

CHAPTER 3

THE WARSAW SITUATION 1939 - 1944, THE WARSAW UPRISING, AND THE FACTORS NECESSITATING ALLIED INTERVENTION

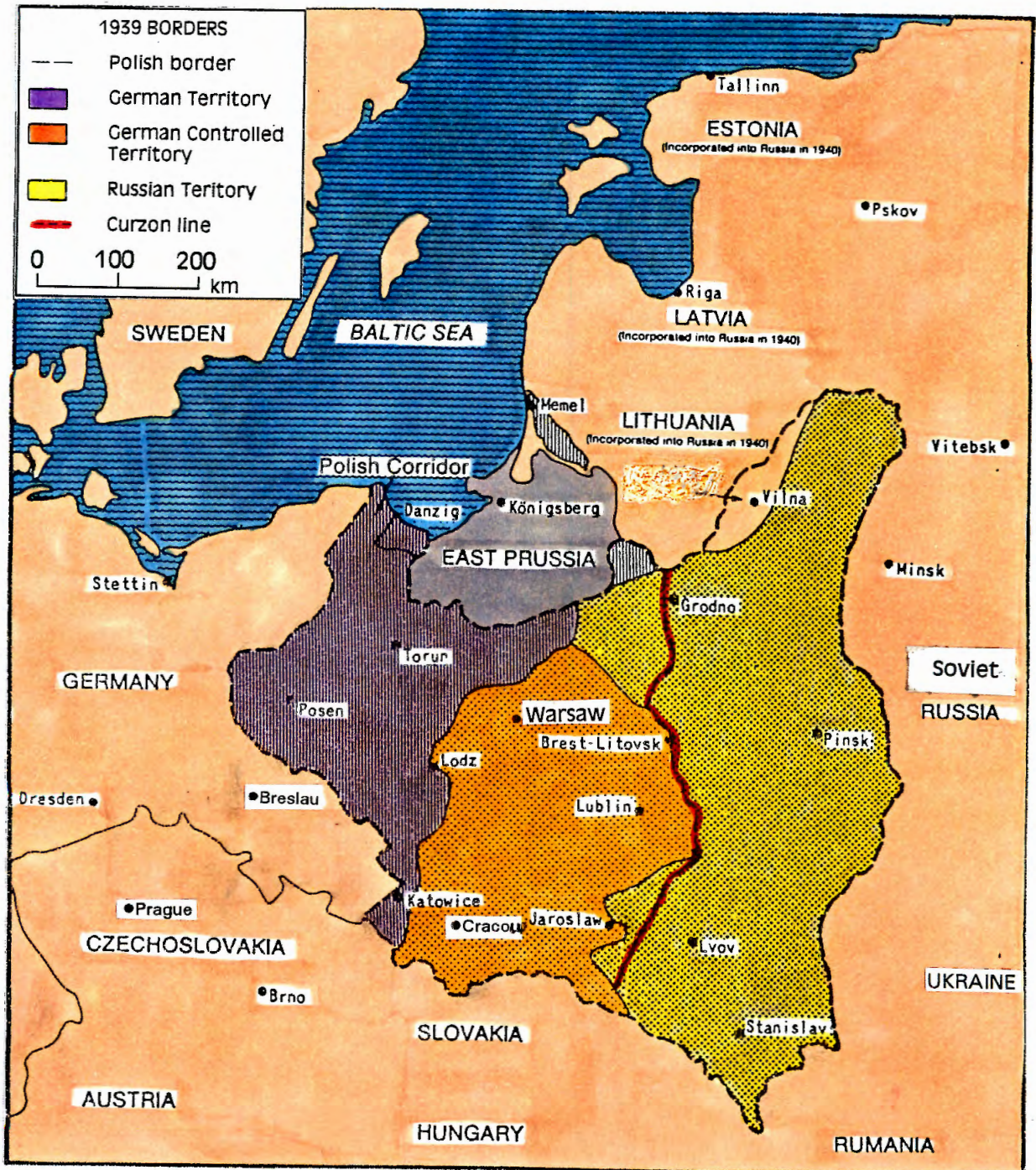
3.1 POLAND AND WARSAW BEFORE WORLD WAR II

The origin of Poland as an independent kingdom can be traced to the unification of a number of Slavonic tribes, which had settled in the basins of the Vistula, the Warta and the Oder rivers. The nation was converted to Christianity in 966 AD. Poland reached the height of her power in the period between the 14th and 16th centuries under the rule of the Jagiellon dynasty.¹ During the 17th and 18th centuries the position of Poland rapidly declined, and eventually, by three partitions in 1772, 1793 and 1795, the Polish Commonwealth, as it was then called, was divided between Prussia, Russia and Austria. Napoleon created the Grand Duchy of Warsaw in 1807, which survived until 1813. At the Congress of Vienna, the major part of Poland was made a kingdom under the rule of the Russian Tsar Alexander I and in 1846 it was completely incorporated into Russia and stayed under Russian control until the end of World War I.

