

October 13, 1944
Record of Meeting Held at Spiridonovka House on
13 October at 5 p.m.

Citation:

"Record of Meeting Held at Spiridonovka House on 13 October at 5 p.m.", October 13, 1944, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Public Record Office
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123188>

Summary:

M. Mikolajczyk discusses the Polish memorandum regarding the reconstruction and internal affairs of post-war Poland, Stalin reprimands Mikolajczyk for the extralegal approval of this memorandum. Churchill defends the memorandum, Stalin criticizes it, and Mikolajczyk emphasizes Poland's sovereignty as well as the legitimacy of the underground government in occupied Poland. Contentious discussion on the issue of the Curzon Line between Stalin and Mikolajczyk--Churchill acts as a mediator.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

RECORD OF MEETING HELD AT SPIRIDONOVKA HOUSE ON
THE 13th OCTOBER AT 5 p.m.

Present:

Prime Minister. Marshal Stalin. M. Mikolajczyk.
Secretary of State. M. Molotov. M. Romer.
Sir Archibald Clark Kerr. M. Gusev. M. Grabski.
Mr. Allen. M. Pavlov. M. Minishek.
Mr. A. Birse.

M. MOLOTOV opened the meeting by stating that there were present the representatives of the Soviet Union, the British and American Governments and their guests M. Mikolajczyk, M. Grabski and M. Romer. He thought it best if M. Mikolajczyk were to begin as the meeting had been called on his initiative.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK thanked Marshal Stalin and M. Molotov for their invitation and the Prime Minister for not having forgotten them. He referred to the memorandum of the Polish Government which he thought would be the best basis for the solution of the Polish problem. During his last visit to Moscow the Soviet Government had signed an agreement with the Polish Committee for National Liberation. He took into consideration the prestige of the Soviet Union who signed that document. On his return to London he had decided to write the memorandum which would be a basis for re-establishing good relations with the Soviet Union. The memorandum spoke of the relations between the two Governments and of a plan about Polish internal affairs.

MARSHAL STALIN asked when the memorandum had been written.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK replied that it was his memorandum of the 29th August. All the Polish people wanted to have friendly relations with the Soviet Union. The memorandum spoke of the reconstruction of the Polish Government after the liberation of Warsaw, the capital of Poland. The basis of the Polish Government was the five political parties: peasants, national democratic, socialists, Christian democratic and Workers. The next paragraph spoke of those who could not form part of the Government, namely the followers of Pilsudski and the Fascist party. He thought that was the wisest basis which might unite all the democratic parties. Such a government had to be nominated by the President of the Republic. If such a government were recognized by all the Allied Powers it would establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. There would be agreement about administration in liberated territory and after the defeat of Germany there would be a treaty regarding the relation between the Polish forces and the Red Army. After the end of hostilities the Red Army would have to leave Polish territory which was self-explanatory.

THE PRIME MINISTER asked whether M. Mikolajczyk had thought of the communications of the Red Army.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK replied that he had. He went on to say that the next paragraph dealt with internal affairs. As he had declared in Paris in 1939 the Polish Government intended to hold elections as soon as possible which would be based on a democratic vote. Parliament would make a new Constitution and elect a new President. The memorandum then dealt with social matters and the appointment of a National

Council formed of five parties which would act as a sort of parliament until the elections were over. It then dealt with an alliance between the Soviet Union and Poland both for the duration of the war and in the post-war period. The alliance would be based on cooperation in the political and economic fields. It would respect the sovereignty of both countries and would be based on non-interference of either of them. An important point was to exclude German interference with Central Europe. It spoke of alliances with Great Britain, Czechoslovakia and close friendship with the United States. Polish co-operation would act as a guarantee of peace. Poland would participate in the occupation of Germany. The memorandum then dealt with the frontier question. The Polish Government hoped that Poland would come out of this war undiminished. They would like the chief centres of cultural life in the East of Poland and raw material centres to be left to Poland. As to German territory which Poland was to receive, they would want to move the German population from that territory. The memorandum discussed the question of nationality and the return of all Poles deported to the Soviet Union and arrested there. With regard to the treaty about the frontier there would have to be an exchange of populations. Poles would have to return to Poland while Ukrainians would return to the Soviet Union. This would be subject to the wishes of the population. The last paragraph dealt with Military matters. They did not want a military government in Poland and therefore did not contemplate appointing a Commander-in-Chief. They wanted the army subjected to the Government. The military part of the Cabinet would deal with war questions. Their aims were as follows: -

