



Poland under Communism

A Cold War History

A. Kemp-Welch



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This is the first English-language history of Poland from the Second World War until the fall of Communism. Using a wide range of Polish archives and unpublished sources in Moscow and Washington, Anthony Kemp-Welch integrates the Cold War history of diplomacy and interstate relations with the study of domestic opposition and social movements. His key themes encompass political, social and economic history; the Communist movement and its relations with the Soviet Union; and the broader East–West context with particular attention to US policies. The book concludes with a first-hand account of how Solidarity formed the world's first post-Communist government in 1989 as the Polish people demonstrated what can be achieved by civic courage against apparently insuperable geo-strategic obstacles. This compelling new account will be essential reading for anyone interested in Polish history, the Communist movement and the course of the Cold War.

Anthony Kemp-Welch is Senior Lecturer at the School of History, University of East Anglia. His previous publications include *The Birth of Solidarity* (second edition, 1991) and, as co-author and editor, *Stalinism in Poland* (1999).

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To Klara, Hannah, Maia and Nadia

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Preface

In 1989, Poland became the first country to leave communism peacefully. Its ruling generals invited leaders of the outlawed Solidarity to a Round Table on the future of communist power. Expecting to co-opt the opposition, they were swept away by an electoral avalanche and resigned. Solidarity then formed the world's first post-communist government. Within a few months, the Polish paradigm was emulated across all of Eastern Europe.

Afterwards, many actors claimed the credit. Soviet leaders from the Gorbachev era state that they took power in 1985 determined to withdraw from the region. They argue that their message was misunderstood by their East European counterparts, or simply disbelieved. Western officials are no more reticent in attributing to their own actions – whether CIA funding at critical junctures or the quiet word in the oppositional ear prior to the Round Table – the decisive tilting of the balance towards freedom. Some Catholic publicists – though not the Vatican – report that the Pope, in private audience with General Jaruzelski, put Poland on the path to power-sharing. Finally, Polish communists themselves declare that they always wished to liberate their country and had done so the moment geopolitics permitted. We are invited to believe that 1989 was the consummation of 'revisionism' they had espoused since 1956.

This book will take account of these prominent players. But it will also include the unsung heroes, easily overlooked by historians, and less able to claim their place in history. Politics also took place on the shop floor where grievances were discussed and strike posters sometimes put up. It occurred covertly in fields and forests at dead of night when farmers and their families planned to protect their property from seizure by the state. Local priests were political too, permitting uncensored publishing in their crypts, and steering their congregations from the pulpit to vote (or to abstain) in mono-Party elections. Thousands of young people jeopardised their future by joining the political opposition and the Solidarity underground.

Such activities by ordinary citizens, muted voices from the chorus, do eventually achieve legal expression. In this sense the Polish experience

under communism holds wider lessons. The Polish success owed nothing to the threat of military force. It showed what could be achieved by civic courage against apparently insuperable geo-strategic obstacles. Refusing to be victims, they too helped to end the Cold War.

When I first visited (in 1971) Poland was opening to the West for capital and technology and communism was placating society with popular measures such as rebuilding Warsaw's Royal Castle, dynamited by the Nazis. Though writing a thesis on Stalinism in the 1930s, I became an increasingly engaged spectator of contemporary Poland. Under the pen-name 'Joseph Kay', I was able to record the origins of political opposition. During Solidarity's sixteen months of legality I was fortunate to attend its meetings at every level, including the Gdańsk Congress in 1981. These experiences informed my first book, *The Birth of Solidarity*.

After the fall, the British Academy enabled me to visit the post-communist historians assembling at the Polish Academy's new Institute of Political Studies. There was an immediate meeting of minds. The important works of its founder members Andrzej Paczkowski, Paweł Machcewicz and Andrzej Friszke have been seminal for mine. We jointly convened panels at the 1995 World Congress of Central and East European Studies (in Warsaw) which became *Stalinism in Poland, 1944–1956* (1999). Its Russian contributor, Sergei Kudryashov, has always been an indispensable guide to Moscow archives. Vital too are the findings and analyses of Mark Kramer (Harvard).

