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National Identity, Historical Narratives, and the Fate of Poland in World War II

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*National Identity, Historical Narratives, and the Fate of
Poland in World War II*

By Ziven Chinburg

On 4 October 1944, radio sets in London received the following message from embattled Warsaw:

This is the stark truth. We were treated worse than Hitler's satellites, worse than Italy, Roumania [sic], Finland. May God, who is just, pass judgement on the terrible injustice suffered by the Polish nation, and may He punish accordingly all those who are guilty.

Your heroes are the soldiers whose only weapons against tanks, planes and guns were their revolvers and bottles filled with petrol. Your heroes are the women who tended the wounded, and carried messages under fire, who cooked in bombed and ruined cellars to feed children and adults, and who soothed and comforted the dying. Your heroes are the children who went on quietly playing among the smoldering ruins. These are the people of Warsaw.

Immortal is the nation that can muster such universal heroism. For those who have died have conquered, and those who live on will fight on, will conquer and again bear witness that Poland lives when Poles live.¹

This marked the final transmission of the Lightning (Błyskawicaradio) radio station of the Polish Home Army fighting for Warsaw in the fall of 1944. Lightning gave battle reports in English for British listeners. According to Jan Nowak, who composed the reports, the goal of Radio Lightning was to "do everything to see that it [the Warsaw Uprising] did not remain a tempest in a teacup, unnoticed by the rest of the world."² However, Nowak's work did little to sway the West to assist the Poles in their titanic struggle for freedom. President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, men far removed from Poland's struggle and its sufferings, had already decided on the Polish issue.³ The anger, resentment, and pride in the last broadcast of the Polish resistance in Warsaw shows what many Poles thought of their allies and how they reconciled themselves to their failure to assert independence.

¹ Quoted in Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 6, *Triumph and Tragedy* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), 144-45.

² Jan Nowak, *Courier from Warsaw* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982) 355.

³ *Ibid.*, 450.

Two months earlier, faced with political pressures, incitements by Soviet radio, and the close proximity of the Red Army, the Polish resistance movement launched an assault on Nazi control of Warsaw.⁴ The Warsaw Uprising (1 August-2 October 1944) was the largest act of any armed resistance movement during the war.⁵ It was a catastrophic failure and the last gasp of the Polish resistance's effort to preserve Poland's sovereignty after the war.⁶ 250,000 Poles, most of them civilians, died supporting the cause of resistance against oppression.⁷ When Red Army troops entered the city in January 1945, it was a complete ruin.⁸ One of the most splendid and historic capitals of the world was no more.

For those who fought in the uprising and those who lost loved ones in it, the question of blame for such a catastrophe looms large. After the war, the Poles needed a way to explain the suffering that beset their nation. Their reaction to the disaster of World War II was to draw on a long-standing historical narrative of Poland as a martyred nation. Poles view their nation as one frequently betrayed and victimized. This victimization often takes a religious undertone, as Poles see Poland suffering for the sins of Europe. Their narrative of the Warsaw Uprising contains both of the component parts of Poland's identity of betrayal and martyrdom: suffering in the many Polish dead and betrayal in the actions of Poland's allies.

⁴ Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, *The Secret Army* (London: Camelot Press, 1950), 214.

⁵ Włodzimierz Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 81.

⁶ Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 78.

⁷ Borodziej, *Warsaw Uprising*, 130.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

The Warsaw Uprising

Before its destruction in 1944, Warsaw was an important cultural center for hundreds of years. It was the center of the Polish royal court from 1596 to 1796 and was the capital of both the Warsaw Confederation and Congress Poland in the 19th century.⁹ The city became the capital of newly independent Poland in 1918 because of its rich heritage. It was a symbol for the lifeblood of the Polish state and people. It is fitting that in this symbolic city, Poland experienced its greatest martyrdom.

Warsaw was a major center of the Polish resistance during World War II. The largest group of the Polish resistance was the Home Army. It was an umbrella organization of smaller resistance groups that appeared almost as soon as the ink had dried on the terms of Polish capitulation in 1939.¹⁰ The Home Army was loyal to the Underground State, which acted as a secret government in Poland for the resistance. Resistance in Poland during the war was widespread; and the Home Army and Underground State were remarkable in their size and organization. The Underground State reported to the Polish Government-in-Exile in London.¹¹ Also referred to as the London Poles, the Polish Government-in-Exile was a unity government consisting of the major prewar political parties, save the disgraced Sanation regime.¹² The Underground State organized civilian support for the Home Army, facilitated help as best it could to those suffering under Nazi occupation, and gave Poles a sense of self-control through

⁹ "Warsaw," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed 7 April 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Warsaw>.