The city of Warsaw is located in the centre of the country, on both banks of the Vistula River, about 1 200 kilometres south-west of Moscow and 520 kilometres east of Berlin. Because of its location, Warsaw became an important trading centre in the Middle Ages. During the 16th century, after the union between Poland and Lithuania, the seat of the Polish government was transferred from Krakow to Warsaw. The city was handed from one master to another after 1655. Sweden, Austria, and Russia ruled in turn.² The city was also very well known for its many fine buildings, for its magnificent public gardens, its monuments and tree-lined avenues. The heart of the city was the ancient royal castle, a vast pile built on a height overlooking the suburb of Praga. To the north of the castle was the old town, later the Jewish quarter, with narrow

1 S.M. Terry, *Poland's Place in Europe*, pp.18-33; S.H. Steinberg, *Statesman's Year-Book*, 1950, p. 1310.

2 S.M. Terry, *Poland's Place in Europe*, pp.18-33; S.H. Steinberg, *Statesman's Year-Book*, 1950, p. 1310.



MAP INDICATING THE CURZON LINE AND THE OCCUPATION OF POLAND
(SEPTEMBER 1939)

streets and well-preserved old buildings. Here stood Warsaw's oldest church, the Cathedral of Saint John, built in the 13th Century. Warsaw's central position in a fertile plain, with abundant transport facilities by water, rail and air, made it one of the chief commercial and manufacturing cities of Eastern Europe. Throughout its history, the city was subject to serious destruction in times of upheaval. During World War I, Warsaw was captured by the Germans, who held the city until the end of the war in 1919.³

The Bolshevik Revolution put an end to the Russian Empire. After the First World War, in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles, Poland became an independent state. Germany relinquished certain areas to Poland, including Poznan and East-Prussia. Danzig, a major seaport, Germanised in 1793, became a free harbour, and a corridor was subsequently created through Prussia to give Poland free access to this port.⁴

The Poles invaded the Ukraine in May 1920 during the Russian Civil War. The Soviets, in turn, launched an offensive against Poland which brought the Red Army to the gates of Warsaw by August. Consternation reigned in the capitals of the Western World over this militant advance of communism into the heart of Europe. French supplies and a military mission were rushed to assist the Poles in repelling the invasion. The Poles succeeded in reversing the tide, driving the Red Army out of Poland, and invading Russia. By October, the Soviet government, weary of war and anxious to turn to pressing tasks of reconstruction, sued for an armistice. At the Treaty of Riga on 18 March 1921 peace was restored between the two countries. The line of the farthest Polish military advance became the new Polish-Russian frontier.⁵

³ After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Warsaw capitulated to the Nazi forces on 27 September. Warsaw was now one of the largest cities in the world. It had a population of 1,2 million; J. Whitaker, *Whitaker Almanack*, 1939, p.939.

⁴ U. Dragomer, *It Started in Poland*, p.17; H. Michel, *The Second World War*, p.1.

⁵ This boundary was considerably further to the east than the Curzon line. The Curzon line was an imaginary demarcation traversing the territory of Poland from north to south between World Wars I and II, and separating, in so far as practicable, the populations with a Polish majority on the west from those with non-Polish majorities on the east. It was proposed as an armistice line by Lord George N. Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, in July 1920. But both the Poles and the Russians ignored it at first. Later this line was adopted as the basis for the boundary between Poland and the Soviet Union; S.H. Steinberg, *Statesman's Year-Book*, 1950, p. 1310; The Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, later insisted on the Curzon line being the border, running from Grodno through Brest-Litovsk, and from Przemyśl to the Carpathian Mountains; M. Gilbert, *W.S. Churchill, Vol. VII, 1941 - 1945: Road to Victory*, p.589.

This frontier left considerable Russian populations on the Polish side. The Soviet Union maintained these were Russian territories, taken away from her after the First World War. The Soviet Union therefore indicated that a large percentage of the people who inhabited the areas was Russian - Ukrainians and White Russians oppressed by the Poles - and that these people wished to be united with their Russian "brothers".⁶

These claims increased international tensions. Germany and the Soviet Union did not agree with the boundaries defined in the Treaty of Versailles whilst Great Britain and France withdrew from the troubles in Poland after World War I. The Germans were aggrieved, believing they had been deprived of what they regarded as *bona fide* German territory. The German Foreign Minister, Gustav Stresemann, declared in 1922 that Poland's existence was intolerable and incompatible with the essential conditions of Germany's life.⁷ In the long run, he expected that German pressure, together with Soviet support, would lead to the recovery of the Polish Corridor, Danzig and Upper Silesia.⁸

Marshal Joseph Pilsulski,⁹ a Polish military leader between 1926 and 1935, formulated a foreign policy aimed at striking a balance between Germany and the Soviet Union, without favouring either of the two.¹⁰ He signed non-aggression treaties with both: with the Soviet Union in 1932 and with Germany in 1934. The sheer dominance of German and Soviet military power, together with the awkward geographic position of Poland, sandwiched between the two major powers, suggested it could be engulfed in case of war. However, in a last grand attempt to check Germany's growing power and at the same time preserve its own security, and also that of the eastern parts of Central Europe, France proposed an ambitious plan to create an Eastern European security zone, the so-called Eastern Locarno zone. It ultimately failed because Poland was reluctant and the British refused to become involved in Eastern Central

6 In 1939 Poland had a population of 34,756,000. 69% of the population were Polish but 30,9% were other nationalities; J. Whitaker, *Whitaker Almanack*, 1939, p.938.

7 W.L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich : A History of Nazi Germany*, p.212.

8 G.L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, p.48; G.V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939 - 1945*, p.2.

