

Anna M. Cienciala. Prefatory Note to:

“Poland in British and French Policy in 1939: Determination to Fight or Avoid War?” (*The Polish Review*, v. XXXIV, 1989, no. 3).

[In the reprint of this article in: Patrick Finney, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, New York, Sydney, Auckland, 1997), pp. 413-433, the editor omitted some material in the notes and renumbered them.]

Since this article appeared in late 1989 and was reprinted in 1997, most of the archival Polish documents cited in it have been published in Polish and English. The Polish-language documents appeared in three volumes: (1) *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1938*, edited by Marek Kornat (Warsaw, 2007), covers the calendar year; (2) *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1939*, edited by Stanisław Żerko (Warsaw, 2005), covers the period January-end August; (3) *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1939* (Warsaw, 2007), edited by Wojciech Rojek, covers the period September 1 – December 31, 1939. The English-language volume, *Polish Documents on Foreign Policy, 24 October 1938 - 30 September 1939*, edited by Włodzimierz Borodziej and Sławomir Dębski (Warsaw 2009), contains translations of key documents for this period. (See Cienciala review, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 22, March 2011, No. 1, pp. 172-174. Corrections: on p. 172, par. 2, lines 3-4 should read: ...had for years seen them as reasonable...p. 174, line 2, should read: ...they had no plans...)

The names of two key archival depositories cited in the article have changed: The Sikorski Institute is now called: The Polish Institute and Polish Museum (PISM); the Public Record Office (PRO) is now: The National Archives (TNA).

Corrections.

p. 201, par. 1, line 7: eliminate the word: two

“ “ “ 2, bottom line, add after: will.

Furthermore, despite his declaration at the Munich Conference at the end of September 1938, that he wanted no more territory; in mid-March 1939, Hitler annexed the remaining Czech lands and created the Slovak Republic, while a few days later, he annexed the Lithuanian port and region of Klaipeda (G. Memel). Thus, it was clear that his word could not be trusted.

p. 203, par. 1, line 3, should read: ...Danzig and at least part of the Polish Corridor...

p. 203, n. 14, add: see note 8 above.

p. 204, par. 1, line 4 from bottom, omit word: Next

“ “ 2, line 6 from bottom should read: ...recall that Soviet...

“ n. 21, line 1, should read: ...Beck's instructions to Łukasiewicz...

p. 205, end of line 5 should read: a guarantee of Poland's independence.

p. 209, par. 1, line 1, 2nd sentence should read: As noted earlier....

p. “ “ “ “ 7, exaggerated – replace with: demonstrative

p. 210, par. 1, line 11 should read: ...and it was understood that this included Danzig.

p. 210, n. 40, date should read: 20 May 1939

p. 211, n. 48, line 3 should read: Dr. Carl J. Burckhardt

p.213, after end of note 54, add: For a more recent study, see Anna M. Cienciala, "The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939: When Did Stalin Decide to Align with Hitler, and Was Poland the Culprit," in: M.B.B. Biskupski, ed., *Ideology, Politics and Diplomacy in East Central Europe* (Rochester, NY, 2003), pp. 147-226. The volume was published in honor of Prof. Piotr S. Wandycz, and contains a bibliography of his works up to 2002.

p. 214, par 1, last line: beleived should read: believed

p. 216, par 1, last line should read: ... Berlin, where he agreed to the German occupation of his country rather than face bloodshed and destruction.

p. 217, par. 2, end of line 5: ambassador should be: Ambassador

p. 219, par. 2, line 8, should read: ...to the British note...

p. 222, n. 93 should read: ... see Stachiewicz, *ibid.*, ...

p. 224, par.1, lines 1-2 should read:

The British goal of giving a guarantee of her independence to Poland on March 31, 1939, concluding the provisional Anglo-Polish Agreement on Mutual Assistance of April 6, ...

p. 224, par. 2 of (2), the last two lines should read:

that they had abandoned their commitment to bomb military objectives in western Germany if the Germans bombed the same in Poland.

p. 225, par 2, last sentence should read: After the Nazi-Soviet Pact...

p. 226, after end of par., add:

For the reader's information, Russian-language diplomatic documents for 1939, published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, then the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in 1990-92, do not contain information on why and when Stalin decided to align with Hitler. They are cited and the issue is discussed in the Cienciala study added to p. 213, note 54.

ANNA M. CIENCIALA

POLAND IN BRITISH AND FRENCH POLICY IN 1939: DETERMINATION TO FIGHT—OR AVOID WAR?*

Historians still differ on the meaning of the British guarantee to Poland of March 31, 1939, and on the policy that flowed from it. Basically, opinion differs on whether the guarantee marked the end of appeasement—as symbolized by the Munich agreement of September 29, 1938—or whether it was a continuation of this policy.

In the period 1945–61, Western historians condemned Munich and saw the British guarantee as the beginning of a new policy of standing up to Hitler. However, A.J.P. Taylor challenged this view in 1961, claiming that the guarantee was, in fact, a continuation of appeasement since it envisaged further territorial revision in Eastern Europe. He believed this policy was justified by the goal of saving peace.¹ In 1969–70, the opening of British archives for the years 1938–39 (under the new 30-year rule), led Western historians to sympathize with British policy-makers, who had to work under specific economic, domestic, and strategic constraints. Therefore, since 1970, Western publications have generally agreed that until March 1939, Britain had no alternative to appeasement.² Moreover, some historians who interpreted appeasement in the classical sense of settling disputes by negotiation, discovered it to be a traditional British policy pursued since the mid-nineteenth century and dictated by such factors as: Britain's global commitments, i.e., her Empire, by the need for peace to carry on trade, by domestic economic pressures, and finally by a public opinion opposed to war. In this framework, Munich is seen as the last manifestation of a traditional policy, which then broke down. Another variation on the theme is to see British policy in 1939 as aiming to secure

*An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the International Conference on Interwar Poland, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind., Feb. 1985; the conference papers are to appear in 1989. A Polish version was published in *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 75, Paris, 1986, pp. 152–183.

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, London, 1961, pp. 189 ff.

² For a useful survey of interpretations of appeasement up to 1975, see: Donald C. Watt, "The Historiography of Appeasement," in: *Crisis and Controversy. Essays in Honour of A.J.P. Taylor*, edited by Alan Sked and Christopher Cook, London, 1976, ch. 6. For up-to-date discussions of Taylor's views, see: *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered. The A.J.P. Taylor Debate After Twenty-five Years*, edited by Gordon Martel, Boston, London, Sydney, 1986. A useful collection of papers, including some by German historians is to be found in: *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement*, edited by Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker, London, Boston, Sydney, 1982.

peace by means of another Four Power Pact, i.e., excluding the Soviet Union.³

While there is a general consensus that March 1939 marked the beginning of a new trend in British policy, there are contradictory views on what it was expected to achieve. On the one hand, Sidney Aster claims the aim was to strengthen Poland's bargaining position so that she could negotiate with Germany "on an equal footing and free from the fear of force;" thus, he concludes that it was not appeasement.⁴ As we shall see later, this was, in fact, the view held by Foreign Secretary Lord Edward Halifax, by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, and by most officials of the Foreign Office. On the other hand, Simon Newman sees the guarantee as a continuation of Britain's traditional balance of power policy which, he claims, included the maintenance of the *status quo* in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, he claims the guarantee was deliberately intended to prevent a peaceful German-Polish settlement, and so provoke a war in which Poland would have to fight on Britain's side. Thus, Newman concludes that Britain bears part of the blame for the outbreak of the war.⁵ As we shall see, this interpretation is at variance with British documents, including those cited by the author.

To conclude this historiographical survey, we should note that German historians have published many valuable studies on appeasement in British policy.⁶ Furthermore, there is one Polish-language study of the British guarantee to Poland, based on Polish archival documents and published sources, also a Polish article and an English-language study of British policy toward Poland in 1939, based mainly on archival British documents.⁷ In this article, I will present conclusions based on my own research, as presented in papers and

³ See especially: Paul Kennedy, *Strategy and Diplomacy 1870–1983*, London, 1983, pp. 13–39. His paper was first published in 1976, as was Paul Schroeder's article with the same thesis: "Munich and the British Tradition," *The Historical Journal*, v. 19, no. 1, 1976, pp. 223–43. Gottfried Niedhart argues that British policy aimed at another Four Power Pact excluding the Soviet Union, see his article: "Appeasement: die britische Antwort auf die Krise des Weltreichs und des internationalen Systems vor dem zweiten Weltkrieg," *Historische Zeitschrift*, v. 225, no. 1, 1978, pp. 67–88. This is a development of the argument he presented in his: "Die britisch-französische Garantieerklärung für Polen vom 31. März 1939: Aussenpolitischer Kurswechsel der Westmächte?" in: *Francia: Forschungen zur Westeuropäischer Geschichte*, no. 2, 1974, pp. 597–618.

⁴ Sidney Aster, 1939. *The Making of the Second World War*, New York, 1972, pp. 14–16, 359–60.

⁵ Simon Newman, *March 1939. The British Guarantee to Poland*. Oxford, 1976, pp. 136, 195–96, 220–23.

⁶ See: Mommsen and Kettenacker, note 2 above; also Paul Kennedy's review article: "The Logic of Appeasement," *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, 28 May 1982, pp. 585–618.