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Amongst many colleagues, Zbigniew Pelczyński (Oxford) has been encouraging throughout the project. The School of History at UEA has proved a happy home. Thanks are due to Michael Watson, my commissioning editor at CUP, and all his staff, especially Leigh Mueller. Quiet places to write were provided by Selima Hill in Lyme Regis, and by Joyce Divers and Willy Bulow in north Norwich. Thanks also to founder members of the Friday Club: Dave Corker, Ali Harvey, Ken Kennard and Andy Patmore. My main debts are to Alice and the dedicatees.

Abbreviations

AAN	Archive of Modern Acts
AFL/CIO	American Federation of Labor / Congress of Industrial Organisations
AK	Home Army
CC	Soviet Central Committee
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPSU	Soviet Communist Party
CRZZ	Central Council of Trade Unions
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
DDR	German Democratic Republic
DiP	'Experience and the Future' (Discussion Club)
FNU	Front of National Unity
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KBW	Polish Internal Security Corps
KIK	Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia
KKP	National Coordinating Commission (of Solidarity)
KKW	National Executive Committee (of Solidarity)
KOK	National Defence Committee
KOR	Committee for the Defence of Workers
KPN	Confederation of Independent Poland
KPP	Poland's Communist Party (pre-war)
KSS	Social Self-Defence Committee (KOR)
KUL	Catholic University of Lublin
MKS	Interfactory Strike Committee
MKZ	Interfactory Founding Committee
MSW	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NIK	Supreme Control Commission
NKVD	Soviet secret police
NSA	National Security Archive
NSC	National Security Council
NSZZ	Independent self-governing trade union (Solidarity)
NZS	Independent students union

OPZZ	Official trade unions
ORMO	Voluntary reserve of the civic militia
PAP	Polish Press Agency
POP	Basic party organisation
PPN	Polish League for Independence
PPR	Polish Workers' Party
PPS	Polish Socialist Party
PRON	Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth
PSL	Peasants' Party
PZPR	Polish United Workers' Party
RAPP	Russian Association of Proletarian Writers
RFE	Radio Free Europe
ROPCiO	Movement for the Defence of Human and Civic Rights
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic
SB	Security Service
SDKPiL	Social-Democratic Party of the Congress Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania
SKS	Students' Solidarity Committee
TRS	Provisional Council of Solidarity
UB	Secret police
UNRRA	UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
WRN	Provincial People's Council
ZiSPO	Stalin Factory in Poznań
ZLP	Polish Writers' Union
ZMP	Polish Youth Union
ZMS	Communist Youth Organisation
ZOMO	Motorised Units of Civil Militia (riot police)
ZSL	United Peasants' Party

1 Prelude

At the Tehran Conference of the ‘Big Three’ (Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt), Churchill proposed that the future Polish state should lie between the ‘Curzon Line’ and the ‘line of the Oder River, including within Poland East Prussia and Pomerania’. The official transcript does not record the American view. However, Roosevelt had a private meeting with Stalin during the proceedings (1 December 1943) at which he accepted the Soviet version of future Polish frontiers.¹ In return, he asked for no publicity for this endorsement. As an additional precaution, he did not inform his own State Department of the arrangement.² There were six or seven million US citizens of Polish origin, mainly Democrats, and he did not want to jeopardise their votes. He would seek an unprecedented fourth term in 1944. Polish-Americans were well organised and expected to hold the balance in key states such as New York, Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Stalin graciously concurred with these democratic niceties, noting that Soviet foreign policy did not suffer from such impediments. In fact, he was more than satisfied with their ‘secret agreement’. He asked US envoy Harriman to confirm it in June 1944 and received a ‘positive reply’.³

In the same month, the Prime Minister of the Polish government in exile visited the USA. Mikołajczyk was assured that the USA was opposed to any agreements of frontier changes in Europe – or elsewhere – prior to the end of the war. The Polish leader was promised a rich package of territorial advances, including oil fields in Eastern Galicia, all totally at variance with the Allied understandings at Tehran. The diplomatic historian Jan Karski, normally forthright in his analyses, merely notes

¹ W. Franklin (ed.), *The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943* (Washington, 1961), pp. 867–68.