9 J. Garlinski, *Poland, SOE and the Allies*, pp. 34, 55, 121.

10 G.V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939 - 1945*, p.1.

Europe. Britain disagreed with the French view that Eastern Central Europe could serve as a barrier between Russian Bolshevism and German expansionism, regarding these as a potential source of trouble.¹¹ The prevailing opinion was that no British government would ever risk the bones of a British grenadier for the Polish Corridor and, in view of British policies pursued during the Anschluss and the Munich crisis, the exact motive behind Britain's offer of a guarantee to Poland during the spring of 1939 is difficult to pinpoint. Germany's entry into Czechoslovakia, however, had alarmed them and they feared Poland would be next. They realised German ambitions extended further than a mere revision of the Treaty of Versailles.

Adolph Hitler who became Chancellor in 1933, insisted that all areas formerly under German control but, since World War I, returned to Poland, had to be reinstated under the German flag.¹² Hitler feared a possible Soviet invasion and therefore desired to convert as much Polish territory as possible into a buffer between Germany and the Soviet Union.¹³ On the other side of Poland, the Soviet Union was eager to incorporate parts of Eastern Poland which she regarded as being rightfully hers, especially since the population of this part of Poland was mostly Ukrainian and Byelorussian.¹⁴

Hitler's view differed in many respects from those of others. War had been an intended and even a preferred part of National Socialist policy from the beginning, not so much out of a preference for fighting for its own sake, as from the conviction that the aim of German expansion could be secured only by war.¹⁵ Hitler aimed for hegemony of the continent and this posed a definite threat to Great Britain.

The British government's declaration of 30 March 1939 explained their position:

-
- 11 G. Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1939-1941*, pp.17-18; G.V. Kacwicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939 - 1945*, p.16.
 - 12 The restoration of an independent Polish state after World War I did not change the basic problem of its unique geographic location, which remained delicate and fragile until the outbreak of World War II.
 - 13 B.H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, p.14.
 - 14 W. Schellack & S.B. Spies (eds.), *Europe since 1848*, p.333.
 - 15 G.L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, p.20.

... in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence and which the Polish government considered vital to resist with their national force, His Majesty's government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish government all support in its power.¹⁶

The subsequent British policy was based on the assumption that, if a war started anywhere in Europe, it would certainly spread to the whole continent, as in 1914. As a firm warning to Germany, the British government would announce its position on Poland early rather than late, hoping that firmness would deter Germany, reassure her victims, and rally others to their side.¹⁷

When Hitler reclaimed the Danzig Corridor and other Polish territories in 1939, Great Britain and France expressed their support for the Polish cause. Hitler was then quick to form an alliance with his former enemy, the Soviet Union, against Poland and its protectors. The non-aggression pact, signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939,¹⁸ stressed a mutual desire to strengthen the cause of peace between the two countries.¹⁹

This agreement had important implications for Poland. The Soviets, who maintained that part of Eastern Poland was still rightfully theirs, shared a common central principle with the Germans. This means that both the Germans and the Soviets wanted to incorporate parts of Poland. Because of these revisionist claims concerning Polish territory, they had very little sympathy with the Poles, who wanted to stay independent. This assessment will later prove to be completely accurate. For this reason the Soviets denied any assistance to the Polish partisans in 1944.

On the same occasion, an agreement on a secret supplementary protocol was reached, stating:

16 G.V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939 - 1945*, p.17; J. Keegan, *The Second World War*, p.44.

17 G.L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, pp.38-39.

18 W. Schellack & S.B. Spies (eds.), *Europe since 1848*, p.333; L.L. Snyder, *The War: A Concise History 1939 - 1945*, p.61; M. Kitchen, *A World in Flames*, p.10.

19 G. Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1939-1941*, p.62; D.C. Watt, *How War Came*, p.44.

In the event of territorial and political rearrangement of areas belonging to the Polish state, the sphere of influence of Germany and the USSR shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula and San. The question of whether the interests of both parties made desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish state and how such a state should be bounded, could only definitely be determined in the course of further political developments. In any event both governments would resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement.²⁰

3.2 DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING POLAND 1939 -1945

On 1 September 1939, the German Wehrmacht invaded Poland.²¹ On 3 September, Britain and France responded,²² declaring war on Germany, igniting World War II. But neither Britain nor France was really prepared for military action and consequently the German army progressed rapidly, reaching the Vistula in less than two weeks. Two weeks later, on 17 September, Russian troops invaded Poland from the east and occupied the eastern provinces. On 29 September, the German and Soviet governments partitioned Poland, the Germans taking some 117 000 square kilometres of territory with about 22 000 000 people and the Soviets 123 000 square kilometres of territory with a population of 13 000 000.²³ Poland had again lost its freedom.²⁴

20 W.C. Langsam, *Historic Documents of World War II*, pp.20-21.

21 In 1939 Poland had a population of 34,756,000. The area it consisted of was about 190 sq. kilometres; J. Whitaker, *Whitaker Almanack*, 1939, p.938.

22 M. Kitchen, *Europe Between the Wars*, pp.313-314; H.P. Willmott, *The Great Crusade: A New Complete History of the Second World War*, p.40; M. Kitchen, *A World in Flames*, p.11.

23 H.P. Willmott, *The Great Crusade: A New Complete History of the Second World War*, pp.44,48; G.L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, p.20; W. Schellack & S.B. Spies (eds.), *Europe since 1848*, p.333.

24 S.M. Terry, *Poland's Place in Europe*, p.33; M.A. Epstein, *Statesman's Year-Book, 1944*, p.1195; J. Whitaker, *Whitaker Almanack*, 1939, p.938.

Britain's and France's reluctance to put any form of pressure on Russia came as a bitter blow to the Poles. What happened to their pledge to do all they could to save Poland?