⁷ Henryk Jackiewicz, *Brytyjskie gwarancje dla Polski w 1939 roku*, Olsztyn, 1980; Anita Prażmowska, *Britain, Poland, and the Eastern Front, 1939*, Cambridge, Eng., London, New York, etc., 1987; cf. Anna Garlicka, "Wysiłki W. Brytanii w celu stworzenia w Europie Środkowej i Południowo-Wschodniej frontu antyniemieckiego," *Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej*, v. XXII, Warsaw, 1986, pp. 135–50.

publications which may not be easily accessible to readers of *The Polish Review*.⁸

We should note that in most of the studies cited above, scant attention was paid to French policy in 1938–39. This was due to the assumption that France merely followed the British lead, an assumption reinforced by the fact that, with some personal exceptions, the archives of the French Foreign Ministry for the period 1930–39 were closed to scholars until the early 1970's. Since that time, however, many volumes of French documents have appeared, as well as two major studies by the English historian, Anthony Adamthwaite,⁹ and the French historian, J. B. Duroselle.¹⁰ They show that while French statesmen believed they could not act without British support, most were, in fact, just as anxious to reach a settlement with Hitler as were the British. There is also a useful collection of papers presented in a 1975 colloquium on Franco-British relations, which includes a brief study on France, Britain, and Poland in 1939.¹¹

* * *

Let us now take a look at the issue that allegedly led to the outbreak of the Second World War, i.e., the Free City of Gdańsk (Danzig), and the so-called Polish Corridor, i.e., Polish Pomerania (Pomorze).^{*} Some Western historians fail to see why the Poles refused Hitler's demands for the return of the city to Germany and for an extraterritorial German highway and railway through the Corridor. They argue that even if most of Polish trade went by sea in 1937, it was, after all, possible for Poland to agree to the return of Danzig to Germany with guarantees for Polish rights there, and a guaranteed access to Gdynia through a belt of territory in the Polish Corridor containing an extraterritorial German highway and railway. These historians do not seem to realize that Poland's acceptance of these terms would have meant not only putting some Polish-speaking territory in the Corridor under German administration, but would also have made Polish access to the two ports of Gdynia and Danzig, and therefore the whole Polish economy, entirely dependent on German good will. In view of the above, the Poles rightly saw Hitler's demands as aiming

⁸ See: Anna M. Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938–1939. A Study in the Interdependence of Eastern and Western Europe*, London, Toronto, 1968; same, paper on the British Guarantee to Poland of 31 March 1939, read at the American Historical Association Convention, New York, Dec. 1979; same, "Polska w polityce brytyjskiej i francuskiej w 1939 roku: wola walki czy próba uniknięcia wojny?" *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 75, Paris, 1986, pp. 152–83.

⁹ Anthony Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936–1939*, London, 1977.

¹⁰ J. B. Duroselle, *La Décadence, 1932–1939*, Paris, 1979.

¹¹ Henri Michel, "France, Grande-Bretagne et Pologne (Mars-Août 1939)," in *Les Relations Franco-britanniques de 1935 à 1939*, Paris (CNRS), 1975, pp. 383–401.

^{*}In this article, I will use the terms Danzig, and the Polish Corridor, instead of Gdańsk and Polish Pomerania, because they are more familiar to Western historians of the interwar period.

at the total subordination of their country to Germany. A few spirited members of the British Foreign Office and the Ambassador to Poland shared the Polish point of view, but they were in the minority.¹²

Here we should also mention that Poland's policy of good relations with Germany, initiated by the Polish-German Declaration of Nonaggression of January 26, 1934, was seen then, and is sometimes seen today, as pro-German. In fact, the aim of Polish foreign policy was to have good relations with both great neighbors, while not being dependent on either, since this was seen as the end of Polish independence. Thus, the Polish-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of July 1932, was balanced by the agreement with Germany in 1934, while the latter was balanced by extending the pact with the USSR for ten years. At the same time, the Franco-Polish alliance and military convention of February 1921 remained the sheet anchor of Polish policy, though Poland did not follow France when this was seen as contrary to vital Polish interests. Furthermore, the policy of good relations with Germany, which is attributed to Foreign Minister Józef Beck, was, in fact, initiated by Marshal Józef Piłsudski in response to the conciliatory policy followed by London and Paris toward Berlin, beginning with the Locarno Treaties of October 16, 1925.¹³

Finally, we should recall that German demands for the return of Danzig to Germany and for German extraterritorial communications through the Polish Corridor to Danzig and East Prussia—demands put forward in October 1938, repeated in January 1939, and again in March 1939—were rejected by Poland. In January 1939, the Polish Cabinet decided not to negotiate on the basis of Hitler's demands since, if granted, more would follow and lead ultimately to the loss of Polish independence. Therefore, Polish counter-proposals envisaged a joint Polish-German guarantee of the Free City and more facilities for German traffic through the Corridor, but without extraterritorial rights. Although these Polish-German talks were secret—for each side hoped to reach its respective goals with time—it should be noted that the Polish decision to

¹² For the view that the maintenance of the Free City of Danzig was not a vital Polish interest in 1939, see: Desmond Williams, "Negotiations Leading to the Anglo-Polish Agreement of 31 March 1939," part II, *Irish Historical Studies*, v. X, no. 38, Dublin, September 1956, p. 187. For Polish views as reported from Warsaw by French ambassador Leon Noël, see: D.289 of 17 May 1939, *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, (henceforth DDF) 2nd ser. v. XVI, p. 196. For a spirited agreement with the Polish point of view by a few members of the Foreign Office, see F.O. memorandum on Danzig, 5 May 1939, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, (henceforth DBFP), 3rd. ser. v. VI, appendix II.

¹³ See A.M. Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, pp. 1–19, and same: "Polish Foreign Policy 1936–1939: 'Equilibrium,' Stereotype and Reality," *The Polish Review*, v. XX, no. 1, New York, 1975, pp. 42–58; for an excellent detailed study see: Michał J. Zacharias, *Polska wobec zmian w układzie sił politycznych w Europie w latach 1932–1936*, Wrocław, 1981; see also Piotr S. Wandycz's definitive study: *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926–1936, French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland*, Princeton, N.J., 1988.

stand and fight, if need be, was made on March 24, 1939, i.e., six days before Britain gave her guarantee to Poland.¹⁴

* * *

Now let us turn to the genesis of the British guarantee. At first sight, this guarantee seems rather strange, since the British government had always assumed that Danzig and part of the Polish Corridor must some day return to Germany. Moreover, this view was shared by some French statesmen since 1925, e.g., Aristide Briand. In point of fact, Britain did not guarantee the status of Free City or the territorial integrity of Poland, but the latter's independence. Thus, Britain made a stand against treaty revision by force, not against revision as such. A stand was mandated by the outrage expressed by British public opinion at Hitler's seizure of the Czech lands in mid-March 1939. That is why Chamberlain and Halifax could not continue the old policy of appeasement.¹⁵ In any case, the news of an alleged German ultimatum to Rumania dictated an immediate response. Therefore, prodded by Halifax, Chamberlain had to give up his original decision to continue to seek peace through appeasement, and publicly warned Hitler on March 17 that Britain would not tolerate any German move toward world domination.¹⁶ Few noticed at the time that this was only a stronger version of the warnings he had made in his speech of September 27, 1938, at the height of the Czechoslovak crisis.¹⁷ As we know, the Munich conference took place two days later.

Britain's first step to check further German aggression was anything but daring. Chamberlain proposed that Britain, France, the USSR, and Poland, sign a declaration to consult together in case of a renewed threat of German aggression. On the urging of the French ambassador in London, Charles Corbin, the phrase was amended to consult on action to be taken. As we know, this project fell through, but this was due not only to Polish opposition. It is true that Józef Beck argued Poland could not sign because, in Hitler's eyes, this would put her on the Soviet side and possibly provoke him to aggression. More important was British distrust of Soviet Russia, which was shared by

¹⁴ See: Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, ch. VI, VII, and same, article in *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 75.

¹⁵ On Aristide Briand and revision of the Danzig settlement and the Polish-German frontier, see Anna M. Cienciala and Titus Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno. Keys to Polish Foreign Policy, 1919–1925*, Lawrence, Ks., 1984, pp. 240–45. For British policy-makers' reactions to Hitler's seizure of the Czech lands, see Oliver Harvey's note of 14 March 1939 in: John Harvey, ed., *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937–1940*, London, 1970, pp. 261–62; for Chamberlain's speech of 15 March 1939, on continuing appeasement, see *Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons*, (henceforth *Parl. Deb. H.C.*) 5th ser., v. 345, cols. 438–40.

¹⁶ Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, London, 1946, p. 362.

¹⁷ *DBFP*, 3rd ser., v. II, no. 1111.

both the Dominions and neutral countries. Finally, Chamberlain wanted not war, but a peaceful settlement with Germany. For the same reasons, Britain rejected the Soviet proposal of a conference between the interested Powers.¹⁸

It is important to note that even before launching the consultation scheme, Chamberlain saw Poland as "very likely the key to the situation."¹⁹ It appears that initially Poland's participation in the projected declaration was meant to encourage the Balkan states to stand up to Hitler. Their independence was seen as a vital British interest in order to block German access to the eastern Mediterranean, for this would threaten British communications through the Suez Canal to India and the Far East.²⁰ Next, Britain saw Rumania's independence as vital, since otherwise Rumanian oil and grain would fall into German hands, thus undermining the naval blockade Britain planned to impose on Germany at the outset of war.

Since Poland bordered on Rumania and had a defensive alliance with her against the USSR, the British and French governments wanted this treaty extended into an alliance against Germany. However, Beck steadfastly opposed this course, arguing that it would push Hungary into the arms of Berlin.²¹ (This was, indeed, a real possibility given the Hungarian demand for the return of Transylvania). Finally, and most important from the British point of view, Poland had a long frontier with Germany and was regarded as the strongest military power in Eastern Europe. (Here we should recall that a Soviet offensive capability was discounted after Stalin's purge of the Soviet officer corps in 1937–38). Thus, Chamberlain believed that if Poland aligned herself with France and Britain, Germany would face the risk of a two front war, and he thought it impossible for Hitler or his generals to risk a repeat performance of 1918.²²

Thus, when instead of signing the declaration on consultation, Józef Beck proposed a bilateral secret Anglo-Polish agreement on consultation to ambassador Howard Kennard on March 22, 1939, and ambassador Edward Raczyn-

¹⁸ For Beck's attitude, see Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, ch. VII; for an account of other reactions and on Soviet proposals, see Aster, 1939, ch. 3, 4.

¹⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 18 March 1939, CAB/98, p. 59, Public Record Office (PRO), London.

²⁰ See remarks by Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall of 17 March 1939, cit. Aster, 1939, p. 119.