² Mary E. Glantz, *FDR and the Soviet Union: The President’s Battles over Foreign Policy* (Lawrence, Kans., 2005).

³ S. Kudryashov, ‘Diplomatic Prelude’ in A. Kemp-Welch (ed.), *Stalinism in Poland, 1944–1956*. (New York, 1999), p. 36.

that the President 'misled' Mikołajczyk.⁴ Roosevelt's own view was evidently that there was no way to prevent Moscow taking control of Poland, should it so desire, and he tried to bring the State Department round to this way of thinking.⁵ His main attention was elsewhere, primarily on developing and achieving his conception of a new post-war order.

The Atlantic Charter (August 1941) had mentioned the need for a revived League of Nations. But for fear of antagonising US opinion – Congress refused to ratify the League Covenant in 1921 – its last Article referred to the essential need for disarmament 'pending the establishment of a wider and more permanent system of general security'. The President proposed a new United Nations to keep the peace. The new body would be truly inclusive. To ensure that the great powers of the day would join – to avoid a boycott like that of the League – they would be given a veto, which would enable them to block any operation mounted against them. In a structural innovation, the UN Charter talked about 'the Organisation and its Members', granting significant institutional authority to the former. In due course, the Secretary-General would emerge as a genuine international actor. Finally, the issue of sovereignty was side-stepped. Thus the Charter talked about the 'sovereign equality' of all its members (a hybrid jurists found puzzling). After Stalin demanded that the USSR, being a federal state, receive a seat each for its sixteen republics, to which the USA replied that it had even more constituent states, the super-powers signed up. The existence of Permanent Members of the Security Council meant that some were more equal than others.

At his first meeting with Molotov, Roosevelt expounded his conception of the Four Policemen. Thus the USA, UK, USSR and China would have the most significant military establishments in the post-war world, and between them would enforce world peace.⁶ Molotov did not respond, though he commented in retirement that 'it was to our advantage to preserve the alliance with America. That was important.'⁷ Stalin, however, saw the point at once, cabling his reaction to Molotov: 'Roosevelt is absolutely correct. Without creation of an association of the armed forces of England, the USA and the USSR able to forestall aggression, it will not

⁴ Jan Karski, *The Great Powers and Poland, 1919–1945, from Versailles to Yalta* (London, 1985), p. 517.

⁵ G. Lundestad, *The American Non-Policy towards Eastern Europe* (Tromsø, 1978), p. 188.

⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS): 1942, vol. III, pp. 568–9.

⁷ *Sto sorok besed c Molotovyim. Iz dnevnik F. Chueva* (Moscow, 1991), p. 76.

be possible to preserve peace in future.’⁸ His omission of China was not accidental.

As Krystyna Kersten remarks, ‘FDR thought issues such as Poland and Romania would be resolved within the UNO.’⁹ As her magnificent study shows, Soviet policies towards Poland were advancing rapidly. In addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Red Army and other public bodies of the Soviet state, Comintern’s successor played a crucial role in preparing the post-war order. Thus its formal dissolution (May 1943) was a deception. Its functions were taken over and expanded by the innocently entitled Department of International Information. This carried out a so-called ‘national front’ strategy for the post-war control of (communist) Eastern Europe. Re-named ‘the strategy of Popular Democracy’ after the war, it was also designed to minimise Western objections to the steady establishment of governments loyal to Moscow.¹⁰

In early 1944, senior Soviet diplomats prepared position papers on the post-war order. Thus Ivan Maisky, long-serving Soviet Ambassador in London, sent Molotov a *tour d’horizon* ‘on desirable bases for the future world’. After a general overview, he turned to particular, problem countries. On Poland he declared:

The purpose of the USSR must be *the creation of an independent and viable Poland; however we are not interested in the appearance of too big and too strong a Poland*. In the past, Poland was almost always Russia’s enemy and no-one can be sure that the future Poland would become a genuine friend of the USSR (at least during the lifetime of the rising generation). Many doubt it, and it is fair to say there are serious grounds to harbour such doubts [emphasis in original].¹¹

Consequently, he recommended that Poland be restricted to ‘minimal size’, according to ethnographic boundaries. Lwów and Wilno should become Soviet cities. At the same time, a different gloss was being put on statements for Allied consumption.