Soon after the German forces had invaded Poland, the Germans incorporated the western and southern sections of Poland into the German Reich. The Poles in the western sections were subjected to a policy of Germanisation and were gradually expelled from this part of the country and pushed into the eastern sector.²⁵

Hitler emphasised it was the Polish people that had to be destroyed. Therefore it was assumed that a massive slaughter of Poles and particularly the extermination of their political and cultural elite would accompany the campaign designed to destroy Poland.

A German administration set up in its occupied area, the "General Government of Poland",²⁶ under the leadership of Hans Frank, decreed that all Poles in the occupied territory would in future be treated as German subjects.²⁷

By 30 September 1939, the Polish premier, General Wladyslaw Sikorski, had established a government-in-exile, based in Paris.²⁸ The Western Allies immediately recognised it as a *de jure*, not *de facto*, government of Poland, its legal status defined by a parliamentary grant of full diplomatic immunity and privileges to the members of the sovereign allied governments and their official staff through the Diplomatic Privileges Act.²⁹

On 13 November 1939, Sikorski formed a ministerial committee for domestic matters, chaired by General K.T. (Kazimierz) Sosnkowski, responsible for handling problems related to the Polish resistance. An official underground organisation, the *Association for Armed Struggle*, or *Zwiazek Walki Zbrojonej*

25 M.A. Epstein, *Statesman's Year-Book*, 1944, p.1195.

26 M. Kitchen, *A World in Flames*, p.184; G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, p.27.

27 M. Kitchen, *A World in Flames*, pp.184-185; G. Deschner, *The Warsaw Rising*, p.12.

28 G. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939 - 1945*, pp.52-53.

29 G.V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939 - 1945*, p.44.

(ZWZ), was formed, to coordinate all resistance activities in Poland. Sosnkowski was appointed Supreme Commander of the ZWZ, operating from Paris and reporting directly to Sikorski.³⁰ ZWZ activities were extended over both German and Russian-controlled areas in Poland.³¹ The country was divided into six areas, or sectors, controlled directly from Paris.

These resistance movements began to operate with sabotage as their chief aim. Russia was aiding Hitler with large raw material deliveries to enhance his war potential and his chances of defeating the West. Hundreds of trains were attacked by Polish saboteurs, often with major success in spite of primitive methods and the use of home-made explosives. For the Polish partisans there was no question of help from outside Poland. Later various independent underground bodies came into being throughout the country. In a very short time Poland was honeycombed with resistance organisations representing the partisans.³²

The Poles hoped that a French offensive in the West, which they had been promised in May 1939, would force the Germans to divert substantial forces to the western front and give the Polish army the opportunity to hold out in at least some portions of the eastern parts of the country, but this never materialised.³³

In January 1940, the Polish command structure was simplified. The Officer Commanding in Warsaw was to act as Officer Commanding the underground in all German-controlled areas, while the Officer Commanding in Lvov would be Officer Commanding in all Russian-controlled areas. The Officer Commanding in Warsaw was Colonel Stefan Grot-Rowecki, also known as Colonel Grot.³⁴

30 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.81.

31 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, p.24.

32 J. Garlinski, *Poland, SOE and the Allies*, p.31.

33 The French did not attack in the West as they had promised, and the Soviet Union broke its non-aggression pact with Warsaw and invaded Poland from the east; G.L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, p.51.

34 J. Garlinski, *Poland, SOE and the Allies*, p.34.

Sikorski ordered all resistance movements to submit to ZWZ authority. To make sure members did not yield to possible Nazi torture, General Sosnkowski had a priest conduct a solemn religious oath with every member of the ZWZ:

Before God the Almighty, before the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Crown of Poland, I put my hand on this Holy Cross, the symbol of martyrdom and salvation, and I swear that I will defend the honour of Poland with all my might; that I will fight with arms in hand to liberate her from slavery, notwithstanding the sacrifice of my own life; that I will be absolutely obedient to my superiors; that I will keep the secret whatever the cost may be.³⁵

In May of the same year, France succumbed to the German assault and the Polish government-in-exile moved its headquarters to the Rubens Hotel, Buckingham Palace Road, London.³⁶ On 30 June, Sikorski sent a delegation to re-establish his supreme command in Poland and create a proper underground radio network,³⁷ which kept the underground well-informed of developments at all times.³⁸ This helped stimulate the resistance of the Polish nation and by October 1942 plans for the liberation of Poland were submitted to the Allied command. However, internal political differences in Poland led to the establishment of two other resistance movements: the "Narrate Shily Zbronje" (NSZ), a conservative-oriented group, and the communist-controlled, "Armia Ludowa" (AL).³⁹ Both were to play a significant political role in the future. In 1942, the ZWZ's name was changed to *Armia Krajowa* (AK), the Secret Army or the Home Army. It enjoyed the support and backing of the four leading Polish political parties and its basic objective was to support the government-in-exile in organising the national revolt, code-named "Operation Big Scheme".

35 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, pp.25-26.

36 J. Garlinski, *Poland, SOE and the Allies*, p.39; G.V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939 - 1945*, p.44.

37 J.K. Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, pp.34-35.

38 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.84.

39 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.85.