²¹ On Rumania, see French view, Beck's instructions of Juliusz Łukasiewicz, the Polish ambassador in Paris, and his conversation with Premier Edouard Daladier, 23 March, 1939, *Diplomat in Paris 1936–1939. Papers and Memoirs of Juliusz Łukasiewicz, Ambassador of Poland*, edited by Waław Jędrzejewicz, New York, 1970, pp. 175–78.

²² Former British Prime Minister David Lloyd George passed on to Soviet ambassador Ivan Maiskii what Chamberlain had told him on 31 March 1939, when he asked why he had given a guarantee to Poland. Chamberlain said: "... according to the information at his disposal, neither the German General Staff nor Hitler would ever risk war if they knew that they would have to fight simultaneously on two fronts—the West and the East." see Maiskii report of 31 March 1939 in *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II*, 2nd printing, Moscow, 1976, no. 138.

ski formally proposed it to Lord Halifax two days later,²³ this fitted the already existing British perception of Poland as “the key to the situation.” Therefore, Beck’s proposal—which was accepted by Halifax—led on March 27 to the recommendation of the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee, which was accepted by the Cabinet two days later, that Britain offer a guarantee to Poland. The Cabinet decided that this offer be made conditional on Poland’s guarantee to help Rumania, and on a reciprocal Polish guarantee to Britain. However, if Poland would not, or could not, accept the above conditions, she would be offered a unilateral British guarantee—since there could be no “Eastern Front” without her.²⁴ While the original British intent was to use Poland as the core of an Eastern Front to be created by adding Rumania, Greece, and also perhaps Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, ultimately this proved to be impossible and the larger project was abandoned.

The above-cited Cabinet decision proves that the guarantee was not something conceived on the spur of the moment. Thus it was not offered as a direct reaction to the “news” brought by the journalist Ian Colvin from Berlin on March 29 that Germany was about to attack Poland. In fact, Colvin’s information had been known to British Intelligence for a month. It was rather the expected effect of this news on British public opinion that made Chamberlain decide on the evening of March 29 to offer the guarantee immediately to Poland.²⁵ Even then, there was some doubt about this when German intent to attack Poland was not confirmed, and when the British and French ambassadors in Warsaw reported the German terms which Poland had rejected, i.e., the return of Danzig to Germany and German extraterritorial communications through the Corridor.²⁶ However, after a brief hesitation, it was decided to proceed with the guarantee, because British public opinion demanded a firm stand against Hitler.²⁷

Was the British guarantee designed—as Simon Newman claims—to prevent

²³ See Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, pp. 216–17; the initiative for a secret Anglo-Polish agreement has been incorrectly attributed to Halifax, see Prażmowska, *Britain, Poland and the Eastern Front*, pp. 46–47.

²⁴ Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, F.P. (36), 38th meeting, 27 March 1939, 5 p.m., CAB 27/624, (PRO) pp. 199–204, partly cit. Aster, 1939, p. 92, and Newman, *March 1939*, pp. 151–52.

²⁵ See David Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938–1945*, London, 1971, entry for 29 March 1939, p. 165.

²⁶ Kennard to Halifax, 29 March 1939, DBFP, 3rd ser. v. IV, no. 564 (10:10 p.m.), and Noël to Bonnet, same day, DDF, 2nd ser. v. XVI, 188.

²⁷ Ambassador Edward Raczynski was told on the morning of 30 March, that no public announcement would be made unless there was reason to fear that Germany contemplated immediate action. However in the afternoon, Sir Orme Sargent informed the ambassador of the projected guarantee, and said a speedy Polish reply was essential in view of increasing attacks on Chamberlain for his lack of initiative in face of German aggression. Ambassador Kennard was then instructed to obtain Beck’s agreement, if possible, at once—see Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, pp. 225–26.

a Polish-German settlement and thus provoke a war with Germany, in which Poland would fight on Britain's side? The reader can decide this for himself by first looking at the conditions originally appended to the guarantee by the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy on the morning of March 31, at Chamberlain's statement to the Cabinet at noon that day—both of which are cited by Newman—and finally at British and French policy between April and September 1939. As far as the first point is concerned, the Committee on Foreign Policy resolved that the guarantee was to be implemented on two conditions: (1) if Poland resisted a threat to her independence; (2) if she did not indulge in "provocative or stupid obstinacy," either generally, or on Danzig in particular.²⁸ Secondly, at noon, Chamberlain told the Cabinet that: "It would, of course, be for us to determine what action threatened Polish independence. This would prevent us from becoming embroiled as the result of a frontier incident."²⁹

We should note that the first condition was amended to read that Poland would resist a threat to her independence with her "national forces." As Halifax explained to the French leaders in late May, this formula was intended to restrain Poland. In his words: "as far as Poland was concerned, safety lay in the fact that, in the event of trouble, Poland would obviously be the first to suffer and suffer disastrously."³⁰ Thus, the Polish Government would think long and hard before deciding to mobilize to meet a German threat. We should also note that when Chamberlain announced the guarantee in the House of Commons on the afternoon of March 31, he first made a long statement to the effect that no question was incapable of solution by peaceful means, and that the offer to Poland was an interim measure while negotiations proceeded on a multilateral declaration on consultation. Only then did he state that if Poland resisted a threat to her independence with her national forces, then the British Government "would feel themselves to be bound at once to lend the Polish Government all the support in their power." He added that France associated herself with this offer.³¹

As we know from British documents, the immediate objectives of the guarantee were twofold: (a) to warn Hitler against using force, and (b) to pave the way to a bilateral Anglo-Polish agreement on mutual aid. This agreement was concluded between Foreign Minister Beck and the British government in London on April 6. It was accompanied by a secret protocol, one point of which stated that British aid against any kind of German threat to Poland's

²⁸ Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, F.P. (36), 40th meeting, 31 March 1939, 9:45 a.m., CAB 27/624, cit. Newman, *March 1939*, p. 202.

²⁹ Cabinet Minutes, 31 March 1939, CAB/98, cit. Newman, *ibid.*

³⁰ Extract from record of conversations between the Secretary of State and MM. Daladier and Bonnet at the Ministry of War, Paris, May 20, 1939, DBFP, 3rd ser. v. V, no. 569, p. 610, and French record in DDF, 2nd ser. v. XVI, no. 243, pp. 482–83.

³¹ *Parl. Deb. H.C.*, 5th sr. v. 345, cols. 2421–42; cit. Aster, 1939, pp. 112–113.

independence—which Poland would resist with her national forces—was understood to include a German threat to Danzig. Soon thereafter, Beck informed the British Government that, as it had requested, Poland would come to its aid if it became involved in war by helping Belgium, Holland, and Denmark.³²

Nevertheless, the formal alliance was delayed until August 25. The reason for this delay was the British goal of attaining a peaceful Polish-German settlement and, in the meanwhile, concluding a treaty with the USSR. This was to serve as an additional incentive for Hitler to sign an agreement with Poland but, if it failed, the USSR was to help defend Poland and Rumania. Therefore, the British aim was to transform the Franco-Soviet alliance of 1935 into a triple alliance. However, while the French viewed such an alliance as the ultimate deterrent to Hitler, the British were somewhat skeptical. In any case, the key problem was that neither Poland nor Rumania, nor the Baltic States—which the USSR was also to “protect”—wanted Soviet guarantees of aid, and even less, the entry of Soviet troops. However, both Poland and Rumania were willing to accept Soviet military supplies in case of war.³³

* * *

Now let us see how the British and French governments envisaged the negotiated Polish-German settlement which was their goal. It is significant that from the outset, Halifax differentiated clearly between a change in the

³² A good summary of British objectives is given by Cadogan, see: *Diaries*, p. 166; for the text of the secret Anglo-Polish agreement of 6 April 1939, see DBFP, 3rd. ser., v. V, no. 16; Polish text in Józef Żarański, ed., *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka (1935–1945)*, v. IV, London, 1972, pp. 716–18; for Beck's declaration of Polish aid to Britain, see Kennard to Halifax, 14 April, 1939, DBFP, v. V, no. 164.

Part II, art. 2, par (b) of the secret agreement of 6 April stated that if Germany tried to undermine Polish independence by economic penetration, or in any other way, the British government would support Polish resistance. If the Germans then attacked Poland, Britain would immediately come to her aid. In case of other German action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and was of such a character that the Polish government would consider it its *vital interest* to resist with its armed forces, then the British government would come immediately to its aid.

Józef Potocki, then a member of Beck's negotiating team in London and Head of the Western Dept. in the Polish Foreign Ministry, no doubt had this par. in mind when he wrote to Edward Raczynski in 1957, recalling that on the third day of negotiations, when Beck was out of London, he, together with Raczynski negotiated with Alexander Cadogan and William Strang. Potocki and Raczynski insisted that certain sentences be redrafted in such a way as to leave no doubt that a German attack on Danzig territory was synonymous with an attack on Poland. Cadogan instructed Malkin (the F.O. Legal Adviser) to redraft the protocol accordingly—see Edward Raczynski, *W sojusznictwie Londynie*, 1st ed., London, 1962, pp. 412–13; 2nd ed., London, 1974, *ibid*; see also English edition, *In Allied London*, London, 1962, note 2.

³³ For a survey of Anglo-Soviet negotiations, see Aster, 1939, ch. 6, 10, 13; on French efforts, see Duroselle, *Décadence*, ch. XIII, XV; for the Polish side, see “Polish Diplomatic Documents Concerning Negotiations Between Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union Before the Outbreak of the Second World War,” (in Polish), General Sikorski Historical Institute, London, 1955, and offprint, *Bellona*, London, Jan-March, 1955.

status of the Free City of Danzig on the one hand, and a threat to Polish independence on the other. He first presented this basic formula to Soviet ambassador Ivan Maiskii on March 19, i.e., before Britain gave her guarantee to Poland. Halifax then told him that if the Danzig question developed into a threat to Polish independence, then the matter "would be of interest to us all."³⁴ Nine days later, he told French ambassador Charles Corbin that Poland should not be forced to face just two alternatives, namely agreement with either Germany or the Soviet Union. A third alternative would be Polish-German negotiations, assented to by the Western Powers—if German demands should go beyond Danzig.³⁵ Thus, from the beginning, Halifax envisaged the return of Danzig to Germany.