¹⁰ Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 72.

¹¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. 2, *1795 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 466.

¹² Poles, both in Poland and abroad, thought of the Sanation regime as being very incompetent in the face of dual Soviet and Nazi aggression in 1939.

its legal system and publications.¹³ The support of the Polish people and the tenacity of the leadership of both the Home Army and the Underground State made for a potent combination. In a way, the success of the Polish resistance movement was its undoing. By producing a resistance movement large enough to take the Nazis head on, the Polish resistance threw itself into a conflict that it was woefully underprepared to undertake.

The Home Army committed around 50,000 men to the Warsaw Uprising.¹⁴ These men were the bulk of the Home Army's strength. Once the Nazis fully recognized the scale of the uprising, they began reprisals and massacres against the local population. Targeting the Wola district, they killed at least 40,000 noncombatants over seven days in early August.¹⁵ The Wola Massacre was indicative of the Nazi strategy of outright targeting of Polish civilians. In August and September, the Nazis killed an estimated 150,000 Polish civilians throughout Warsaw. They hoped to break the back of the Polish resistance by means of extreme brutality. If there were no Poles alive to resist, then there was no Polish resistance. By the time Soviet forces liberated the city in January of the following year, it was virtually unpopulated – the Nazis expelled more than half a million Varsovians and killed those whom they did not expel.¹⁶ After the Home Army's surrender on 2 October, the Nazis set about destroying the city. They destroyed almost all major historical buildings and around 42 percent of all structures in the city.¹⁷ Hitler

¹³ Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 73.

¹⁴ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 402.

¹⁵ Borodziej, *Warsaw Uprising*, 81.

¹⁶ Davies, *God's Playground*, 477.

¹⁷ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 425.

ordered this done as a mark of righteous German fury over what he saw as the perfidious actions of an inferior people.

The Warsaw Uprising was not just a Polish and German affair. The Big Three Powers, in varying degrees, set the conditions of Warsaw's destruction in motion.¹⁸ The Soviet Union indirectly played a large role in starting the uprising. On 29 July, a Soviet controlled Polish-language radio station, called the Union of Polish Patriots, issued an appeal to Varsovians to rise up against Nazi occupation.¹⁹ Similar calls appeared the next day from Moscow-based radio Kościuszko.²⁰ To cap their efforts off, the Soviets dropped flyers over Warsaw appealing for a national revolt on the same day.²¹ These appeals implied that Soviet aid would shortly arrive to help any Polish attempts to wrest control of Warsaw from the Nazis. The Home Army feared that the Nazis, upon intercepting these radio broadcasts, would begin large-scale round ups of the civilian population for forced labor and executions.²² The Nazis planned to anchor their lines on the Eastern Front around Warsaw and consequently needed large numbers of laborers to construct defenses.²³ Nazi leadership was concerned that a general uprising would break out in the city. In order to preempt this, they planned to kill large numbers of Varsovians and sow fear among the survivors. The Home Army figured it was best to preempt the Nazis. If the Home Army did not act before the Nazis got a chance to implement their plans, the majority of Home Army fighters in and around Warsaw would have been impressed into defensive preparations for the cause of prolonging Nazi

¹⁸ Norman Davies, foreword in *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* (London, U.K.: Penguin Books, 2003), x.

¹⁹ Bór-Komorowski, *Secret Army*, 211.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 213.

²² *Ibid.*, 210.

²³ Borodziej, *Warsaw Uprising*, 68.

occupation, if not executed. Inactivity meant death for the Home Army. Home Army leadership had a decision: face the Nazis in battle or let them destroy Polish resistance without a fight. The Home Army chose to fight.

Soviet radio broadcasts leading to the uprising were more than simple propaganda transmissions. The Soviets had reason to predict Warsaw's liberation. In late July 1944, the defeat of the Nazis seemed apparent – they had lost their Army Group Center and close to half a million men in Operation Bagration in Belarus on the Eastern Front.²⁴ Soviet forces liberated all prewar Soviet territories by late July, and Western Allies had Paris in sight on the Western Front. To the Home Army, the advance of the Red Army seemed unstoppable.²⁵ Reports of Soviet forward patrols reaching Warsaw filtered through Home Army leadership on 29 July.²⁶ It appeared clear that the time for Poland's rising was now or never.