First, the continuation of the war;

Secondly, mutual co-operation; with all Poles, with Great Britain and other countries. An important point was that all Polish forces on any front were to continue the war against Germany.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK explained that the memorandum had been sent to Poland and had been approved by Polish parties.

MARSHAL STALIN asked which parties.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said it had been approved by the four parties which formed the basis of the present Government.

MARSHAL STALIN asked whether they existed.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK replied that they did and that they formed the basis of the Government, namely the peasants' party, the national-democrats, the socialists and the workers.

MARSHAL STALIN asked whether the memorandum had been published and whether it had been stated that the parties approved of it. Some special Party Congress might have approved of it.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said that the memorandum had been sent to their representatives in Warsaw during the heavy fighting there. Without publishing details of the memorandum he had announced that it had been approved in Poland.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that that was not the proper way of giving approval. It was the first time that a party had approved of anything without holding a conference.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said that he knew that Marshal Stalin before becoming the leader of the great Soviet nation had worked underground and understood how to speak to his

friends. This memorandum had been communicated in the same manner during the German occupation of Warsaw and the whole of Poland had approved.

MARSHAL STALIN said that in those times when in Russia political parties were forbidden, his party had held six congresses and twelve conferences and twenty or twenty-five meetings of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. That was his "illegal" experience.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK replied that he respected that way of fighting underground, but he also respected his colleagues who had for five years of German occupation found means to communicate with each other. He emphasised his deepest conviction that this memorandum was the best way of uniting all forces of the Polish nation for friendly cooperation with the Soviet Union.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that there were points in the memorandum which he liked.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that he had not noticed them.

M. GRABSKI said that when the memorandum had been made he went to M. Lebedev, the Soviet Ambassador, to hand it to him and to give any necessary explanations. It appeared to him that the Soviet Ambassador gave the matter some attention because he called a stenographer, who made some notes. He had called the attention of M. Lebedev to the fact that the memorandum had been approved in Poland. It did not mean that in principle the Government had held that the Constitution of 1935 was sacred. They had criticised that Constitution. But the Constitution of 1921 and that of 1935 provided for the appointment of a President. While the greater part of Poland was still occupied by the Germans there was no legal means of changing the Constitution and electing a President. They had looked upon this as a temporary period. M. Grabski drew attention to the fact that he had defended the Constitution of 1921 and had fought against that of 1935. He had then told the President that if the five parties agreed to form a new Government and a new national Council in place of Parliament, personalities would not be important.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he had read a note on this conversation. It did not seem to be on the same footing as the memorandum. He had understood that the memorandum was intended to be a basis for further discussion in order to reach a compromise between the Polish Government and the Polish Committee. For instance, it was proposed that the five-party basis was not intended to reduce the participation of the Committee to 20 per cent. He hoped there would be a more even balance. Was that so?

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said he was a realist and that unity between the Polish Government and the Polish Committee was impossible. He wanted to go deeper. The basis of the Polish Government was the four parties: the peasant party, the national-democrats, the socialists and the workers. The Committee was based on one party although it maintained that it had the support of others. It was best not to argue about this but to go deeper and to base the new Polish Government on five parties; each party would have a participation of one fifth.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought the idea had been to work out an arrangement with the Polish Committee and to discuss the matter here. It was a matter for discussion. He understood that M. Mikolajczyk and his colleagues were prepared to discuss it and to agree about the Constitution with the Committee and the Soviet Government. He was making these points because he was anxious that it should be realised that the memorandum was a basis for discussion, a give-and-take by all parties. It was important that this should be affirmed. He asked whether he had misrepresented M. Mikolajczyk in saying this.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK explained that the facts were as follows: The Soviet Government had made an agreement with the Committee. The Polish Government had been recognised by the British and American Governments. A Polish Government would have to be formed which would be recognised by all the United Nations.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he thought this memorandum was a basis for discussion.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK thought it was the best proposal made so far.