Stalin’s response to Churchill’s questions about post-war Poland were models of urbanity. ‘Uncle J replied that of course Poland would be free and independent and he would not attempt to influence the kind of government they cared to set up after the war . . . Of course the Polish Government (in exile) would be allowed to go back and to establish the

⁸ E. Mark, *Revolution by Degrees. Stalin’s National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941–1947*, Cold War International History Project (hereafter CWIHP) Working paper no. 31 (Washington, 2001), p. 11.

⁹ K. Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991), p. 120.

¹⁰ Mark, ‘Revolution by Degrees’, pp. 6–7.

¹¹ T. V. Volokitina (chief ed.), *Sovetskii faktor v vostochnoi Evrope, 1944–1953*, vol. I. *1944–1948 Dokumenty* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 29–30.

broad-based kind of government they had in mind. Poland was their country and they were free to return to it.' If Poland sought guarantees for their future security, then the Soviet Union would provide them. Reporting this to Roosevelt, Churchill added his understanding that the USA was unable to join in any guarantee 'other than those general arrangements for maintaining world peace which we have to make at the end of the war'.¹²

Roosevelt responded to Churchill that being too wedded to the 'present personalities of the Polish Government-in-exile' might give Stalin the erroneous impression of 'a design on your part to see established along the borders of the Soviet Union a government which rightly or wrongly they regard as containing elements irrevocably hostile to the Soviet Union'. He realised this was not the intent, since Churchill sought rather to preserve the right of countries to choose their government without outside interference 'and specifically to avoid the creation by the Soviet Government of a rival Polish government'. To Stalin, Roosevelt expressed confidence that 'a solution can be found which would fully protect the interests of Russia and satisfy your desire to see a friendly, independent Poland, and at the same time not adversely affect the cooperation so splendidly established at Moscow and Tehran.' He earnestly hoped that while this 'special question' remained unresolved, there would be no hasty or unilateral action that 'adversely affected the larger issues of international collaboration'.¹³

There is a premonition here that the balance of forces within the Grand Alliance was changing. The previously cosy Anglo-American 'special relationship' was becoming a less comfortable *ménage à trois*. Stalin must have been delighted, if not necessarily surprised, to see that an essential issue for him – the future of Poland – had become a bone of contention between the capitalist powers – the more so since the Soviet Union had as yet done rather little to impose its own solution.

The decisive moves took place in July 1944. On 22 July, the Soviet Union announced the formation of a Committee of National Liberation in Poland (the Lublin Committee). In response, Mikołajczyk sent Churchill and the US administration a strongly worded declaration, stating that the Soviet Union clearly intended 'to impose on Poland an illegal administration that has nothing in common with the will of the nation. All this is happening contrary to the repeated assurances of Marshal Stalin that he desires the restoration of an independent

¹² Roosevelt and Churchill. *Their Secret Wartime Correspondence* (New York, 1975), pp. 428–9 (5 February 1944).

¹³ S. Butler (ed.), *My Dear Mr. Stalin. The Complete Correspondence of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph V. Stalin* (New Haven, 2005), pp. 201–2.

Poland.¹⁴ A public statement by the government in exile on 25 July called the Lublin Committee ‘an attempt by a handful of usurpers to impose on the Polish nation a political leadership which is at variance with the overwhelming majority’.¹⁵ A week later, the Warsaw Uprising against the Germans began.

Stalin fully understood the intention of the Polish government in exile to liberate their capital before the Red Army arrived. He had not been consulted during its military preparations. He also had a personal score to settle, having been part of the Soviet offensive of 1920 when the Red Army was miraculously defeated outside Warsaw. Without logistical support, which Stalin withheld, even to the extent of denying Soviet facilities for Western air-drops until 9 September when they were too late, the Uprising was doomed. Some 200,000 Poles perished in the Uprising, after which the city was systematically destroyed. It is worth adding, however, that the Red Army did not remain idle outside Warsaw. It faced fierce attacks from the German defences, and suffered 23,483 fatalities in August alone. As Kudryashov comments, such ‘objective factors’ on the Warsaw front provided a good pretext for non-intervention.¹⁶

Once re-elected, Roosevelt felt freer to make representations to Stalin on the future Polish government. Roosevelt emphasised that these were not driven by any particular preference for the London government. But there was a growing recognition in Washington that the Lublin Committee represented only a small proportion of the Polish population. This intervention was unavailing. Moscow entered into diplomatic relations with the Lublin government on 5 January 1945.