The uprising was the culmination of a year of preparation and build up. In fall of 1943, at the behest of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, the Home Army began to plan and prepare for a national uprising titled Operation Tempest.²⁷ The operation called for active resistance against Nazi occupation in major urban areas once the Red Army was in a position to liberate Poland. The goal of Operation Tempest was to seize control of major Polish cities from the Nazis before the Red Army arrived. In preparation for the launch of Operation Tempest, the Home Army drew down its attacks on the Nazis and squirreled away men and weapons. The Home Army's strategy of conservation in anticipation of a national uprising led to accusations by British and

²⁴ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 392.

²⁵ Bór-Komorowski, *Secret Army*, 207.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁷ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 388.

Soviet intelligence of stagnation and incompetency. Reports describing the Home Army as ineffectual made the whole Polish resistance movement look insignificant. As Operation Bagration reached its latter stages in the summer of 1944, forces of the Home Army successfully liberated Lviv and launched attacks against Nazi forces in Vilnius, Polesia, Białystok, Lublin, Radom, Kielce, and Łódź. Not all of these attacks were successful, but they showed that the Home Army was capable of doing something to resist the Nazis. When Home Army units would link up with their Soviet “liberators,” they were disbanded, their weapons seized, and their leaders arrested by the N.K.V.D.²⁸ By late July, the Red Army reached the eastern bank of the Vistula River. The radio calls by the Soviets for a Polish rising in Warsaw were, in the minds of the Home Army, a premonition of Soviet advance. Since the Red Army was by then so close to Warsaw and had been disbanding smaller units of the Home Army, Home Army leadership felt in a dire situation. It had a choice: establish own control of Warsaw or face arrest and execution by the N.K.V.D.

The Soviets also forced the hand of the Home Army by founding the Polish Committee of National Liberation in Lublin ten days before the start of the uprising. The Polish Committee of National Liberation, commonly known as the Lublin Committee from its base of operations, was a Soviet puppet provisional government.²⁹ The Lublin Committee signed agreements with Stalin early in the summer of 1944 that stated that the Red Army was to imprison the Home Army after the war and that the Lublin Committee was to form the basis of the new Polish government.³⁰ The Underground State and the Polish Government-in-Exile now faced a challenger to their position as the

²⁸ Ibid., 395.

²⁹ Ibid., 386.

³⁰ Stanisław Mikołajczyk, *The Rape of Poland* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1948), 97.

proper government of Poland. The existence of a Soviet puppet government on Polish soil put added pressure on the Home Army to secure a major Polish city with its own forces. The Underground State was fearful that if the Home Army did not control a major, symbolic city and gain a notable military success, the Soviets would completely brush aside any chance of Polish independence.³¹ With no territory under their control and no major successes to point to, the Underground State had little chance of gaining the support they needed for their survival from the West and from the Polish people. Stalin stood in the way of legitimacy for the Underground State. He thought of the Underground State as a nuisance to his postwar goals for Poland and did not recognize its parent, the Polish Government-in-Exile. During the Warsaw Uprising, he claimed that Home Army fighters were nothing more than lawless criminals.³² If these lawless criminals controlled the prewar capital of Poland with a force numbering in the tens of thousands, he would have to take a different tone. A victory in Warsaw was the Underground State's last chance to preempt Soviet domination after the war.

The Underground State had its hopes for victory dashed largely because of inactivity on the part of Poland's allies. The Soviets doomed Polish forces in Warsaw by not allowing Western warplanes to use nearby Soviet-controlled airfields to perform shuttle-bombing runs or to resupply Home Army units at the start of the uprising.³³ Soviet refusal to allow for Western aid or to support the uprising themselves caused tension with Britain. In mid-August, Churchill asked Stalin to support the uprising but Stalin rebuffed him.³⁴ Only in mid-September, after the uprising was clearly doomed, did

³¹ Bór-Komorowski, *Secret Army*, 201.

³² Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 78.

³³ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 409.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the Soviets allow the West to make use of their airfields. The British were able to deliver 58 or so low-level airdrops; the Americans only performed one airdrop, though it was of significant size.³⁵ A lack of communication with the Home Army hampered Western supply runs. Nazi forces captured half of all the supply packages.³⁶ The British, in addition to supply drops, could have deployed paratroopers to help the Poles at the start of the uprising. They had a unit of Polish expatriate paratroopers under their command titled the First Independent Parachute Brigade. The British decided not to use these paratroopers to help Warsaw because they believed that the uprising was a misadventure.³⁷ Instead, the paratroopers deployed to the Netherlands during Operation Market Garden.³⁸ In consequence, Western support failed to make a difference in the uprising. If the Western Allies would have provided full air support from the beginning of the uprising, however, and allowed the First Independent Parachute Brigade to drop on Warsaw, the course of the uprising would have been different.