Problems in other areas of the war effort prevented active Allied support and the operation was temporarily suspended in 1942. The Allied command requested the resistance movements to continue with sabotage attacks against the Germans.⁴⁰

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941,⁴¹ the door for cooperation between the Soviet Union and the Allies was opened and this changed the Polish-Russian situation dramatically; a new agreement between the Soviet Union and the Allies was signed,⁴² ending the Soviet-German agreement of 1939 and re-establishing diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union.⁴³ Mutual aid and support were confirmed and Polish POW's inside the Soviet Union were granted amnesty. Also, a Polish army was established inside Russian territory, commanded by General W. Anders.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Soviet Union pressed Great Britain to recognise its revisionist claims concerning Polish territory. It also wanted Poland to acquiesce in its territorial and eventually political demands. Therefore the new agreement accepted that Polish territories occupied by the Soviet Union after the joint German-Russian attack in 1939 would remain part of the Soviet Union.⁴⁵

Anglo-Polish-Soviet relations during the war years were delicate. Britain needed Soviet support against Germany and acted as moderator between Soviet and Polish interests, but Soviet demands for Allied recognition of areas it had occupied as a German confederate, placed Britain in an untenable position.⁴⁶ The Polish government-in-exile in London considered itself an ally of Great

40 G.J. Garlinski, *Poland, SOE and the Allies*, p.25.

41 G. Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1939-1941*, p.139; H.J.J. Wachters, *Wereldspiegel der 20e Eeuw*, p.217

42 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, p.33.

43 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.133.

44 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, p.33; J.Garlinski, *Poland, SOE and the Allies*, p.119.

45 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, p.34.

46 G.V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939-1945*, p.71.

Britain, but regarded itself at the same time as at war with the Soviet Union.⁴⁷ After lengthy negotiations, Britain eventually relented and recognised the Soviet claims, prompting the resignation of an incensed General Sosnkowski, the Officer Commanding the *Armia Krajowa*.

Russian assistance to the Allies would have solved many problems. The planned Soviet offensive from the east, against the Germans, meant recapturing the territories which in the meantime had been conquered by the Germans. The Russians now claimed these territories. Britain reluctantly yielded to these Soviet claims but with every intention of curbing further claims for expansion, especially regarding Poland.

In negotiations between the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviets, the Poles were determined to preserve the *status quo ante bellum*. This included a guarantee of lasting security for their frontiers. No agreement concerning a border line could be reached in 1942 and consequently no eastern Polish border was described when a treaty was eventually drawn up. However, by 1943 the situation had again changed dramatically when the Soviet Union assumed a negative attitude towards Polish claims. Stalin insisted on the Curzon line being the border.⁴⁸

The situation deteriorated further when Sikorski made allegations, in talks with Churchill in April 1943, claiming that a large number of Polish soldiers had been killed by Russian troops and were buried in mass graves at Katyn, near Smolensk.⁴⁹ When several thousand bodies were subsequently discovered in these graves by the Germans, circumstances pointed to the Soviet Union's guilt⁵⁰ and a strong anti-Soviet sentiment flared up in Europe.⁵¹ Poland maintained these were the bodies of officers who mysteriously disappeared in

47 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.133.

48 M. Gilbert, *W.S. Churchill, Vol. VII, 1941 - 1945: Road to Victory*, p.589; J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.5.

49 N.D. Orpen, *Airlift to Warsaw: The Rising of 1944*, p.10; *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 14, p.653.

50 J.K. Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, p.197; J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.26; H.J.J. Wachters, *Wereldspiegel der 20e Eeuw*, p.225; G.V. Kacwicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939-1945*, pp.155-156; M. Kitchen, *A World in Flames*, p.274.

51 H. Michel, *The Second World War*, p.482.

1940. Stalin brushed aside the allegations as German propaganda, aimed at creating discord between the Allies. In a letter to the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, he accused Hitler of starting the furore.⁵²

On 10 April 1943, German authorities supplied a plane to fly a Polish delegation to Smolensk and the next day they inspected the mass graves and exhumed bodies. Another group of 12 experts went back later that month and spent five weeks examining the evidence. Both groups reported eight mass graves containing well-preserved bodies of between four and six thousand Polish officers, all dressed in military uniform. All the bodies had a single bullet hole at the back of the skull. Cigarette cases, wallets, personal papers, letters and a total of 22 diaries were found on the bodies. The last entries in these diaries were made either during March or April 1940, the estimated time of their disappearance from a Soviet Prisoner of War camp at Kozelsk.⁵³

Stalin reacted with characteristic ruthlessness and used this incident to condemn the Poles, accusing them of being responsible for the discord.⁵⁴ He wrote to Churchill:

The fact that the anti-Soviet campaign started simultaneously in the German and Polish press and follows identical lines, is indubitable evidence of contact and collusion between Hitler and the Sikorski government.

He also stated:

These circumstances compel the Soviet Government to consider that the present Polish government has in practice severed its relations of alliance with the USSR and has adopted a hostile attitude to the Soviet Union.⁵⁵

52 A. Polonsky, *The Great Powers and the Polish Question, 1941 - 1945*, p.24; G.V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile 1939-1945*, p.156.

53 S. Korbonski, *The Polish Underground State*; pp.144-146.

54 G.J. Garlinski, *Poland, SOE and the Allies*, p.119.

55 A. Polonsky, *The Great Powers and the Polish Question 1941 - 1945*, pp.124-125.

Describing Sikorski's government as an "emigré government, isolated from its people", he accused it of being ineffective and demanded it be investigated.

Because of the Katyn forest massacre incident, the Soviet government broke diplomatic relations in 1943 with the Polish government in London. Thus, in mid-summer of 1944, it appeared that Moscow was bent on ignoring the London Poles altogether. This explains why the Soviets did not want to become involved in Warsaw after the uprising on 1 August 1944.