British government thinking was reflected in the *Times* editorial of April 1, which stated that the British guarantee to Poland did not mean a blind acceptance of existing Polish frontiers, but that it guaranteed Polish independence. Two days later, the editor, Geoffrey Dawson, noted in his diary that both Chamberlain and Halifax thought the article "just right on first reading and were only worried by the Poles and others."³⁶ Indeed, earlier reports along the lines of Dawson's editorial had led Beck to threaten the cancellation of his impending visit to London. Although the Foreign Office issued a statement that the *Times* did not express the views of the government,³⁷ Dawson's diary entry proves that it did.

On April 6, i.e., on the day the Anglo-Polish agreement was signed in London, Frank Roberts of the Central Department of the Foreign Office—which included Poland—commented that since Beck's hand had been "strengthened," he might not be unwilling to discuss Danzig and a German road across the Corridor with the Germans.³⁸ Two weeks later, the same thought was expressed to ambassador Edward Raczyński by the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alexander Cadogan, when he said the Poles should not be "intransigent" now that Britain had guaranteed them.³⁹ At the same time, Halifax cabled Kennard in Warsaw that the guarantee should strengthen Beck's bargaining position, and that everything must be done to avoid the impression that the guarantee had made a reasonable settlement difficult.⁴⁰ These statements, along with those made by the British ambassador in Berlin, Sir Neville Henderson, and by Chamberlain's closest adviser, Sir

³⁴ DBFP, 3rd ser. v. IV, no. 432.

³⁵ Corbin to Bonnet, 28 March 1939, DDF, 2nd ser. v. XV, no. 176.

³⁶ Geoffrey Dawson diary, 3 April 1939, cit. Franklin Reid Gannon, *The British Press and Germany, 1936–39*, Oxford, 1971, p. 22 ff.

³⁷ Cit. Cienicala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, pp. 226–27; E. Raczyński, *In Allied London*, p. 14.

³⁸ Minute by Frank Roberts, 6 April 1939, F.O. 371/23016/C4870/54/18, (PRO).

³⁹ Cadogan, *Diaries*, 20 April 1939, p. 176.

⁴⁰ Halifax to Kennard, 20 April 1939, DBFP, 3rd ser. v. V, no. 237.

Horace Wilson,⁴¹ clearly indicate that British policy-makers aimed at a Polish-German settlement satisfactory to Hitler. Here we should note that while Beck also envisaged Polish-German negotiations, he refused to accept terms contrary to Poland's vital interests. Thus, on April 23, he warned ambassador Kennard that Poland would not negotiate on the basis of the German demands which she had rejected, and this regardless of what Britain might do.⁴² However, this warning was ignored in London.

Let us now turn to French policy. As we noted earlier, some French politicians had long assumed that Danzig would return some day to Germany. Indeed, after 1925, many viewed the Polish alliance as less of an asset than a burden. Also, many French officials nursed a great distrust and dislike of Józef Beck, whom they saw as being pro-German.⁴³ While this view stemmed from Beck's maintenance of good relations with Germany and from his sometimes exaggerated independence from France, we should bear in mind that in 1938 the French had little compunction in abandoning President Edward Beneš and Czechoslovakia, even though he had always been subservient to Paris and the country was an ally of France.

As we know, France, which was Poland's ally since 1921, joined in the British guarantee of March 31, 1939. Furthermore, impressed by the Anglo-Polish agreement of April 6—of which the French government received only a summary, since Halifax and Beck agreed not to communicate the text to Paris for fear of leakage, and thus rousing Hitler's ire—it responded positively to the Polish request that the Franco-Polish alliance of 1921 be updated to conform to the new Anglo-Polish accord. On May 11, the French Cabinet unanimously approved a draft protocol interpreting the alliance of 1921, along with an appended declaration by ambassador Juliusz Łukasiewicz, which France

⁴¹ See Henderson letter to Sir Horace Wilson, 9 May 1939, PREM/I/331A, and statement in Cabinet of 26 Aug. 1939, cit. Aster, 1939, p. 342. (For more on H. Wilson, see below.)

⁴² Kennard to Halifax, 23 April 1939, DBFP, v. V, no. 274; the full Polish text of the conversation is in Józef Potocki to Edward Raczynski, 24 April 1939, no. 49/WB/tj. Encl. 1, part I., Archives of the Polish Embassy, London, Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (henceforth PISM), London.

⁴³ Thus, Alexis Léger, Secretary General of the French Foreign Ministry, believed the return of Danzig to Germany was "a foregone conclusion, and there was no reason for France and Great Britain to take action to prevent it," Phipps to Halifax, 18 March 1939, DBFP, 3rd ser. v. IV, no. 418, encl. p. 382. On the same day, Léger told Phipps that he knew from a "confidential" source that Beck's aim was to ask London for an Anglo-Polish alliance, knowing that this was impossible. He would then use the British refusal to justify leaning toward Germany, even at the cost of becoming her vassal, *ibid.*, no. 405, p. 373.

was to take note of, that Danzig was “a vital Polish interest.”⁴⁴ The political protocol was to be signed on May 19, the day on which protocols interpreting the Franco-Polish Military Convention of February 1921, were also to be signed by the Chief of the French General Staff, General Maurice Gamelin, and the Polish War Minister, General Tadeusz Kasprzycki. But French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet suddenly asked ambassador Łukasiewicz for a delay in signing the political protocol. What had happened?

First of all, Bonnet belatedly decided to ask London whether the Anglo-Polish agreement of April 6 included the statement that Danzig was a vital Polish interest. Although the Foreign Office reaction to this question was favorable, Bonnet agreed to await a definite reply from Lord Halifax, who was due in Paris on May 20.⁴⁵ On that day, Halifax told Bonnet and Premier Edouard Daladier—who was also Minister of Defense—that there was no such statement in the agreement of April 6. While this was literally true, Halifax concealed the fact that in the secret Anglo-Polish understanding, any kind of German threat to Poland’s independence, which she considered her vital interest to resist with her national forces, would bring about immediate British aid, and that this could be read to include Danzig. What is more, Halifax went on to outline a plan of settlement. Danzig, he said, would return to Germany, but retain its status as a Free City; that is, it would have neither fortifications, nor be occupied by German troops. It would be administered like a German city and might even have a representative in the Reichstag. (Here Halifax said his impression was that Beck was primarily concerned with the continued existence of Danzig as Free City.) Next, this settlement, in which Poland’s rights were to be safeguarded, would be secured by an international guarantee. When Daladier asked about the German demand for extraterritorial communications through the Corridor, Halifax replied this issue could not be negotiated at the moment; later, when the time was right, he thought the “good offices” of the Pope or the Italian government might be requested to help mediate an agreement. Daladier demurred that Italy was too closely tied with Germany, saying he would prefer mediation by the Vatican.⁴⁶ (In fact, the Vatican had made a move in this direction in early May, while both the Pope and Mussolini were to try their hand with the Polish government in late August 1939.) Thus, on May 20, the French and British governments agreed to work for a settlement whereby Danzig would return to Germany, and the latter would get an extraterritorial connection with Danzig and East Prussia through the Polish Corridor.

⁴⁴ For the Beck-Halifax agreement to keep the text of the Anglo-Polish agreement of 6 April secret from the French, see Cypher telegram to H.M. Minister, Paris, 7 April 1939, F.O. 371/23016/C5063/54/18 (PRO). For the French Cabinet resolution of 11 May 1939, see Bonnet to Daladier, 18 May 1939, DDF, 2nd ser. v. XVI, no. 22; for the Polish summary of the negotiations, see *Diplomat in Paris*, pp. 202–20.

⁴⁵ See DDF, 2nd ser. v. XV, nos. 211, 217, 226, 228.

⁴⁶ For the Halifax-Daladier-Bonnet conversation of 29 May 1939, see note 30 above.

We should note that while the Polish government had rejected these terms in March, they had always been considered by British statesmen—and indeed by some French ones, e.g., Aristide Briand—as a reasonable solution to the Danzig-Corridor problem. This was also the case with Léger, Bonnet, and Daladier in 1939.

It is clear that the Bonnet-Daladier agreement to Halifax's plan led to the postponement of the Franco-Polish agreements. In fact, on May 20, the very day of the Halifax-Bonnet-Daladier conversation, gen. Gamelin wrote gen. Kasprzycki that the military protocols they had signed the previous day would not assume the character of an agreement between the two General Staffs until the political agreement was signed.⁴⁷ As it turned out, the latter was not signed until September 4, 1939, when the Polish-German war was in its fourth day, and France was in its first day of war with Germany. (The contents of the Franco-Polish military protocols will be discussed later, along with British and French military commitments to Poland.)

Thus, the Halifax-Bonnet-Daladier agreement of May 20 differed from Hitler's terms only in two respects: (a) the continued existence of Danzig as Free City—this time within the Reich—and an international guarantee. Chamberlain mentioned such a solution for Danzig, when he spoke to a group of Labour members of Parliament in June, and again to General Sir Edmund Ironside on the eve of his departure to Poland in July.⁴⁸

* * *

It is impossible in this short paper to follow all the ins and outs of British policy toward Germany in the summer of 1939. Suffice it to say that repeated British warnings to Hitler and repeated declarations of support for Poland, were more than balanced by unofficial Anglo-German conversations. Even if Helmuth Wohlthat did not obtain a memorandum from Sir Horace Wilson outlining a comprehensive Anglo-German agreement (July), such an agreement may well have been discussed.⁴⁹ In any case, on August 3, Sir Horace Wilson mentioned such a settlement to German ambassador Herbert von Dirksen. On this occasion Wilson said that if Germany agreed to negotiate and signed a declaration of nonaggression with Great Britain—the latter would

⁴⁷ See Polish protest and Gamelin letter to Kasprzycki, DDF, 2nd ser. v. XVI, nos. 244, 245.