Stalin's refusal to allow Western warplanes to use Soviet airfields disappointed Churchill and Roosevelt, but they decided not to override Stalin's orders. Both leaders responded differently to the uprising. Churchill, hearing the broadcasts of Radio Lightning, was far more sympathetic to the Polish cause.³⁹ Roosevelt, on the other hand, was aloof about the uprising and more concerned with the relationship between the West and the Soviet Union in the long term. Churchill sent a message to Roosevelt on 25 August asking Roosevelt to ignore Soviet restriction of airfield use, and

³⁵ Ibid., 410, 419.

³⁶ Ibid., 411.

³⁷ Ibid., 487.

³⁸ Ibid., 490.

³⁹ Ibid., 408.

consequently see what would happen.⁴⁰ Roosevelt replied, "I do not consider it would prove advantageous to the long-range general war prospect for me to join with you... I have taken into consideration Uncle J.'s present attitude towards the relief of the Underground forces in Warsaw."⁴¹ Roosevelt, representing the larger of the two powers, checked Churchill's impetuosity. He did not want to offend Stalin going into the important Yalta Conference early next year. Roosevelt also needed Stalin's support for concluding the war with Japan. In late 1944, it appeared that an invasion of the Japanese home islands was the only way to force Japan out of the war, and Roosevelt wanted Soviet military assistance for the prospective invasion. He decided that good terms with Stalin were worth more than thousands of Polish lives.⁴²

The Home Army needed significant help in order to win. Nazi forces completely outmatched the Poles in firepower and air support. Yet, the Soviets were not willing to push their forces to assist with the uprising or to provide artillery and air support.⁴³ Whether or not the Soviets were calculating in their lack of support is debatable. The Red Army had just launched a major and successful offensive earlier that summer and needed respite. Strained from their advances, Soviet supply lines were not in an ideal situation.⁴⁴ In late August, Soviet General Konstantin Rokossovsky, commander of the 1st Belorussian Front, which was near Warsaw, told B.B.C. correspondent Alexander Werth that the Nazis had advanced four armored divisions against Soviet forces when they arrived at the Vistula. The Nazi counterattack, according to Rokossovsky, made the Red Army unable to render adequate assistance to the Poles fighting in Warsaw. In

⁴⁰ Ibid., 413.

⁴¹ Quoted in Churchill, *Second World War*, 6: 140.

⁴² Davies, *Rising '44*, 630.

⁴³ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 417.

⁴⁴ Borodziej, *Warsaw Uprising*, 91.

Rokossovsky's view, the Home Army foolishly launched the uprising without any serious promise of Soviet support. He described the uprising as, "a bad mistake," and dismissed Soviet calls for an uprising as "routine stuff."⁴⁵ He claimed that the Home Army did not attempt to communicate with the Red Army and placed all blame for the failure of the Warsaw Uprising on the leadership of the Home Army.⁴⁶ Despite the Nazi forces arrayed against them, a unit of the Red Army was able to reach Warsaw. The First Polish Army, a unit of Polish expatriates largely drawn from Poles deported to the Soviet Union after its annexation of eastern Poland in 1939, was able to make some headway across the Vistula and into Warsaw during the uprising.⁴⁷ This is to say that the only unit of the Red Army that attempted to help was entirely Polish. For his efforts in support of his countrymen, the commander of the First Polish Army, Zygmunt Berling, was relieved of command.⁴⁸ Soviet troops simply would not fight in what Soviet leadership thought was a Polish struggle. On the other hand, that a large unit of the Red Army was able to cross the Vistula shows that Soviet forces would have been able to liberate Warsaw in conjunction with the Home Army. By not ordering the Red Army to join in the uprising, the Soviets left the Poles to their own devices in a fight against vastly superior Nazi forces. The Soviets, in effect, damned the Polish effort to liberate Warsaw.

The Poles, alone, did not stand a chance against the Nazis, yet they fought on heroically. They had little choice, as Nazi forces surrounded them and gave no quarter. The bloody and ultimately futile struggle for Warsaw is symbolic of Poland's overall

⁴⁵ Quoted in Alexander Werth, *Russia at War: 1941-1945* (New York: Avon Books, 1964), 795.

⁴⁶ Konstantin Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 257.

⁴⁷ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 418.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 432.

experience in World War II. The Poles continued to fight, despite their allies abandoning them. The actions of Poland's allies during the uprising buttressed the Polish view of their country as being a betrayed victim. The bravery of Poles in laying down their lives at the altar of freedom despite being in a hopeless situation forged a national sense of pride. The Poles may have been the victims of disingenuous allies and monstrous enemies, but, in their eyes, they had earned eternal glory as a people willing to suffer for the cause of freedom.