On 3 February 1945, Roosevelt and Churchill flew in separate planes to the Crimea and were then conveyed by mountain roads to the Livadia Palace, outside Yalta. It was a gruelling journey, particularly for an ailing President. Next morning, Stalin arrived – overland – from Moscow. The three Allies, whose armies were now victorious on all fronts, agreed a settlement for Germany. The country was to be divided into three zones of occupation, with France later acquiring a fourth, on British insistence. Germany would be jointly administered by an Allied Council and an economic settlement would be agreed later. Meantime, Stalin’s bill for \$20 billion reparations was noted. Poland’s eastern border would be the ‘Curzon Line’, with minor modifications, thus granting the Soviet Union large new areas. Poland was to be compensated by ‘substantial

¹⁴ *Documents on Polish–Soviet Relations, 1939–1945* (London, 1961), vol. II, no. 164.

¹⁵ *Idem* no. 165.

¹⁶ ‘Diplomatic Prelude’ in A. Kemp-Welch (ed.), *Stalinism in Poland*, pp. 38–9.

accessions of territory in the north and west'. This would be finalised at a later peace conference.

The future of formerly Nazi-occupied areas, and above all the shape of the government of Poland, proved more contentious. Underlying discussion was the fact of the Red Army's presence in both the Balkans and substantial areas of Eastern and Central Europe. The conference began with Soviet armies seventy miles from Berlin. Given that Sovietisation was also being imposed in these areas, to question their future governance seemed somewhat artificial. Nonetheless a statement of democratic intent was made. Roosevelt proposed a 'Declaration on Liberated Europe', which reaffirmed the Atlantic Charter's principle of 'the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live'. The Declaration, to which Stalin solemnly subscribed, called for the formation of 'interim governmental authorities broadly representative of all domestic elements in the population and pledged to the earliest possible establishment through free elections of government responsive to the will of the people'. No mechanisms for monitoring the conduct of such elections were put in place, nor did Roosevelt press the State Department's advice that a European High Commission should supervise implementation of the Declaration. This was particularly a problem for Poland.

Churchill reminded Stalin that his country had gone to war for Poland. 'Honour' demanded that the 150,000 Poles who had fought with the Allies should not be abandoned and their government could not just be disowned.¹⁷ Roosevelt, though speaking as a 'visitor from another hemisphere', acknowledged that some gesture was needed for the six million Poles in his country, 'indicating that the United States was in some way involved with the question of freedom of elections'. After an extensive exchange of views, it was agreed that a new Polish coalition should be formed, to include members of both the government in exile and the Lublin Committee. In another verbal commitment that did not achieve reality, the new interim government was 'to hold free and unfettered elections as soon as possible'.

Roosevelt gave an upbeat report of Yalta on 1 March 1945. 'I am confident that the Congress and the American people will accept the results of this conference as the beginnings of a permanent structure of peace.'¹⁸ But within weeks, the emptiness of the Polish settlement became apparent. As Churchill complained to Roosevelt: 'After a fairly

¹⁷ J. Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance. The Anglo-American Special Relationship, 1940-1957* (London, 1995), p. 141.