MARSHAL STALIN declared that the memorandum suffered from two defects which might prevent agreement. In the first place it ignored the existence of the Polish Committee. How could it be ignored? One could not shut one's eyes to the facts. M. Mikolajczyk knew that in liberated territory much work was going on. A short time ago there had been a Congress of socialists and peasants and various questions had been discussed. The Congress had declared itself to be in favour of the Polish Committee. The Polish Committee have a large army. Whoever ignores these facts was an opponent of a compromise. If one analysed the situation in Poland one would conclude that Poland had no Government or had two Governments, which was equal to no Government. A Government should be formed on a compromise of the two groups which called themselves Governments. The chief defect was that the memorandum ignored the Polish Committee. In the second place, the memorandum made no mention of the Curzon Line. If the Poles wanted good relations with the Soviet Union, then without recognition of the Curzon Line, there could be no good relations. He asked, what were the advantages in the memorandum? It was a plan for establishing relations between the Soviet Union and Poland after the war. That could certainly find favour with anyone who wished to have good relations between Poland and Russia, but that was a question for the future. But they had to think of the present, and in that respect the memorandum was weak. He thought the Constitution of 1921 was better than that of 1935. But that question could not be a stumbling-block for establishing relations between the Soviet Union and Poland. The question of the Constitution must be left to the Poles to decide for themselves.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that it seemed to him from Marshal Stalin's words that a hopeful note had been struck. He understood that it was the intention of the Polish Government to seek to reach a friendly agreement with the Polish National Council. It was their wish. The memorandum was no obstacle to that. If agreed, it met Marshal Stalin's criticisms. As regards the frontier he would like to make a statement explaining the point of view of the British Government. The British Government considered that Russia had suffered severely from the German invasion and the Russian armies were the only means by which Polish liberation could be achieved. The British Government considered that the Curzon Line was the only line in the East to form the boundaries of Poland. He had told this to the Poles all through the past year. He understood, of course, that the Allies would pursue the war against Germany to make sure that Poland received other territory in the West and in the North-East Prussia and Silesia-other territory which, in his judgment, would be a full balance for the changes made in the East. It would be a great seaboard, they would have the splendid port of Danzig and valuable territory in Silesia. On this basis there could be a great Poland. Not exactly the same as after the Versailles Treaty but nevertheless a home for the Polish race to which Britain attached great importance-a solid home where they might live in safety, freedom and prosperity. There was no doubt about the position of the British Government. If they were at the peace table he would use the same arguments provided he had the confidence of the House of Commons and the British Government.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK remarked that Marshal Stalin had said that the memorandum ignored the Polish Committee. In certain respects it did, but not in others. It should not be overlooked that the Polish Government had devoted all its efforts for five years to organise a large army, air force and navy, which were now fighting on various fronts.

MARSHAL STALIN said he understood and recognised this fact.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said that the Polish Government had organised the underground struggle in Poland. He pointed out that the Soviet Government now recognised the Polish Committee and not the Polish Government.

MARSHAL STALIN admitted that he did not recognise the Polish Government. Nevertheless, he wished a compromise between them and the Polish Committee.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said that the Polish Government did not ignore the Polish Committee. It recognised the support of the five parties.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that there was not a single word in the memorandum about the Committee.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK repeated that it went deeper, namely, to the supporters of a new Government. If they spoke of the Congress of Parties in Poland he would like to mention something which had not appeared in the press. The Lublin broadcast had quoted certain names but not the names of the leaders of the parties. It had mentioned the name of Bartnicki, who had only just become a member of this party, and the name of a certain Antonio, who was quite unknown. Telegrams had been sent welcoming the Red Army and expressing the wish to live in a free and independent Poland.

