Committee denounced the London government as representatives of the Polish nation. It arrived in Poland escorted by the Red Army and numerous Soviet advisors who controlled every aspect of its operations. On July 27, 1944, Edward Osóbka-Morawski signed a secret agreement in Moscow establishing the border between the USSR and Poland along the Curzon line.⁵³

The Soviet army crossed the Polish-Soviet border in January 1944; the Soviet government denied violating the existing border of a foreign state and claimed its army was operating within the USSR territory. Only in July 1944, when its troops crossed the Bug River, defined as the border by the Curzon Line and the 1939 German-Soviet partition line, Moscow admitted to having entered the Polish territory. Immediately afterwards, it inaugurated the Polish Committee of National Liberation. The Soviet army handed over the civilian administration of the liberated territory to the Committee, which on January 1, 1945, announced its transformation into the provisional government of Poland. Meanwhile, units of the far more significant anti-German Resistance movement, which remained loyal to the exiled government in London, were arrested and eliminated by Soviet authorities, sent into exile, or forced to join the Polish army. The Soviet government did nothing to prevent the crushing of the Warsaw Uprising of August

⁵¹ *Dekret Krajowej Rady Narodowej o utworzeniu Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego* [Decree of State National Advice about formation of Polish National Committee of Wyzwolenia], in "Pierwsze dokumenty odrodzonej Polski", Kraków: Nakładem Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Informacji i Propagandy w Krakowie, luty 1945, p. 3–4.

⁵² *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczy Pospolitej* [Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland], 1944, no. 1 (15 sierpnia), p. 5.

⁵³ N. Papish, O. Fedun, *Istoryko-politychni aspekty stanovlennia ukraińsko-polskoho derzhavnoho kordonu* [Historical and Political Aspects of the Formation of the Ukrainian-Polish State Border], in "Rehionalni studii. Uzhhorodskyi natsionalnyi universytet" [Regional Studies. Uzhhorod National University], 2019, no. 16, p. 110.

1 – October 2, 1944. It was understood that the national Resistance, rather than Soviet troops, aimed to liberate the capital, and its willingness to help disappeared immediately. Deployed on the eastern bank of the Vistula River, in the Praga District, the Soviet army did not fire a single shot to help the rebels. During the Warsaw Uprising, about 150-200,000 civilians were killed.

CONCLUSIONS

A common opinion is that the destruction of the Polish anti-German, anti-communist underground was a predetermined process. Still, Poland was also destroyed by a real civil war that continued at least till 1947. In this war, the USSR-supported communist forces, the surviving parts of the national Resistance movement, and Ukrainian partisans fought each other with great fury and desperation.

War World II in Europe was coming to an end. Not long before that, the allied Big Three had discussed the political fate of Poland at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, held on February 4–11 and July 17–August 2, 1945 (the division of Central-Eastern Europe into spheres of influence widely researched in: (Plokhii, 2019⁵⁴). Stalin's demands regarding the Polish-Soviet border were now approved by the "Western Two"; Poland was compensated for the lost eastern lands with German territories up to the borders of the Oder and Neisse rivers, as well as the southern part of East Prussia. To accommodate the Polish population that was to leave the eastern lands, the German population was deported westward from the region Poland had just acquired. The British and Americans recognised the provisional government of Poland, thus sacrificing their loyal Polish allies in exile in exchange for several of them joining the new Polish government. The war that had been started to protect the independence of Poland from the claims of Nazi Germany in the west resulted in the country's doubled dependence on the USSR: Poland was to be governed by people committed to transforming its social, economic, and political life after the Soviet model; Poland's international security was to depend solely on the Soviet defence of its western border against future German revanchism.

⁵⁴ S. Plokhii, *Yalta: tsina myru* [Yalta: The Price of Peace], Kharkiv, Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2019.

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