¹⁸ *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 13 (New York, 1950) (1 March 1945).

promising start, Molotov is now refusing to accept any interpretation of the Crimea proposals except his own extremely rigid one. He is attempting to bar practically all our candidates from the consultations (for the Polish government), is taking the line that he must base himself on the views of Berut [*sic*] and his gang, and has withdrawn from his offer that we should send observers to Poland.' Churchill saw Poland as a 'test case between us and the Russians of the meaning which is to be attached to such terms as democracy, sovereignty, independence, representative government, and free and unfettered elections'.¹⁹ The President discouraged a message to Stalin in these terms, preferring a lower-level, ambassadorial approach. Churchill replied: 'Poland has lost her frontier. Is she now to lose her freedom?'²⁰

Roosevelt's plans for a new world body, which Stalin seemed to regard as a somewhat marginal initiative, gave Moscow a lever with Washington. In return for participation in the putative United Nations, and also for complying with American wishes that the Soviet Union, on the completion of war with Germany, should join that against Japan, Moscow sought concessions. They were principally on the Polish issue.²¹

Ambiguous drafting at Yalta had attempted to gloss over the likelihood that the Lublin Government and Moscow would prevail. The key sentence in the Yalta Protocol stated, 'The Provisional Government which is now functioning in Poland should . . . be reorganised on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from abroad.' Roosevelt admitted later, 'as clearly shown in the agreement, somewhat more emphasis is placed on the Lublin Poles than on the other two groups from whom the new Government is to be drawn'.²²

In one of his last messages to Stalin, Roosevelt put the position squarely: 'I must make it clear to you that any such solution which would result in a thinly disguised continuance of the present Warsaw regime would be unacceptable and would cause the people of the United States to regard the Yalta agreements as having failed.'²³ He stated that representation of non-Warsaw elements should be substantial. Stalin replied that it was Roosevelt who was derogating from the Yalta Agreement and proposed a formula under which non-Lublin Poles would be given one fifth of the Cabinet posts, without specifying their comparative importance.²⁴

¹⁹ *Roosevelt and Churchill*, pp. 662–4 (8 March 1945). ²⁰ *Idem* p. 671 (13 March 1945).

²¹ G. Lundestad, *The American Non-Policy towards Eastern Europe*, p. 194.

²² FRUS: 1945, vol. V, p. 189. ²³ Butler (ed.), *My Dear Mr. Stalin*, p. 311.

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 318–20.

On 12 April, the new US President Truman announced a policy of continuity. Roosevelt's own ambiguities, and the usual complications of policy-making in Washington, made that easier to declare than to define. But the imperatives were clear: to end the war with Japan and to find an effective way to deal with Stalin's Russia. The latter led to a division of opinion. Some sought a tough approach to the Soviets, particularly against their imposition of communist or pro-communist governments in Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe. A milder approach encouraged Truman to address Stalin's own security imperatives and reach accommodations with them where possible. That in turn meant achieving some consensus with the Soviets on the nature of the post-war order.²⁵

The first days of the Truman Administration were coterminous with signature of a treaty of mutual assistance between the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Government (21 April), and the Soviet insistence that it be the sole Polish representative at the inauguration of the United Nations in San Francisco and other international forums. At his first meeting with Molotov (23 April) President Truman told the Soviets bluntly to stick to the Yalta Agreement on Poland. He made clear that American economic assistance, essential to Russia's post-war recovery, would depend upon compliance. The intention was not nit-picking over the words of an international agreement but to stand up to the Russians. This was given urgency by the arrest of sixteen Poles prominent in the anti-Nazi underground, and their imprisonment in the Lubyanka. They were brought to trial in Moscow in June 1945.

Talks between Harry Hopkins and Stalin did not make progress on future elections or political freedom in Poland. However, the American envoy conceded that the present Warsaw government would constitute 'a majority' of the new Polish provisional government. It was sanctified at Potsdam.

The successful testing of the atomic bomb (July 1945) gave new impetus to the incipient Cold War. Truman told Stalin about it during the Potsdam Conference. The newly styled 'Generalissimo' affected surprise about a development he had known about through espionage almost from its inception. Its first usages a few weeks later were intended, *inter alia*, to forestall Soviet involvement in the Far East, as promised at Yalta. In October, Truman called the atomic bomb a 'sacred trust' for all mankind, while remaining vague about placing it under some international supervision.

²⁵ M. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration and the Cold War* (Stanford, 1992).

Truman used his Navy Day address (27 October) to outline a new agenda. American power would be used to promote self-determination and national sovereignty. Territorial changes should not be imposed upon peoples without their will. The United States would not recognise governments created by *fait accompli*.²⁶ This policy of non-recognition was accompanied by non-intervention in the sphere already under Soviet hegemony.