However, Sikorski was killed in a plane crash in Gibraltar on 4 July 1943, after visiting Polish troops in the Middle East.⁵⁶ In an obituary in the House of Commons, Churchill referred to him as the symbol and embodiment of the spirit which had borne Poland through centuries of sorrow, a spirit which is unquenchable by agony.⁵⁷

Stanislav Mikolajczyk, Sikorski's successor, was the leader of the Peasants' Party, a moderate liberal and able administrator. He was known as an honest and balanced leader but he did not have the persuasive influence Sikorski had.⁵⁸ To complicate matters further, he could not get along with General Sosnkowski, the reappointed Commander of the Polish Forces. They frequently clashed on trivial matters. Sosnkowski was also totally opposed to any form of co-operation with the Russians whilst Mikolajczyk held more moderate views.⁵⁹

On 30 June 1943, Colonel Stefan Grot-Rowecki, commander of the *Armia Krajowa* in the Warsaw area, was arrested by the Gestapo.⁶⁰ This happened only four days before the untimely death of Sikorski. Tadeusz Komorowski, a pre-war cavalry officer of aristocratic descent, also known as General Bor-Komorowski, succeeded Colonel Grot-Rowecki as commander of the *Armia*

56 D. Irving, *Accident: The Death of General Sikorski*, p.75; E.L. Woodward, *Polish Foreign Policy and the 2nd World War*, p.356.

57 D. Irving, *Accident: The Death of General Sikorski*, p.87.

58 D. Irving, *Accident: The Death of General Sikorski*, p.88; J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.149.

59 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.149.

60 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, p.47.

Krajowa. He had served previously as deputy commanding officer in the armies of the Polish National Democratic Party but had limited military experience.⁶¹

Mikolajczyk's government-in-exile was restructured in October 1943 and developed new political and military command structures.⁶²

The objectives of the different resistance movements were re-established and they now boasted a total membership of around 250 000. The formidable German presence in Poland made collective mobilisation impractical and necessitated a new plan of action, agreed upon in collaboration with the Polish government based in London. The basic objective remained a revolt but German dominance made it impracticable to limit it to Warsaw only. "Operation Big Scheme" thus became "Operation Burza". It began with a series of sabotage attacks and very soon all resistance movements were actively involved, especially in the vicinity of Lublin and Kielce.⁶³ Some historians refer to this well-organised underground as "a secret state in Poland".⁶⁴

The network started redistributing newspapers throughout Poland. Universities closed by the Germans reopened, publishing academic papers and conferring degrees. But these symbolic gestures were regarded as being of secondary importance. The ultimate objective was a national revolt to liberate the homeland from German oppression. However, it had to coincide with a Russian offensive against Germany. Bor-Komorowski waited for the opportune moment but Stalin remained unapproachable.⁶⁵

By June 1944, the Russian forces were slowly gaining the upper hand against the Axis Powers, destroying Germany's grip on Europe as a whole. Successful invasions in Normandy and Italy afforded the Allies an important foothold in the west and south, while the Soviet Union exercised pressure from the east. With pressure coming from all fronts, the Germans found it difficult to counter

61 J. Garlinski, *Poland, SOE and the Allies*, p.120; J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.149.

62 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.151.

63 R.C. Lukas, *Military Affairs*, October 1975, p.129.

64 G. Wright, *The Ordeal of the Total War 1939 - 1945*, p.157.

65 R.C. Lukas, *Military Affairs*, October 1975, p.129.

the Russian offensive. German resistance crumbled as the Soviet tidal wave rolled from the east.⁶⁶

The tempo of the German retreat, coupled with broadcasts from Moscow urging the Poles to revolt, left the impression of impending Russian assistance in the event of an uprising against the German occupation forces in Warsaw.⁶⁷

On 23 June 1944, the Russian armies launched another offensive from the east.⁶⁸ With great precision, 146 Soviet infantry divisions and 43 armoured brigades moved ahead, occupying Vitebsk on 26 June, Orsha and Bobruysk on 27 June, Mogiler on 28 June and Minsk on 3 July.⁶⁹ Vilna was occupied on 16 July.⁷⁰ All German forces inside the Soviet Union were defeated and the road to Poland opened. On 24 July, Marshall C. Rokossovsky, commanding the Don front, captured Lublin. From Lublin the Russians advanced in a north-westerly direction,⁷¹ heading for Warsaw.⁷² The Russian armies could now advance towards Warsaw.⁷³ The Second Motorised Unit of the Red Army reached the outskirts of Warsaw on 31 July 1944.⁷⁴

The Soviet Union did not want to handle Poland's war-time administration personally, and decided to contact the National Council of the Homeland, a communist-oriented movement, formed in December 1943. Stalin claimed it was the only organisation capable of taking care of Poland's internal administration. Earlier, on 21 July 1944, the communist aligned National Council

66 *The Star*, 24 July 1944 : Russians 50 miles from Warsaw, p.1.

67 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.245.

68 W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Tide to Victory*, p.9; M. Kitchen, *A World in Flames*, pp.280-281.

69 R.C. Lukas, *Military Affairs*, October 1975, p.129.

70 F.L. Loewenheim, et al., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*, p.509.

71 *Manchester Guardian*, 1 August 1944 : Ten miles from Warsaw, p.5.

72 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.231.