⁴⁸ Hugh Dalton, the Labour Party expert on Foreign Affairs, told amb. Raczyński that Chamberlain spoke of a possible Polish-German compromise on Danzig, which might be mediated by the League High Commissioner, Burckhardt, and be secured by an international guarantee—Raczyński report to Beck, 30 June 1939, ER/MR no. 49/WB/tj/351, Polish Embassy, London, PISM. In early July, Chamberlain told Sir Edmund Ironside, Inspector General of Overseas Forces, who was going to Poland, that he envisaged the return of Danzig to Germany as a Free City, see Frederick MacLeod and Denis Kelly, eds., *Time Unguarded. The Ironside Diaries, 1937–1940*, London, 1962, p. 77.

⁴⁹ See Helmuth Metzmacher, "Deutsch-Englische Ausgleichbemühungen in Sommer 1939," *Verteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte*, v. XIV, no. 4, October 1956.

withdraw her guarantees from Poland, Greece, and Rumania.⁵⁰ (The last two countries received guarantees on April 17, after Mussolini's invasion of Albania.) We may assume that instead of encouraging Hitler to think of negotiations, this proposal helped convince him that Britain would not honor her commitments to Poland.

Another encouraging sign for the Führer was the niggardly British attitude on financial aid to Poland. Instead of giving the latter a sign of support by public agreement to the sizable sum she requested, Halifax and Chamberlain allowed the Treasury to pare it down to a ludicrously small amount. In fact, the negotiations were even suspended, and only concluded later. It is true that Britain had to husband her financial resources, but her parsimonious attitude confirmed Hitler's view that she would not go to war for Poland. Indeed, the Treasury clearly viewed Poland as a poor risk; one of the conditions of the loan as finally granted was that the gold of the Bank of Poland should be located abroad, to be accessible in case of war.⁵¹ It would have been better politics to announce that Britain would help Poland to the hilt, and that the loan was only a first installment. However, if this was suggested in London, it must have been rejected.

Returning to Sir Horace Wilson's proposal of August 3 to ambassador Dirksen, Hitler's answer was finally delivered on August 20 by Fritz Hesse, the German press attaché in London. Acting on Ribbentrop's instructions, Hesse told Wilson that Hitler stood by his demands for Danzig and extraterritorial communications through the Corridor, but he might be willing to "negotiate" with Poland on the basis of his March demands (which Poland had rejected).⁵² Perhaps this message sparked plans for Göring's secret visit to England. Whatever the case may be, the date was set for August 23. However, the Nazi-

⁵⁰ Note by Sir Horace Wilson on a conversation with Ambassador Dirksen, 3 August 1939, DBFP, 3rd ser. v. VI, no. 533. According to Dirksen's report of the same day, Wilson confirmed the accuracy of the notes Dirksen had taken on the Wilson-Wohl July conversations, see *Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War*, Moscow, 1948, v. II, no. 24, and *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II*, no. 302. Dirksen's memorandum was not found in the German Foreign Ministry Archives—see *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, ser. D, v. VI, no. 766, note. The Soviets most likely found the document among those they captured in Germany at war's end.

⁵¹ For a short survey of the Anglo-Polish financial negotiations, see David E. Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War. Germany, Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930–1939*, Princeton, N.J., 1980, pp. 305–09. For more detail, see Prazmowska, *Britain, Poland, and the Eastern Front, 1939*, ch. 5.

⁵² See H. Wilson's note of 20 August 1939, PREM/I/331/A (PRO), also Aster, 1939, pp. 258–59.

Soviet Pact was signed that day and the visit was cancelled.⁵³

Here we should note that when the Soviets demanded in mid-August that Poland and Rumania agree to the passage of Soviet troops, and, indeed, made this agreement the condition for further negotiations with the Anglo-French Military Mission in Moscow, Stalin knew that Hitler was anxious to sign an agreement with him. Moreover, when the Poles refused this demand, Daladier instructed the head of the French mission in Moscow to give his consent. But French agreement was not enough for Stalin and the talks broke down on the pretext of Polish and Rumanian obduracy. The Anglo-French Military Mission was still in Moscow when Ribbentrop arrived on August 23 and signed the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact with Molotov. As we know, the secret protocol appended to this pact included the partition of Poland between Germany and the USSR.⁵⁴

The announcement of the Nazi-Soviet Pact did not change the dual line of Franco-British policy, that is, of warning Hitler against using force, while at the same time working for a Polish-German settlement which would satisfy the Führer. However, after August 23, it was this second goal which was pursued with desperate urgency by London. Paris maintained an attitude of passivity, except for Daladier's extraordinary letter to Hitler of August 26, in which the Frenchman offered his "help" in reaching a Polish-German settlement. Hitler, however, would have none of it.⁵⁵ On August 25, the Anglo-Polish Treaty of Mutual Assistance was finally signed, but even on this occasion Halifax told ambassador Raczyński that it was essential to differentiate between the Free City of Danzig on the one hand, and Polish territory on the other. He also warned that it would be "unwise" for the Polish government to reject any conversations about the Free City with Berlin. Finally, he said that

⁵³ On Göring visit, see Cadogan, *Diaries*, p. 199, note. Sydney Cotton, an Australian aerial photography specialist and pilot, working for British Air Intelligence, was sent to Berlin to pick up Göring, but met with incredulity—see Woermann note, 23 August 1939, DGFP, ser. D, v. VII, no. 221, also F.H. Hinsley, E.E. Thomas, C.F.G. Ransom, and R.C. Knight, *British Intelligence in the Second World War. Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*, Cambridge, New York, 1979, v. I, App. II, pp. 496–99, where Cotton's visit to Berlin on 22 Aug. is mentioned, but not its purpose.

⁵⁴ For Anglo-Soviet negotiations in Moscow, see Aster, 1939, ch. 10, and Duroselle, *Décadence*, ch. XII, 5; for Polish documents, see note 33 above; for German-Soviet talks from May to August 1939, see Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Starting World War II, 1937–1939*, Chicago, London, 1980, pp. 602–08. For a sympathetic view of Soviet policy, see Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933–1939*, New York, 1984, ch. 10, also Teddy J. Uldricks, "A.J.P. Taylor and the Russians," in G. Martel, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered*, ch. 7.

⁵⁵ See *Le Livre Jaune Français*, Paris, 1939, nos. 253, 261.

Polish interests in Danzig could be safeguarded by an international guarantee.⁵⁶ This advice was particularly significant in view of the fact that on the previous day the leader of the Nazi Party in Danzig, Gauleiter Albert Forster, had proclaimed himself "head" of the government. Finally, the British government was well aware that the Free City was armed to the teeth and full of German soldiers, who had been arriving all summer disguised as "tourists."

Another fact worth noting in connection with the Anglo-Polish treaty is Halifax's request to ambassador Raczynski that for "political effect" the treaty be signed no later than 5 p.m. that day, i.e., August 25.⁵⁷ Perhaps this timing was selected to coincide with the expected time of arrival in Berlin of Mussolini's letter to Hitler, in which the Duce wrote that while Italy would support him in a war with Poland, she did not have the resources to be an active belligerent in a war with France and Britain.⁵⁸ Whether or not this letter was concocted with British support, we know that both Chamberlain and Halifax maintained close contact with Mussolini with the aim of securing his help in an eventual "mediation" between Poland and Germany. Indeed, on August 24, Halifax had cabled the British ambassador in Rome, Sir Percy Loraine, the terms for a negotiated Polish-German settlement, and Loraine passed them on to Ciano.⁵⁹ This suited Mussolini, for the last thing he wanted was a war with the Western Powers, a war he believed they were bound to win.

The double blow dealt him by the conclusion of the Anglo-Polish alliance and by Mussolini, led Hitler to suspend his orders for the attack on Poland, scheduled to begin on August 26. He now indicated to the British that he was willing to "negotiate." This was not at all the result of Western "firmness," as Halifax told ambassador Raczynski that day, when advising him that the Polish government should not refuse negotiations if Hitler agreed to them. On the contrary, Raczynski was right in telling Halifax that Hitler's aim was to "break the resolution of the Western peoples."⁶⁰ Indeed, how could Hitler have been impressed by "Western firmness"? Aside from Wilson's declaration to ambassador Dirksen and the readiness to welcome Göring in England, the British leaders were also using some British businessmen and, in particular, Birger Dahlerus, a Swedish businessman friend of Göring's, as secret intermediaries between the Marshal on the one hand, and Chamberlain and Halifax on the

⁵⁶ Halifax to Kennard, 26 Aug. 1939, DBFP, 3rd ser. v. VII, no. 309. For the English text of the Anglo-Polish Treaty, see Command Paper no. 6616, London, 1945; for English and Polish Texts, see *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka*, v. IV, pp. 767–68, and for secret protocol (English), p. 769.

⁵⁷ Raczynski to Beck, cypher no. 176, 25 Aug. 1939, Cypher Books, Polish Embassy, London, PISM.

⁵⁸ For Mussolini's letter to Hitler, see *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, (henceforth IDDI), 8th ser. v. XIII, no. 250, and DGFP, ser. D, v. VII, no. 271.

⁵⁹ Note from Loraine to Ciano, 24 Aug. 1939, IDDI, *ibid.*, no. 205, and Halifax to Loraine, DBFP, 3rd ser. v. VII, no. 222.

⁶⁰ Halifax to Kennard, 26 Aug. 1939, DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 354.

other. They hoped that Göring would use his alleged moderation to bring Hitler on to the path of peace.