Diplomacy

The major question that Poles grappled with in the wake of their tragic experience in World War II is why their Western allies seemingly betrayed them.

The Polish resistance movement, early in the war, thought of itself as being able to rely on its Western allies. World War II in Europe started, officially, because of the West's commitment to Polish sovereignty. After the Soviets and Nazis carved up Poland, the French hosted the Polish Government-in-Exile in Paris. After the fall of France, the Polish Government-in-Exile moved to London. The London Poles thought of themselves as being a member of the Allies in good standing. They hoped to have the same status and receive the same treatment as the French Government-in-Exile, as both were part of the original alliance against Nazi Germany. To this end, the London Poles helped raise military forces from Polish expatriates. The British supplied, trained, and commanded Polish expatriate units that fought in the Mediterranean Theater and on the Western Front.⁴⁹ Polish soldiers fought side-by-side with British and Americans. They were eager to contribute to the Allied cause and get much-desired revenge

⁴⁹ John Pomian, ed., *Joseph Retinger: Memoirs of an Eminence Grise* (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1972), 96.

against the Nazis. The London Poles assumed that their host and benefactor, the United Kingdom, would do its utmost to preserve Polish independence and territorial sovereignty. After all, Polish sovereignty is what technically drew Britain into the war. If Poland did not have independence and sovereignty at the end of the war, then the starting goal of the war was lost. When Poland fell under Soviet control after the war, Poles felt that their Western Allies had totally betrayed them.

At the end of the war, it seemed that Poland was alone – Poland could count on no dependable allies or friendly neighbors. Yet Poland's isolation started during the beginning of the war with the failure of Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski's diplomacy. The centerpiece of his strategy was an attempt to foster good relations with the Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile. The strategy failed, as both repudiated Polish diplomatic goals.

Sikorski thought that a union with Czechoslovakia would create a state powerful enough to resist both Russia and Germany in the long term. Sikorski's idea was a rehashing of Józef Piłsudski's idea of Intermarium.⁵⁰ Piłsudski, Poland's head of state after World War One, believed that the small nations of Eastern Europe between Germany and Russia should unite under Polish leadership to preserve their independence in the face of Russian and German imperialism.⁵¹ Piłsudski failed to realize his ambition, but the idea of Poland unifying with a neighboring small power intrigued Sikorski as the answer to mutual Russian and German aggression.

⁵⁰ Intermarium refers to Piłsudski's concept of a federative Eastern European super-state between Russia and Germany that would have the strength to resist both powers. Poland, in this super-state, would be the leading member.

⁵¹ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 7.

Sikorski was never able to win the Czechoslovaks over and the relationship between the two exiled governments deteriorated over time.⁵² The Czechoslovaks rejected Sikorski's union, which was officially proposed in 1940.⁵³ Czechoslovakian President Edvard Beneš figured correctly that the Soviet Union would come to dominate Eastern Europe after the war and sought to maintain a good relationship with the Soviets, even if that meant souring relations with the Poles.⁵⁴ Soviet diplomatic pressure, in conjunction with Czechoslovak reservations, sealed the fate of Sikorski's hopes.⁵⁵ Having never experienced Russian or Soviet occupation, the Czechoslovaks figured that being a Soviet protectorate would be more benign than unification with Poland. In contrast to the Russians, the Poles had a history of recent conflict with Czechoslovakia.⁵⁶ The Czechoslovaks were afraid that a union with the much larger Poland would be a license for Polish domination. The proposed union would leave Poland the dominant power in the region and Czechoslovakia at its mercy.⁵⁷

With the blessing -- and slight prompting -- of the British, Sikorski tried to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.⁵⁸ The London Poles were stoic in doing so, as the Soviet Union had committed numerous crimes against Polish people in eastern Poland during its occupation of the territory from 1939 to 1941. Soviet authorities deported between 1.25 and 1.6 million Poles to Siberia and Central Asia in less than two years.⁵⁹ In addition to the deportations, the Soviets executed thousands of

⁵² Davies, *Heart of Europe* 89.

⁵³ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 333.

⁵⁴ Pomian, *Eminence Grise*, 98.

⁵⁵ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 334.

⁵⁶ Victoria Vasilenko, "The Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation Project in British Policy, 1939-1943: A Federalist Alternative to Postwar Settlement in East Central Europe?" *Canadian Journal of History* 49, no. 2 (2014): 204.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵⁸ Pomian, *Eminence Grise*, 115.

⁵⁹ Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-48* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 27.