MARSHAL STALIN asked whether M. Mikolajczyk denied the fact that a Congress of the Socialist party had been held.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK did not deny it and said the Congress had sent these telegrams, and they emphasised the recognition of the Polish Government in London.

MARSHAL STALIN said that this had afterwards been refuted in the press.

THE PRIME MINISTER pointed out that they were wasting time on details and that there were more important matters for discussion.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK agreed, but remarked that on liberated territory there were good things and bad things. It were well if they got information about the arrests which were being made in liberated territory.

M. Mikolajczyk went on to deal with the question of the Curzon Line. He was not in a position to argue with Marshal Stalin or Mr. Churchill. The frontier question was not one with which he could deal. It was for the Polish nation to decide. Marshal Stalin and Mr. Churchill would have a wrong impression of him if he agreed to give away 40 percent of Polish territory and 5 million Polish inhabitants.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that it was not Polish but Ukrainian and White Russian territory.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK asserted that there were 11 million people in those territories. Polish soldiers abroad who were fighting against the Germans thought that they were fighting in the hope of returning to that territory. It would be said that, while the Polish soldiers fought, the Polish politician was giving up this territory.

MARSHAL STALIN retaliated by saying that 14 million Ukrainians and White Russians were fighting for their land, but M. Mikolajczyk perhaps did not know of it. They had suffered much more than all the Poles put together.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said that he recognized the sacrifices of Ukrainian and White Russian soldiers, but Poland, since 1939, had lost 5 million people, who had been killed by the Germans in the war and during the occupation.

THE PRIME MINISTER intervened to say that they all knew of Poland's sufferings. That was why they wanted a united Polish Government to end the sufferings. If they could not unite there would be more trouble.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK thought the solution lay in the good will of the three Great Powers and in their making a broad gesture. If he had to voluntarily give up territory and remove Polish forces, what guarantee would there be of freedom?

MARSHAL STALIN asked who threatened Poland's freedom? Was it the Soviet Union?

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said he wanted freedom for all Poles.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought that arrangements were being made to transfer those people who wished to go to Poland and vice versa.

MARSHAL STALIN said that it was already being done.

THE PRIME MINISTER pointed out that they were there to make the best possible arrangement. Great battles were still being fought and still greater battles might have to be fought. He hoped M. Mikolajczyk would be able to say that he recognised the fact that the British Government supported the Soviet Government in the proposed new frontier in the East, and that whatever regrets he might have he recognised the fact, for it was a fact, a powerful fact. He was not asked to say what he wished, but they were thinking of the future of Europe and the territorial arrangements produced would give Poland a natural home. He wished to say that Marshal Stalin was just as resolute as the British and American Allies in the wish to see Poland as a free sovereign and independent State, with the power to lead its own life. They would expect Poland to be friendly to the Soviet Union. Of course, not every individual would be friendly. There were always differences of opinion. But one could not expect the Soviet Government to tolerate an unfriendly Poland after all the blood that had been shed. The British Government supported the proposed frontier because they felt it their duty. Not because Russia was strong but because Russia was right in this matter. The Prime Minister went on to suggest that the following declaration might be acceptable to the Soviet Government: M. Mikolajczyk might say that the Polish Government accepted the decision as to the frontier for practical purposes subject to the fact that they were not debarred from pleading at the peace conference.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said the Polish Government had suggested a demarcation line. He did not know that they now had to divide Poland before dealing with other questions.