73 A. Seaton, *Stalin as Warlord*, pp.227-228; J. Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. V, p.344.

74 *Daily Mirror*, 1 August 1944 : Red Army in Warsaw suburb, p.1.

of the Homeland, issued a number of decrees with the purpose of creating a National Liberation Committee to handle the administration of Poland. In another statement it maintained the Mikolajczyk government in London was representative of an "illegal and self-styled authority".⁷⁵ Another stated objective was to form an alliance with all Slavic states. Consequently, Stalin recognised the National Council of the Homeland as the legitimate government of Poland.⁷⁶

This alarmed the Allies, who encouraged Mikolajczyk to negotiate with Stalin regarding the creation of a universally recognised Polish government.⁷⁷ The Polish premier had little option but to go to Moscow on 26 July 1944.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, Stalin's actions and statements had infuriated the underground movements, who unanimously decided to go ahead with "Operation Burza", which would enable them to liberate Warsaw and have a legitimate Polish government in place before Russian troops arrived. This government would then receive the Russians as their "guests" and would restrict Russian claims of liberating Poland.⁷⁹

The quick success of the Russian offensive placed the Polish government-in-exile in an awkward position, since diplomatic relations had not yet been restored. Although the latest developments could lead to freedom from German oppression, they could simply mean an exchange of oppressor.⁸⁰ Bor-Komorowski proposed approaching the Russians to suggest concerted action against the Germans. The Poles harboured fears of having the Germans replaced by the Russians before receiving any safeguards. The fact is, they dreaded even a temporary or partial occupation of Poland by Russian forces; even worse, they feared a puppet communist government in Warsaw, set up

75 L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, p.196.

76 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, p.73.

77 S.M. Terry, *Poland's Place in Europe*, p.33; G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, p.75.

78 J. Coutouvidis & J. Reynolds, *Poland 1939-1947*, p.100.

79 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, p.76.

80 H. Michel, *The Second World War*, p.584; H.P. Willmott, *The Great Crusade: A New Complete History of the Second World War*, p.383.

by Stalin. In restoring Polish-Russian relations the Poles would have to be certain what the intentions of the Russians were.⁸¹

However, as the Russian forces advanced closer to Warsaw and with Stalin's adamant refusal to acknowledge the Polish government-in-exile, the Soviet intentions became obvious. Stalin had even declared that, during the advance of the Russian troops into Poland, they encountered no group or organisation capable of administering the area. He described the underground army, the *Armia Krajowa*, as of no significance.⁸²

On 27 July, Bor-Komorowski telegraphed Sosnkowski in London, informing him of the intended revolt.⁸³ The same day the Germans ordered 100 000 Poles in Warsaw to report at 08:00 the following day to start digging trenches, an indication of the imminent possibility of Russian attacks.⁸⁴

From 29 July, Radio Moscow broadcast a daily bulletin to the underground radio network of the Polish resistance movement in Warsaw, encouraging a revolt.⁸⁵ Poles were encouraged to fight in the streets of Warsaw, in the houses, shops and factories to accelerate the hour of final liberation.⁸⁶

On 30 July, the Kosciuszko radio station in Moscow joined in the urgent appeals to the Poles:

Inhabitants of Warsaw, take up your weapons ... Fight the Germans ... Help the Red Army to get across the Vistula ... Let the million inhabitants of Warsaw

81 Public Record Office, London, CAB 101, p.57; L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, p.269.

82 W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Tide of Victory*, p.120.

83 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Rising*, p.78.

84 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Rising*, p.83; M. Kitchen, *A World in Flames*, pp.281-282.

85 J.M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, p.233; W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Triumph and Tragedy*, p.144.

86 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Rising*, p.81.

become a million soldiers ... and drive the Germans from your city so that freedom can be yours.⁸⁷

Radio Kosciuszko also encouraged the Poles to revolt:

Join the battle with the Germans ... the time for decisive action ... Warsaw the hour of action has arrived ... People of Warsaw, take up your arms ... a million Poles must become a million soldiers.⁸⁸

The Poles wanted a liberated Warsaw before the Russians arrived and expected a Russian entry very soon. At first the Partisans believed that the Russians wanted the Poles to revolt at once. Later, after the Russians gave up their attack, the Poles realised they wanted the destruction of the Polish Home Army in Warsaw. At this point the Poles had a very effective underground radio network, which had been expanded and established since 1940.⁸⁹ The *Armia Krajowa* had ten radio-telegraph stations located outside Warsaw, as well as a single broadcast station, known as "Lightning".⁹⁰ Inside Warsaw, civil authorities of the Polish government-in-exile controlled four radio-telegraph stations: one was known as Polish Radio and another maintained direct contact with the government-in-exile in London. The other two were controlled by the Department of Civil Defence and by the Peasants' Party. The Communist Polish People's Army also had its own radio-telegraph station inside Warsaw. All these were moved frequently to escape detection by sophisticated German tracking equipment.⁹¹