Polish prisoners.⁶⁰ The London Poles were willing to work with the Soviets despite their crimes. British support was instrumental in getting the two enemies to reconcile.⁶¹ Initially, Sikorski's willingness to work with the Soviets paid off. On 30 July 1941, shortly after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the two governments signed the Sikorski-Maisky Agreement. Because of this agreement, tens of thousands of Poles deported to the Soviet Union escaped to the Middle East.⁶² Stalin and Sikorski differed on the Polish-Soviet border and Stalin obstinately refused to let all of the Poles in the Soviet Union leave, however.⁶³ Sikorski was hopeful, despite these issues, that the two governments could maintain a working relationship with the help of Western arbitration.

The goodwill of the Polish Government-in-Exile in establishing friendly relations with the Soviet Union was for naught. The Soviets broke relations with the London Poles over the discovery of the Katyn Forest Massacre by the Nazis in April 1943.⁶⁴ The N.K.V.D. killed approximately 14,500 Polish army officers, policemen, and intelligentsia in the Katyn forest near Smolensk in April and May of 1940.⁶⁵ During and after World War II, Soviet policy concerning the Katyn Massacre was to deny responsibility for it and place blame on the Nazis. When the London Poles got wind of the massacre, they asked for an investigation by the International Red Cross.⁶⁶ The Soviets knew that an impartial investigation of the massacre would expose their guilt. Therefore, the Soviets broke relations with the London Poles in order to stymie the investigation. This break in

⁶⁰ Ibid., 16-7.

⁶¹ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 164.

⁶² Ibid., 162.

⁶³ Ibid., 328.

⁶⁴ Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 73.

⁶⁵ Anna Cienciala, Natalia Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski, eds., *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.

⁶⁶ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 339.

relations delegitimized the Polish Government-in-Exile in the eyes of the West. The position of Poland vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the Allied camp had reached a nadir. By the spring of 1943, the Soviet Union had been part of the Big Three Powers facing Nazi Germany for a year and a half. This was because the Western Allies needed to cooperate with the Soviets, who were doing the bulk of the fighting against Nazi Germany, in order to achieve victory in the European Theater.⁶⁷ The Soviets were considered by Britain and the United States to be higher in precedence than any other member of the Allies. If the Soviet Union turned its back on a government, then that government lost credibility among all of the Allies. The Soviets successfully managed to block Polish requests to investigate the massacre. The failure of Polish calls for an impartial investigation further delegitimized the Polish Government-in-Exile. After the Polish-Soviet break in relations, the British Government began to draw down its military support to the Polish resistance.⁶⁸ Popular support for the Polish cause began to dwindle and British fears of damaging the British-Soviet alliance became paramount.⁶⁹ The Soviets forced the Western Allies to choose between supporting them or the London Poles.

The West ignored the Katyn Massacre as the obvious warning sign of Soviet oppression that it was.⁷⁰ For the Poles, Western reaction to Katyn was the clearest betrayal of the war. In the words of Jan Nowak, who was in London as an agent of the Polish resistance, “British reaction to these events was the greatest blow since the

⁶⁷ Lloyd Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe, from Munich to Yalta* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1993), 166.

⁶⁸ Nowak, *Courier from Warsaw*, 233.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁷⁰ Pomian, *Eminence Grise*, 192.

beginning of the war.”⁷¹ The British government knew that the Soviets were possibly guilty, but did not investigate or blame them during the war in order to maintain the alliance. The United States followed Britain’s lead in ignoring questions concerning the official Soviet version of the massacre.

Before the entry of the Soviet Union into the Allied camp in 1941, the British showed nothing but support for the London Poles. By 1943, they were supporting Soviet claims of Nazi responsibility for the Katyn Massacre without serious question. Polish interests and Western interests showed themselves to be different. The Western Allies wanted to maintain their alliance with the Soviet Union more than they were willing to honor previous support for the Polish Government-in-Exile.

As the war wound down, territorial changes became a pressing issue. In late 1941, the United States and the United Kingdom signed the Atlantic Charter, which stated that they supported no territorial changes to any nation after the war. The Poles, pressed by Stalin since the signing of the Sikorski-Maisky Agreement to give up territory in the east, felt buttressed by the charter.⁷² Churchill went back on the charter at the Tehran Conference in 1943 when he described to Stalin how he supported moving Poland further west at the expense of Germany and to the benefit of the Soviet Union.⁷³ Roosevelt supported territorial changes to Poland at the Tehran Conference as well. According to Arthur Bliss Lane, American ambassador to Poland from 1945 to 1947, Roosevelt owns a lion’s share of the blame for Poland’s fate. On Roosevelt at Tehran, Lane wrote, “When he [Roosevelt] made essential concessions at Tehran, the die was

⁷¹ Nowak, *Courier from Warsaw*, 131.