MARSHAL STALIN pointed out that M. Mikolajczyk had suggested dividing the Ukraine and White Russia. He, Marshal Stalin, was against the division of Poland but he also opposed the division of the Ukraine and White Russia.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said that he had heard in public a declaration about the division of Poland but not about the division of Germany.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the details had not been defined but they could be settled here. On the other hand if they made a furore about it they might stimulate German resistance. He then appealed to M. Mikolajczyk to help the British Government in this matter. Britain went to war because of the attack on Poland

although she was ill-prepared. She went to war to prevent the Polish people being trampled on. She would have fulfilled her pledge if at the end of the war there existed a sovereign independent Poland enabling all Poles to have a home. That was her position and it implied the Curzon Line and improvements in the North and South. They could go into further details if they liked. At this stage it was unwise for the Polish Government to separate themselves from Britain. At the time when Britain declared war she stood alone and was nearly destroyed. It all hung upon a hair. He therefore had a claim to ask the Polish Government to make a beau gesture to enable them to find a road to the peace of Europe.

M. MOLOTOV reminded the meeting about what was said in Tehran upon the Polish question. All the participants of the Tehran Conference were present except President Roosevelt. The President had said that he arrived to the Curzon Line but he did not wish it published for the moment. M. Molotov considered they could conclude that the points of view of the Soviet Union, Britain and America were the same. He had thought it necessary to refer to this point because M. Mikolajczyk had appealed to the good will of the Three Powers.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK asked whether the Polish frontier in the West had been mentioned at the Tehran Conference.

M. MOLOTOV replied that the line of the Oder had been suggested and no one had objected.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that Britain had supported it.

Mr. EDEN pointed out that it had been in their minds to allow Poland to go as far West as she wanted up to that line.

THE PRIME MINISTER added that they would have East Prussia west of Konigsberg.

MARSHAL STALIN added-South of Konigsberg as well.

THE PRIME MINISTER then asked the Polish representative to consider the following: The united Polish Government or what emerged from these discussions, in other words, a new Polish Government, accepted the Curzon line as the de facto eastern boundary of Poland subject to the right to discuss particular rights at the Peace Conference.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK said that he was not authorised to make such a declaration.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he did not want M. Mikolajczyk to say anything that would be repudiated by his supporters, but this would be the best chance of bringing into being a united Polish State.

M. MIKOLAJCZYCK repeated that he could not agree. He had heard that the Polish Committee had hopes of getting Lvov.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that the Soviet Union did not sell land. There was no foundation for the rumour. They would not have Lvov.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that as he looked at it he thought Danzig was a possession of equal importance. He asked Marshal Stalin whether they could not postpone the meeting and allow their Polish friends to consider the matter a little more.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that the Russians had in mind not the question of Danzig but also of Stettin. They would support that.

THE PRIME MINISTER said there were two things for consideration: (1) de facto acceptance of the Curzon Line with interchange of population; (2) a friendly discussion with the Polish Committee so that a united Poland might be established. Changes would take place in the future, but if it were done now that would be best for the future of Poland, especially at this closing period of the war. He asked the Poles carefully to consider the matter that night. He and Mr. Eden would be at their disposal. It was essential for them to make contact with the Polish Committee and to accept the Curzon Line as a working arrangement subject to discussion at the Peace Conference on a de facto basis.

MARSHAL STALIN wished to make it clear that the Soviet Government could not agree. They could only accept that formula with an amendment. The Curzon Line could only be a basis for the future frontier. They could not have one frontier to-day and another to-morrow. The political systems of Poland and the Soviet Union were different. As the Red Army advanced the population was restoring Soviet authority and the collective farms. To leave the frontier question undecided would mean great hardship. The population had to be considered. For that reason they wanted a definite frontier like they had with Roumania and Finland. This might surprise their allies, but there was no other way out owing to the difference in the system of government. In other respects he agreed with the formula.

M. MIKOLAJCZYK asked whether this meant that the frontier of 1939 would be restored.

MARSHAL STALIN said it would be the Curzon Line which was well known. It gave Poland places like Bialystok, Lonza, Przemysl, &c.

THE PRIME MINISTER remarked that no doubt Mr. Harriman would report this overture to the President.