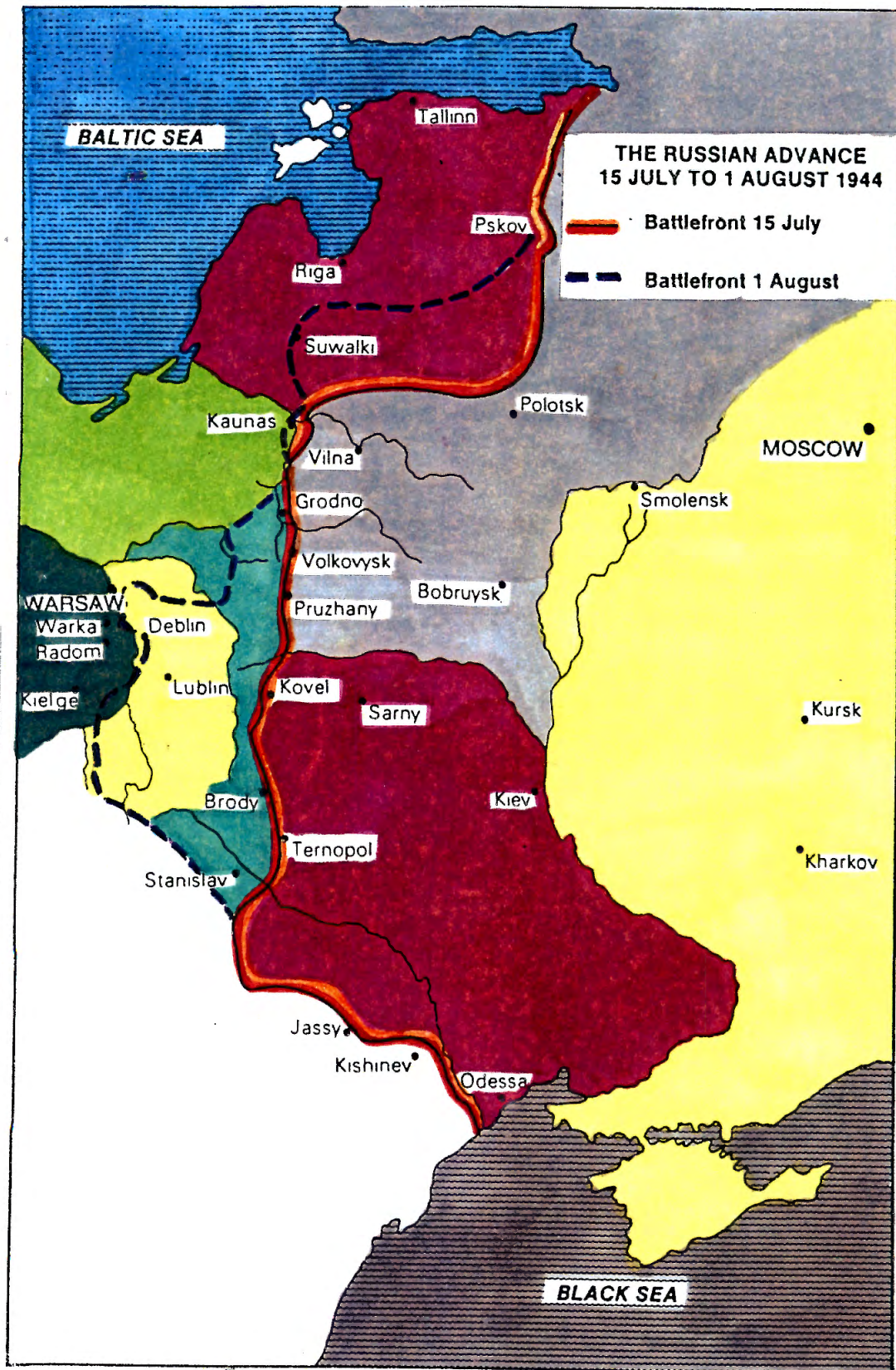
87 G. Bruce, *The Warsaw Rising*, p.81.

88 W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Triumph and Tragedy*, p.114; H. Michel, *The Second World War*, p.584.

89 J.K. Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, p.33.

90 J.K. Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, p.34.

91 J.K. Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, p.36.



THE RUSSIAN ADVANCE: 15 JULY TO 1 AUGUST, 1944.

By way of Allied air supply drops between June 1943 and October 1944, the Polish underground had received radio equipment to set up 877 radio stations and the *Armia Krajowa* appointed 2 084 soldiers, including 783 women, to man the stations.⁹²

The Russian Red Army continued with its relentless advance towards Warsaw and by 31 July, with the Russians a mere 10 kilometres from Warsaw, Bor-Komorowski launched "Operation Burza".⁹³

It was set to start at 17:00 on 1 August, the busiest time of day, when most people were returning from work and partisans could occupy previously identified positions, without being spotted.⁹⁴

It was planned and carried out with such secrecy that the Germans were caught unawares. Bor-Komorowski's own detailed description of events, recorded by Churchill, makes for compelling reading:

Thousands of windows flashed as they were flung open. From all sides a hail of bullets struck passing Germans ... In the twinkling of an eye the remaining civilians disappeared from the streets.⁹⁵ From the entrances of houses, men streamed out and rushed to the attack. Within 15 minutes the entire city was engulfed in the fighting. Every kind of traffic ceased ... the battle for the city was on.⁹⁶

Within the hour the whole city was in revolt.⁹⁷ After only two days, underground armies had occupied the whole South-western part of Warsaw.⁹⁸

92 J.K. Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, p.34.

93 W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Triumph and Tragedy*, p.115; J. Keegan, *The Second World War*, p.482.

94 A. Pomian, *The Warsaw Rising*, p.12; J. Keegan, *The Second World War*, p.482.

95 *Manchester Guardian*, 5 August 1944: Polish rising in Warsaw, p.6.

96 *Daily Herald*, 5 August 1944: Warsaw battles in streets of death, pp.1,4.

97 W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Truimph and Tragedy*, p.115.

98 *News Chronicle*, 3 August 1944: Warsaw Poles rise, Nazi Control ceases, p.1.