Taking Hitler at his word, Chamberlain and Halifax called in ambassador Kennard from Warsaw and ambassador Henderson from Berlin to help work out a suitable proposal for negotiations. Like Halifax's project of May 20, it was based on the German terms of March 21, which had been rejected by Poland. In one of the many drafts of Chamberlain's letter to Hitler of August 28, we even find a reference to this date, but it was dropped in favor of a reference to Hitler's speech of April 28, in which he had abrogated the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935. At the same time, he mentioned the terms he had offered to Poland and which she had rejected, saying they were no longer valid. However, he also stated that he recognized Polish rights and Polish independence. Therefore, Chamberlain asked whether Hitler still stood by his declaration of April 28, meaning both his terms of March 21 and his statement on Poland. In another draft of Chamberlain's letter, there was a proposal to hold a plebiscite in Danzig on the model of the Saar plebiscite held in 1935 under League of Nations supervision, which Germany had won. This suggestion was, however, dropped in the final text of the letter. Also, at the last moment Cadogan was able to delete a proposal—worked out by Halifax and Henderson—for an Anglo-German Nonaggression Pact.⁶¹

The core of the proposed settlement was put to the Cabinet by Chamberlain on August 27. Stating that according to Dahlerus, Hitler wanted not only Danzig but also the whole Polish Corridor, Chamberlain said that the most the Poles could concede was the return of Danzig to Germany and extraterritorial German communications across the Corridor.⁶² Needless to say, the Poles had not been consulted; indeed, as noted earlier, Beck had warned Kennard in late April that they would refuse such conditions, regardless of what Britain might do. Nevertheless, it was with this settlement in mind, that the British government asked Beck to agree "in principle" to negotiations with Germany and to accept an international guarantee if a settlement was reached. Beck agreed, for he could not do otherwise. However, he made it quite clear that Poland's "basic points" could not be compromised. He also told Kennard on August 27 that he must demur from any inference that Poland would accept Hitler's terms. Finally, we should note that Beck gave his consent on the basis of a

⁶¹ For drafts of Chamberlain's letter to Hitler, see PREMI/331A (PRO); see also Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy*, pp. 311–12, and Cadogan, *Diaries*, 28 Aug. 1939, p. 203; for text of the letter, see DBFP, 3rd ser. v. VII, no. 498 (to Paris).

⁶² Cabinet, 27 Aug. 1939, in Cabinet 44 (39), CAB 21/100 (PRO); also DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 649; for Cabinet Conclusions of 26–27 Aug. 1939, see Aster, 1939, pp. 342–44.

summary of Chamberlain's letter to Hitler.⁶³ When Raczynski received the full text on August 31, he cabled Beck that it bore the "stamp of appeasement." He also informed the Minister that Churchill and some other British politicians assured him they would oppose any attempt by Chamberlain to return to his old policy of making concessions to Germany.⁶⁴ Despite Beck's repeated requests for an explanation of what the international guarantee would mean, he never received one.

Hitler's first answer to Chamberlain's letter of August 28, which he gave orally to Henderson, was that he wanted not only Danzig and the Corridor, but also the Polish part of Upper Silesia. However, he then sent a written reply in which he accepted negotiations and an international guarantee, provided the USSR was one of the guarantors. But he also demanded that a Polish plenipotentiary arrive in Berlin by noon of August 30.⁶⁵ The British were pleased but felt they could not accept the last demand; it was too redolent of President Hacha's visit to Berlin on the night his country was invaded.

Despite this, some Cabinet members and officials actually thought that Hitler's acceptance of negotiations and of the international guarantee meant they had him "on the run." Thus, Halifax and Cadogan thought Hitler was "in a fix."⁶⁶ In point of fact, Ribbentrop was right that Chamberlain's letter to Hitler indicated the British were looking for a way out.⁶⁷ Therefore, Halifax suffered from delusion in thinking that if negotiations began and the Western Powers were very stiff, "then Hitler would be beat."⁶⁸ In a more sober mood, the Foreign Secretary noted that while there might be no permanent peace in Europe as long as the Nazi regime lasted, this should not argue conclusively against "working for a peaceful solution on proper terms now."⁶⁹ What he meant, of course, were the terms for which he had obtained French agreement

⁶³ See DBFP, *ibid.*, nos. 411, 443; for Beck's message on no compromise on basic points, see Warsaw cypher telegram no. 254, Aug. 28, 1939, received by the Polish Embassy London via the Polish Embassy Paris, PISM. For Beck's demurral to Kennard, see latter to Halifax, 29 Aug. 1939, DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 487.

⁶⁴ Raczynski to Beck, cypher, 31 Aug. 1939, Polish Embassy London, PISM.

⁶⁵ For the Hitler-Henderson conversation of 28 Aug. a.m. see DBFP, *ibid.*, nos. 455, 490, 501, and DGFP, D, VII, no. 384; for Hitler's written reply, see DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 502, and DGFP, *ibid.*, no. 21. Cadogan thought it looked "quite different and quite better," see *Diaries*, p. 204; H. Wilson noted it made "a much less bad impression," than the oral reply, see 29 Aug. PREMI/331A, (PRO). However, Daladier thought it clearly showed the intention of dismembering Poland, and refused to come to London to discuss it, see DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 533.

⁶⁶ For Halifax remarks on basis of Dahlerus report, see Cabinet 29 August 1939, 11:30 a.m., Cabinet 45 (39), CAB 23/100, partly cit. Aster, 1939, pp. 356-57; for "Hitler in a fix," see Cadogan, *Diaries*, 30 Aug. 1939, p. 205.

⁶⁷ Ribbentrop to Italian ambassador Bernardo Attolico, 29 Aug. 1939, DGFP, D, v. VII, no. 411.

⁶⁸ See Harvey, *Diplomatic Diaries*, 29 Aug. 1939, p. 309.

⁶⁹ Halifax note on memorandum by Ivone Kirkpatrick, and note by Orme Sargent, 30 Aug. 1939, DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 455, p. 354.

in May. We should note that in reply to Hitler, the British government made an "express reservation" on the Danzig-Corridor question—meaning it was not to be conceded outright but by negotiation—and stated they "understood" the German government was drawing up proposals for a solution.⁷⁰ However, Joseph Kennedy, the U.S. ambassador in London, indicated the true mood at 10 Downing Street, when he reported Chamberlain as saying that he was more worried in getting the Poles to be "reasonable," than the Germans.⁷¹

Ribbentrop gave an oral reply to the British request for clarification of German policy, when he summoned ambassador Henderson to see him at midnight on August 30. He then gave him a fast reading of what was allegedly Hitler's "last offer." It consisted of sixteen points, the core of which was the return of Danzig to Germany and a plebiscite in the Corridor. However, only those could vote who were resident there in 1918. (This meant the return of Germans who had left for the purpose of voting and no vote for the Poles born or settled there since November 1918, though we should note that even then the Corridor had a Polish majority.) Whichever side won, would agree to the other having extraterritorial communications to the sea.⁷² It was an offer nicely calculated to impress British opinion, as well as Western opinion in general, and isolate Poland if she refused.

However, unlike 1938, the British and the French could not bully the Poles into accepting Hitler's terms. Any indication of bullying, no matter how reasonable the terms might appear, risked an outburst of indignation in Britain not only from Churchill and his supporters, but also from all those who were disgusted with Munich. Nevertheless, no restraint was put on ambassador Henderson when, allegedly in his own name, he harangued Józef Lipski, the Polish ambassador in Berlin, that war must be avoided at all costs and exerted extreme pressure on him to get his government to "request" the transmission of German terms. Perhaps Henderson was allowed to go ahead because of his known pro-German attitude, but he was not restrained until Horace Wilson told him not to discuss the matter on the telephone, since the Germans were tapping the line. In any case, while Henderson was in contact with German Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Ernst von Weizsäcker and with

⁷⁰ See DGFP, D, v. VII, nos. 461, 534, 538, 547, 548; Cadogan, *Diaries*, p. 205.

⁷¹ Kennedy telegram, 30 Aug. 1939, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1939, I*, (henceforth FRUS) p. 392.

⁷² Sixteen points: DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 622; DGFP, *ibid.*, no. 458.

his own superiors in London,⁷³ Halifax urged Warsaw to have regard for "world opinion" and to prepare for negotiations.⁷⁴

Beck had no alternatives but to instruct Lipski that he request to see Ribbentrop and inform him the Polish government was considering the German proposals—that is, the gist of the sixteen points that Lipski had received from Henderson. The ambassador saw Ribbentrop on August 31 at 6 p.m., but when the latter heard that Lipski did not have full power to negotiate—i.e., accept the German terms—he ended the conversation.⁷⁵ On the same day, the Papal Nuncio in Warsaw, Monsignor Filippo Cortesi, urged the Polish government to declare its readiness to accept the return of Danzig to Germany and to enter into negotiations on the Corridor and on minority questions. In fact, this was the proposal suggested to the Vatican by Mussolini. The Polish government declined.⁷⁶

However much Chamberlain might have liked to accept such a procedure, he could not do so, for in the British proposal Danzig was to be the subject of negotiations, i.e., the return of the city was to be conceded by Poland in a negotiated settlement. For this reason, Halifax insisted on such negotiations in his reply to Mussolini's suggestion of August 31, that Danzig return to Germany prior to an international conference, which was to settle Germany's remaining demands on Poland as well as other European problems.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, even after Hitler's sixteen points had been communicated to the diplomatic corps in Berlin, and after the German radio had broadcast them, claiming they had been rejected by Poland, Halifax still urged the Polish government to accept negotiations. He also suggested that the League of Nations High Commissioner in Danzig, Dr. Carl J. Burckhardt, act as mediator.⁷⁸ As it happened, Halifax's last telegram, urging negotiations, was being deciphered in the British embassy in Warsaw when Hitler launched his attack on Poland at 4:30 a.m. on September 1, 1939.

⁷³ See, *Diplomat in Berlin 1933–1939. Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski, Ambassador of Poland*, ed. Waclaw Jędrzejewicz, New York, 1968, pp. 569–73; for Weizsacker's note on telephone conversation with Henderson, 31 Aug. 1939, 10:14 a.m., see DGFP, *ibid.*, nos. 510, 533, 597; Aster, 1939, pp. 360–62.

⁷⁴ Halifax to Kennard, DBFP, *ibid.*, nos. 539, 552, 576, 596, 600, 608–09; also, handwritten Polish note that First Secretary of the British Embassy Warsaw, Robin Hankey, had telephoned Beck's office at 8 a.m. 31 August, and message: cyphers, Polish Embassy London, PISM; see also, FRUS 1939, I, pp. 390–91.