⁷² Pomian, *Eminence Grise*, 96.

⁷³ Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 356.

cast.”⁷⁴ The London Poles did not learn of Western support for territorial changes to Poland at the end of the war until after the Tehran Conference concluded. When Churchill revealed to the public his support for Soviet territorial claims in eastern Poland, Poles reacted with dismay. Jan Nowak wrote of his reaction, “When I listened to these arguments I was filled with a rage I could hardly contain.” In the eyes of Poles, “Stalin had been given the green light; the way to Poland was open.”⁷⁵

The Western Allies gave in to Soviet pressure concerning the Katyn Massacre and postwar territorial changes because of how they viewed their Soviet ally. They created a propaganda driven view of Stalin as benevolent “Uncle Joe” in order to sell the alliance with the Soviet Union to their people. In the United States, Stalin was *Time* magazine’s “Man of the Year” in 1942. *Time* described the K.G.B., in a 1943 article, as an analog to the F.B.I. It did not report on the Gulag system or the institutionalized Soviet culture of repression. As historian Halik Kochanski puts it, “The pro-Soviet publicity machine was active in the United States and the Office of War Information (OWI) ensured that newspapers followed that line.”⁷⁶ In Britain, the government information policy was pro-Soviet as well. For example, in May 1944, Churchill reported to the House of Commons that, “The discipline and military etiquette of the Russian Armies are unsurpassed.”⁷⁷ Anyone who has studied the march of the Red Army to Berlin knows that what Churchill said is outrageously false. In order to justify the initial creation of the Western-Soviet alliance, the West ignored Soviet invasions of six

⁷⁴ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed* (Belmont, MA: Western Islands, 1948), 257-8.

⁷⁵ Nowak, *Courier from Warsaw*, 268.

⁷⁶ Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 440.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 461.

sovereign nations before 1941.⁷⁸ The West wrote off Soviet annexations as something that could be negotiated later. The West condemned Nazi invasions of sovereign nations, yet allied with a country just as guilty. In hindsight, the views of the West about Stalin during World War II appear woefully misguided. The West thought that Stalin, Churchill's "friend and ally," was a reasonable partner whom they could work with after the war's conclusion.⁷⁹ In order to sell themselves as being in a just alliance to rid the world of evil, they selectively ignored the evil they allied with.

Some in Britain did realize the predicament that Poland was facing towards the end of the war, but were not sympathetic. Popular British opinion held the Poles obstinate and, as A.P. Herbert, a humorist and Member of Parliament, titled his poem on the Poles, "Unreasonable." He wrote in December 1944, "'Unreasonable' Poles, why do you falter? / Be sensible – be realistic, pray. / Yours are the only frontiers that must alter: / You are the one crusader in the way. / Unreasonable Poles, preserve tradition / In just two centuries, you must allow, / You've thrice enjoyed benevolent partition. / For Heaven's sake, why start to argue now?"⁸⁰ Rather than take some responsibility for Poland's situation, the British found it easier to blame the Poles themselves. According to Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile from 1943 to 1944, Churchill accused the London Poles of causing Stalin to found the Lublin Committee.⁸¹ Like Churchill's claim that the Red Army had supreme discipline, this accusation is false. The London Poles did not force Stalin to support the Lublin

⁷⁸ The Soviet Union invaded the Baltic States, Finland, Romania, and Poland, which was allied with Britain and France at the time, between 1939 and 1940.

⁷⁹ Gardner, *Spheres of Influence*, 207.

⁸⁰ A.P. Herbert, *Light the Lights* (London: Methuen & Co., 1945), 43.

⁸¹ Mikołajczyk, *Rape of Poland*, 97.

Committee. Blaming Stalin's actions on the Polish Government-in-Exile was an out for Churchill to ignore his own failures concerning Poland.

It is possible that the West understood that it was signing away Eastern Europe to the Soviets when it made the Yalta and Potsdam Agreements in 1944 and 1945, respectively. Roosevelt and Churchill expected Stalin to maintain a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe after the war's conclusion. The Percentages Agreement, signed by Churchill and Stalin in October 1944, evidences this.⁸² The agreement gave Britain and the Soviet Union license to have a percentage of influence in the nations of southeast Europe after the war. The caveat to the West's acceptance of Soviet control of Eastern Europe was Soviet assent to democratic elections in their sphere. The Big Three powers agreed on the importance of democracy in Europe after the war at the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences. Arthur Bliss Lane, who witnessed Soviet controlled elections after the war in Poland, wrote, "The hypocrisy of the phrase 'free and unfettered elections' was tragically obvious."⁸³ Indeed, the Soviet Union had decades of experience in producing fraudulent elections. The West essentially accepted substituting one undemocratic, repressive power for another. Regardless of whether or not the West thought that Stalin would allow Eastern Europe to be truly democratic, the West understood that Stalin would control the region. The West accepted Poland's domination by the Soviet Union at the end of the war.