Poland henceforth occupies a much smaller part in super-power relations. As Walt Rostow puts it, 'after Potsdam, the question of the fate of democracy in Poland virtually disappeared from Truman's and [his new Secretary of State] Byrnes' agenda.'²⁷ Thereafter, American leverage over the course of events in Poland was largely economic. A significant package was ready by mid-1945, including UNRRA supplies, and export credits. A six-point plan was presented to the Warsaw Government in early 1946. It included most-favoured nation status, compensation for nationalisation of American property and a commitment to free trade. The only overtly political condition was point 6: Polish adherence to the Potsdam declaration on free elections. But the weakness of this leverage was demonstrated by Poland's referendum.

Instead of the promised 'free election', three issues were brought before the public. (1) Abolition of the Senate. No replacement was named, leaving open the (theoretical) possibility for representatives of self-governing organisations; (2) land reform and nationalisation; (3) Poland's Western borders. The poll was held on 30 June 1946. The turnout was impressive: almost 12 million or 85% of those eligible to vote. An official declaration on 12 July stating that 68.2% had voted 'yes' for abolition contrasted with the 83.3% 'no' vote claimed by Mikołajczyk, who had urged a 'no' vote against. Though neither figure seems reliable, the true one will probably never be known.²⁸ Issues 2 and 3 were answered with massive affirmatives, again on the official figures. On 19 August 1946, the British and American governments formally protested to Moscow about electoral irregularities. They were told not to interfere in Polish sovereign affairs.

The locus of East–West confrontation in Europe shifted to Germany. Yet Poland remained a key issue in this regard, and would remain so throughout the Cold War. An independent Poland would not threaten the Soviet Union in narrow military terms, as the subsequent neutralisation of Austria and Finland showed. But it would make it mightily

²⁶ *Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman, 1945* (Washington, 1961), pp. 431–8.

²⁷ W. W. Rostow, *The Division of Europe after World War II, 1946* (Austin, 1981), p. 18.

²⁸ Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule*, pp. 280–3.

difficult for Moscow to maintain security and supply routes between its home base and East Germany where twenty divisions were stationed. A democratic Poland would also reduce Soviet-controlled Eastern Germany to the status of a pawn in some future power-play, a bargaining counter with the West to assure reparations or tool to prevent German reunification.²⁹ Worst of all for the Soviet Union, a reunited Germany might opt for neutrality, or even join the Western bloc. But that was unthinkable whilst a Cold War continued.

As 1946 proceeded, it became more generally accepted that world politics and economics were splitting into two camps. On 9 February, Stalin attributed this to the 'development of world economic and political forces on the basis of modern monopoly capitalism'. The Western counterpart was Churchill's 'Sinews of Peace' speech in Fulton, Missouri on 5 March. It has lodged in historical memory for the famous sentence,

From Stettin [*sic*] in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all the famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high, and in some cases, increasing, measure of control from Moscow.³⁰

The old doctrine of the balance of power was thus unsound. Not only were communist parties and their lackeys imposing their regimes across eastern Europe, those beyond the reach of Soviet armies were still plotting to seize power in southern and western Europe. Less well-remembered, though more controversial at the time, was his continued championing of the Anglo-American special relationship.³¹ He argued that Anglo-Saxons needed to unite to withstand the new totalitarianism. The ensuing controversy did not help Truman's cause.

In November 1946, the Republicans won a crushing victory in the congressional elections. Though fought on bread and butter issues, work stoppages, high taxation and inflation, the result had important international implications. To address these issues at home, Truman needed tax cuts and a smaller government. At the same time, a deteriorating international outlook argued for greater foreign aid and increased military capabilities. Not for the last time, rhetoric came to the rescue. 'At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose

²⁹ Rostow, *The Division of Europe*, p. 15.

³⁰ R. R. James (ed.), *Churchill Speaks. Winston S. Churchill in Peace and War. Collected Speeches, 1897-1963* (New York, 1981), p. 881.

³¹ See Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance*, Chapter 18.

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