⁷⁵ See *Diplomat in Berlin*, p. 610; DGFP, D, VII, no. 476.

⁷⁶ See *Actes et Documents du Saint-Siège et la Guerre en Europe, Mars 1939–Août 1939*, Vatican, 1970, nos. 148, 152–54, 165–67, 171; also, *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka*, v. IV, pp. 704–05, and DBFP, 3rd. ser. v. VII, no. 526.

⁷⁷ Halifax-Ciano telephone conversation, 31 Aug. 1939, afternoon, DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 627.

⁷⁸ Halifax to Kennard, 31 Aug. 1939, 11 p.m., DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 620.

Even Hitler's outright aggression did not stop Western efforts to save the peace. The French and British diplomatic notes delivered in Berlin on September 1, protested the aggression and threatened war—but only if the German government failed to “agree” to withdraw its troops from Poland, and failed to “express readiness” to negotiate. Moreover, no deadline was set for the German answer; on the contrary, to the German question whether the notes represented an ultimatum, the answer was that they did not.⁷⁹ In fact, the text of the notes—which had been fixed in late August—clearly left Hitler the opportunity to back out. And, indeed, there seemed to be a possibility for him to do so, when on August 31 Mussolini proposed an international conference to settle the Polish-German dispute, as well as other European problems.

The French Cabinet seems at first to have rejected this offer, or at least Daladier appears to have done so. However, later that day, i.e., September 1, the French Cabinet informed Rome that it would accept the conference proposal. We do not know how and why the French Cabinet reversed itself, if, indeed, it had been opposed in the first place. There are no Cabinet papers, only the memoirs of some participants, so the whole matter is unclear.⁸⁰ However, it appears that while the British government refused to consider either Polish-German negotiations or a conference without a prior withdrawal of German troops from Poland, the French government made no such condition.

It has been argued that British delay in entering the war was due to French pleas for time.⁸¹ While this was clearly a factor, it is also clear that the British leaders hoped against hope that Hitler would draw back from the brink of war. In any event, when an incomplete British Cabinet met on September 2 at 4:20 p.m., Halifax reported on the Italian offer and his reply, and asked for agreement to the time limit Hitler had requested from Mussolini to answer his proposal, i.e., the evening of September 3. This the Cabinet refused, setting the deadline for Hitler's answer to the British night for midnight that day, i.e., September 2. However, at the same time, the Cabinet agreed that Halifax should try to coordinate the deadline with the French government, and also endorsed the statements to be made that evening in Parliament by Chamberlain and Halifax.⁸² But the French government asked for a delay of 48 hours, so Chamberlain and Halifax decided not to announce a deadline for Hitler's answer. Therefore, speaking at 7 p.m. in the House of Commons and the House of Lords respectively, they explained that Hitler's answer to the British and French notes had not yet been received, and that this delay was probably due

⁷⁹ DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 699, and Henderson report of 2 Sept. 1939, no. 707.

⁸⁰ For discussion and documents, see Duroselle, *Décadence*, pp. 481–86, and Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, pp. 344–49.

⁸¹ See R.A.C. Parker, “The British Government and the Coming of the War with Germany, 1939,” in M.R.D. Foot, ed., *Historical Essays in Honour and Memory of J.R. Western*, London, 1976, pp. 1–14.

⁸² Cabinet, 2 Sept. 1939, 4:15 p.m., 48 (39), CAB 23/100, also Aster, 1939, pp. 376–78.

to Mussolini's conference proposal. They then made the statement approved by the cabinet that afternoon, i.e., that if the German government agreed to withdraw its troops, and if it expressed readiness to negotiate, then the British government would treat the situation "as if nothing had happened." Providing the *status quo ante* was restored, the British government would support either direct Polish-German negotiations, or a wider conference if the two parties so wished.⁸³ It is difficult to see this extraordinary statement, made on the second day of all-out German aggression against Poland, as anything but a last ditch effort to save the peace at the expense of the battered ally of France and Britain.

While Halifax was received quietly in the House of Lords—where he enjoyed great respect—the House of Commons exploded with rage against Chamberlain. What is more, some members of the Cabinet revolted. It was plain that if Chamberlain did not take a stand by 11 a.m. on September 3—when the House of Commons was scheduled to meet—his government would fall. Therefore, Paris was informed that he could not wait another 48 hours for Hitler's answer.⁸⁴ The hope of a revolt by the German generals also fell through. Henderson reported that the German General Staff could not be persuaded to withdraw the troops from Poland, unless the Nazi regime fell first.⁸⁵ (In fact, they would not revolt against Hitler over the popular war against Poland, and expected him to lose support only if Germany faced a determined France and Britain.) Thus, the British ultimatum demanding an answer to the note of September 1, was delivered on September 3 at 9 a.m. with a deadline of 11 a.m. When no answer came, Britain found herself at war with Germany; France followed at 5 p.m., when its deadline also expired.

* * *

Halifax later wrote that neither the Polish nor Rumanian government was under any illusion that they might receive concrete help from Great Britain.⁸⁶ Indeed, it is sometimes assumed that Britain and France fulfilled their obligations to Poland by merely entering into a state of war with Germany. However, aside from the fact that Hitler left them no option, we should bear in mind that both Powers had made military commitments to Poland. Thus, in the Anglo-Polish General Staff Air talks, held in Warsaw in May 1939, the British committed themselves to bomb German military objectives if the Germans did so first in Poland. If the Germans bombed civilian objectives there, the British said they would first consult France. The agreed verbal protocol of these talks

⁸³ See *Parl. Deb. H.C.*, 5th ser. v. 351, cols. 280–85; same, *House of Lords*, v. 114, cols. 952–54.

⁸⁴ See Aster, 1939, pp. 382–88; for Chamberlain-Daladier telephone conversation, 2 Sept. 9:50 p.m., see DBFP, 3rd ser. v. VII, no. 740.

⁸⁵ See Henderson to Halifax, DBFP, *ibid.*, no. 725.

⁸⁶ Halifax cited in Earl of Birkenhead, *Halifax. The Life of Lord Halifax*, London, 1965, p. 347.

was signed on June 1, 1939.⁸⁷ However, the Poles were not told that these commitments were abrogated by the British for fear of retaliatory German air attacks on France and Britain.⁸⁸

Much greater commitments were made to Poland by France. According to the military protocols signed in Paris on May 19, if France was attacked by Germany, Poland was to come to France's aid by launching an attack from the East. If Germany attacked Poland, the French were to launch limited ground and air action at once, and to launch an offensive against Germany with the bulk of their forces on the fifteenth day after the German attack on Poland (i.e., on the completion of French mobilization).⁸⁹ We may well ask why this commitment was made at a time when the French and British General Staffs had already agreed to adopt a defensive strategy in the West?⁹⁰ Duroselle finds the commitment "difficult to explain;" Admathwaite puts it down to French "muddle;" while Robert Young claims that since the Poles knew French strategy to be defensive, they had only themselves to blame for taking France at her word.⁹¹ Gamelin, for his part, gave contradictory explanations in his memoirs; first he claimed that the protocols did not specify an offensive with the bulk of French forces, while later he wrote that the Polish armies had collapsed, so there was no point in launching a French offensive.⁹²

These arguments are specious to say the least. First of all, it is clear from the military protocols that French commitments were not the result of muddle. Secondly, the Polish General Staff knew what the French strategy was up to May 1939, i.e., to hold the Maginot Line and enter Belgium only if it were invaded by the Germans and then called for help. But they were surely entitled to believe that in signing the protocols of May 19, the French General Staff had abandoned the old defensive strategy in favor of launching an all-out attack

⁸⁷ See *Protocols of the Polish-British General Staffs Conference in Warsaw, May 1939*, (in French), *Bellona*, nos. III-IV, London, 1957, and offprint, 1958.

⁸⁸ On 12 August 1939, the French and British General Staffs decided the only way to help Poland was by an air offensive in the West; however, this was cancelled later, see Col. P. Le Goyet, "Le théâtre d'opérations du Nord-Est," *Relations Franco-Britanniques*, Paris, 1975, p. 326.

⁸⁹ For the Protocols of Franco-Polish military conversations signed in Paris 19 May 1939, see DDF, 2nd ser. v. XVI, no. 233, and *Bellona*, London, 1957, II; offprint, 1958, pp. 12-13.

⁹⁰ For discussions between the French and British General Staffs and agreements reached between 24 April and 17 May, see: papers by Le Goyet and Col. B.R. Neave-Hill, in *Relations Franco-Britanniques*, 1975, pp. 136-77, 338-49; also: Prażmowska, *Britain, Poland, the Eastern Front, 1939*, ch. 4; documents in DDF, 2nd ser. vol. XV, nos. 254, 274; vol. XVI, nos. 79, 193.

⁹¹ See Duroselle, *Décadence*, p. 460; Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 319; Robert J. Young, *In Command of France, French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-1940*, Cambridge, Mass., London, 1979, p. 233.

⁹² See Maurice G. Gamelin, *Servir*, Paris, 1946, v. II, pp. 418-19, and v. III, Paris, 1947; comments by gen. Wacław Stachiewicz, *Pisma*, v. II, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 50, Paris, 1979, pp. 267, 288.

on the Siegfried Line if the Germans attacked Poland. In any case, it was in France's best interest to mount such an attack when the bulk of German forces was tied down in Poland. In fact, we have the word of the Chief of the Polish General Staff, General Waclaw Stachiewicz, that the Poles expected the French to fulfill their commitments. We also know that the Polish War Minister, gen. Kasprzycki, did not sign the Paris protocols as an exercise in make-believe. On the contrary, the Polish defense Plan West—which could not be drawn up until the French said what they would do—was based on the principle that Polish forces must hold up the Germans all along the front, retreating when necessary, until the French attacked in the West. This would provide relief for the Poles, allowing them to regroup for a counter-attack. It is true the Polish Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz, feared that once Hitler had taken Danzig, the Corridor, and perhaps Upper Silesia as well, and then made a peace offer, French politicians might listen. That is why, aside from the military obligation made to the French to hold up the Germans, Śmigły-Rydz decided to fight for these areas instead of abandoning them and half of Poland as well, to hold the Vistula line. But he never doubted, nor did Foreign Minister Beck, that the French military would fulfill their commitments.⁹³

While it is true that the military protocols of May 19 were not to assume the character of an official military agreement until the political accord interpreting the alliance was signed, and this was not done until September 4, the Poles can be excused for assuming that the French General Staff would prepare the necessary plans for an offensive against Germany in the West. Unfortunately for the Poles, however, Gamelin made no plans to attack the Siegfried Line, which the Germans had not even completed. Had such an attack been prepared and launched, the French would have had a good chance of breaking through the thin German defenses and of occupying the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany. The French could also have accomplished this goal by disregarding Belgian objectives and marching through Belgium. However, the French General Staff had no such plans.

It is not as difficult to understand why the French made their commitments to Poland as Duroselle thinks. In fact, the aim of the French General Staff was to have the Poles hold out as long as possible in order to gain time for France, hence the commitments. When the British asked gen. Gamelin at the first meeting of the Supreme Allied War Council at Abbeville on September 12, whether he would change his strategy if the Poles fought for two or three months, he replied that he would not do so. In his view, the role of the Poles was to win precious time for the Allies, so they could prepare for the moment when Germany would transfer the bulk of her forces to the West.⁹⁴ Thus, it is

⁹³ On Polish General Staff interpretation, see *Ibid.*, pp. 273–74; see also Leszek Moczulski, *Wojna Polska*, Poznań, 1972, pp. 96–98.

⁹⁴ See François Bédarida, *La Stratégie secrète de la drôle de guerre. Le Conseil Suprême Interallié, Septembre 1939–Avril 1940*, Paris, (CNRS), p. 1979, p. 95 and note J. *ibid.*

hard to avoid the impression that the French deliberately misled the Poles to believe they would launch an offensive against Germany—and then left them to fight alone.

* * *

In conclusion, it is clear that the British guarantee to Poland, which was fully supported by France, was not designed to restore the balance of power in Europe and to provoke Hitler into a war in which Poland would have to fight on Britain's side. On the contrary, the objective was to persuade Hitler to give up armed aggression and take what he wanted from Poland by way of so-called negotiations, in which the Poles would meekly concede his demands and thus save the peace. The Western Powers, for their part, would save face by guaranteeing the settlement, along with Germany, Italy, Poland herself—and after August 23, also the Soviet Union.

It was surely a self-induced delusion to believe, as Chamberlain, Halifax, and their supporters apparently did at the time, and as some Western historians still do today, that the British guarantee would allow Poland to negotiate with Germany "on an equal footing and free from the fear of force." After all, this was hardly possible in view of the fact that Germany, which had a long frontier with Poland, was the greatest military power in Europe. Thus, A.J.P. Taylor was closest to the mark in viewing the guarantee as a continuation of appeasement because it envisaged further territorial revision in Eastern Europe. We should note here, however, that his justification of this policy on the grounds that it aimed to save peace, was the result of convictions acquired some twenty years later, when he was actively involved in the British "Ban the Bomb" movement.⁹⁵ Finally, the view that Britain was aiming to exclude the USSR through another Four Power agreement on the lines of the project of 1934,⁹⁶ is correct only until late May, when Chamberlain decided to seek a treaty with the USSR. In any case, in 1939, there could be no real hope of establishing a lasting peace with Hitler. The best the British and French could hope for was to win more time, and this they were willing to do at the expense of their ally, Poland.

In sum, the so-called new policy stemming from the British guarantee to Poland was a continuation of appeasement as followed toward Czechoslovakia in 1938, but dressed up in new clothes. Let us look at five points of comparison:

(1). In 1938, Czechoslovakia was an ally of France, but not Britain; France, however, followed the British lead. Britain strove at first for a negotiated or

⁹⁵ For A.J.P. Taylor's re-evaluation of Munich in light of his involvement in the British movement for nuclear disarmament in the late 1950's, see his memoirs: *A Personal History*, New York, 1983, pp. 225–30, 234.

⁹⁶ On the Four Power Pact, see note 3 above.

mediated settlement between the Czechoslovak government and the Sudeten Germans. When this proved impossible, Chamberlain accepted Hitler's offer of a conference—an offer he had suggested himself, but which was made to Hitler by Mussolini. At Munich, Hitler obtained the Sudetenland; this meant that Czechoslovakia was left without her mountain fortifications and her key industrial regions; thus, she was completely dependent on Germany, even if Hitler had not marched in on March 14-15.

The British goal in giving a guarantee to Poland on March 31, 1939, concluding the Anglo-Polish agreement of April 6, and the alliance of August 25, was to bring about a "negotiated" settlement between Germany and Poland on terms which the latter had rejected, i.e., the return of Danzig and the cession of a belt of territory in the Polish Corridor for German extra-territorial communication with Danzig and East Prussia. This would have made Poland totally dependent on Germany. The French raised no objections.

(2). In 1938, France publicly asserted she would fulfill her obligations to Czechoslovakia—though Bonnet privately told the Czechs France would never fight over the Sudetenland—and Britain hinted that if war broke out, it might not be confined to the belligerents, thus implying it might become a European war. Indeed, on September 27, the British government stated that if Czechoslovakia was attacked and France went to her aid, then Britain and the USSR would stand by France. (In fact, the Soviet government had not been consulted.) The British navy was placed on alert and the French army was mobilized.

However, the French made no offensive plans to fulfill their obligations to Czechoslovakia, which they could only have done by attacking Germany in the West. Likewise, though the French and British made military commitments to Poland in 1939, the French made no plans for an offensive in the West as per the military protocols of May 19, while the British did not inform the Poles they had abandoned their commitment to bomb West Germany if the Germans bombed Poland.

(3). While there were no negotiations in 1938, for expanding the Franco-Soviet alliance into a triple alliance with Britain, the 1939 policy of drawing the USSR into an alliance against Germany was foreshadowed in the British statement of September 27, cited above.

(4). In 1938, Chamberlain forced President Beneš to accept a British mediator, Lord Runciman; however, as noted above, this effort failed. In 1939, the Western Powers projected or proposed mediation between Poland and Germany by the Scandinavian states (not pursued), by the Vatican (Papal Nuncio's proposal to the Polish Government), by the Italian government (not pursued), and by the League of Nations High Commissioner in Danzig (British proposal

to Poland). The aim of mediation, as of negotiations, was to give Hitler what he wanted while avoiding war.

(5). At the Munich Conference, Britain and France offered a guarantee to what was left of Czechoslovakia, conditional on the settlement of outstanding Polish and Hungarian claims and on the adhesion of Germany and Italy. When Hitler annexed the Czech lands and set up a puppet Slovakia, Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons that the guarantee offered in 1938 was no longer valid—because Czechoslovakia had collapsed.

According to the Franco-British plan of 1939, a Polish-German settlement, whether reached in bilateral negotiations or at an international conference, was to be secured by an international guarantee signed by the Western Powers, Germany, Italy, and Poland (after the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, Hitler proposed that the USSR also be a guarantor).

Thus, just as in 1938, so in 1939, peace was to be saved, or at least war staved off for a time, at the expense of the victim, who was to “agree” voluntarily to German demands. The difference was one of form. Neither the British nor the French government could openly bully Poland into submission, nor could they agree to a carbon copy of the Munich Conference; their public opinion would not stand for either. Therefore, Poland was either to “negotiate” with Germany, or be invited to an international conference. In either case, however, she was to accept Hitler’s demands.

But Poland refused to consider the German terms she had rejected as a basis for negotiation, while Hitler refused to wait. He had the pact with Stalin in his pocket and believed that this would prevent France and Britain from going to war if he attacked Poland. He also believed that if he did not attack by September 1, the autumn rains would turn Poland into a bog and war might have to be put off; this he was determined to avoid.

* * *

Given French and British perceptions of their own weakness, their overwhelming desire to avoid war, and their view that limited German expansion at Poland’s expense would at least win them time, it may well be that no other policy could have been expected on their part. But by the same token, it is high time to dispose of the myths that the British guarantee to Poland was the end of appeasement; that with the guarantee, the Poles could have negotiated freely with Germany without the fear of force, but refused to do so because they were bereft of the sense of reality; that France and Britain carried out their obligations to Poland merely by entering a state of war with Germany; and finally, that the Poles had only themselves to blame for trusting the word of their allies, notably the French commitment to launch an all-out offensive against Germany if the latter attacked Poland.

In 1938, appeasement worked because Hitler accepted it. In 1939, when he secured an agreement with the Soviet Union, it led to war. Here we should

note that the idea of a nonaggression pact with Hitler was by no means new to Stalin in 1939. In fact, he had suggested it to the Germans in May 1935, and then at the turn of 1936–37.⁹⁷ This was well before the Munich Conference, which some historians see as the reason for his shift to Germany, and had nothing to do with the much later Polish refusal (August 1939) to agree to the passage of Soviet troops through Poland. However, we shall have to await the opening of the Soviet diplomatic archives to obtain a more complete picture of Stalin's policy. Let us hope that the new Soviet "Glasnost" will last a long time and stretch that far.

⁹⁷ See: Litvinov proposal of a Nonaggression Pact to German ambassador von der Schulenburg of 8 May 1935, DGFP, ser. C. v. IV, no. 78, p. 138. In making this proposal, Litvinov referred to the German proposal made after the Anglo-French-Italian Stresa Declaration on Austrian independence, in which the German government stated it was ready to conclude nonaggression pacts "with neighboring powers," see, *ibid.*, no. 29, p. 51; at that time, of course, Germany and the USSR were separated from each other by Poland, just as they were in August 1939. For Soviet proposals in 1936–37, see DGFP, ser. C, v. VI, nos. 183, 195.