Poles saw their allies abandon support for an independent Poland; they saw their allies renege on official positions; they saw their allies buy into a false characterization of Stalin and the Soviet Union. The crowning symbolic event in Poland's failed relationship

⁸² Kochanski, *Eagle Unbowed*, 456.

⁸³ Lane, *Poland Betrayed* 238.

with the West was the London Victory Celebrations of 1946. Poland, along with only Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, did not march in the London victory parade.

Diplomatic disorder resulting from British derecognition of the Polish Government-in-Exile prevented a Polish cohort from attending. That Poles did not march along with their Western allies was symbolic of how Poles felt that the West treated their country.

In the minds of Poles, they gave equal service to the Allied cause, but reaped little reward. According to Jan Ciechanowski, the Polish Government-in-Exile's ambassador to the United States from 1940 to 1945, what really happened to Poland:

...was not merely a change of government. By arbitrarily determining Poland's territorial and political status, in violation of her constitutional and sovereign rights, the Big Three Powers had actually interrupted the continuity of the Polish State. They had entirely disregarded the will of the Polish people. They had carried out the fifth partition of Poland.⁸⁴

Poland was not a part of the winners circle. Though liberated from the Nazis, Poland lost the war. According to Poles, responsibility for Poland's defeat lay with their allies.

It is understandable why Poles blame the West for the dismal fate of Poland during and after the war -- it is understandable why they feel betrayed by the West. The West is, in part, to blame for the failure of the Warsaw Uprising. According to the Polish narrative of victimhood, the West abandoned Poland to Soviet control because it was in the best interest of the West to do so. Diplomatically, the West failed to support Polish interests over Soviet interests consistently. Poles, after the war, viewed themselves as acting in good faith towards their allies, only to meet betrayal. From the Polish perspective, the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Underground State worked in the best interests of Poland and in the interests of democracy and self-determination. The

⁸⁴ Jan Ciechanowski, *Defeat in Victory*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1947), 386.

Polish narrative of betrayal holds that Poland's dubious allies hamstrung the efforts of Poland's resistance movement. This narrative points to the actions of the West that hurt Poland's chances for independence after the war, and weaves them into a historical identity of victimhood.

Metanarratives

One additional compelling reason why the Poles were apt to think of themselves as a martyred people after World War II is that there is a dominant narrative in their history of glorious victimhood. Polish victimhood is not pitiable – it is a victimhood that provides a sense of place and purpose. Throughout their history, Poles have been the victims of foreign aggression from both east and west. Poland first experienced national victimhood during the middle ages. The Mongols nearly destroyed Poland in the 1240s and the Teutonic Knights did the same in the 14th and 15th centuries. Polish victimhood reemerged during the Partitions of the 18th century. Over the course of the last 250 years, Poland became thoroughly engrossed in a metanarrative of victimhood and martyrdom.

Polish history since the First Partition of Poland in 1772 is cyclical. Poland has gone through two cycles -- one starting in 1772 and one in 1939 – and they consist of three parts. The first part is betrayal, the second is death, and the third is resurrection. Poland's cyclical narrative fundamentally draws parallels to the story of Jesus Christ's life. Death in the Polish narrative is the result of collusion and perfidy on the part of Poland's neighbors. The first "death" of Poland occurred during the Partitions of the 18th century; the second resulted from the Soviet and Nazi invasion of 1939. The Betrayal of Christ is a rough parallel. Poland suffered long periods of national anguish during its

occupations in both the 19th and 20th centuries. Christ's crucifixion is the mirror of this suffering.⁸⁵ Polish national uprisings (the November Uprising of 1830 and the January Uprising of 1863-4) in the 19th century were Poland's first crucifixion. Poland's second crucifixion was its experience during World War II.⁸⁶ Poland adopted an identity of martyrdom and victimhood from its suffering at the hands of its occupiers.⁸⁷ Just as Christ rose from the dead, so has Poland after the fall of communism in 1989. Poland's national rebirth concludes the cycle – Poland is redeemed, reborn, and delivered.

The idea of Polish history having religious undertones first took shape in the Polish romantic movement of the early 19th century. Polish romanticists put forth the idea that Poland is the Christ of Europe. The Poles have traditionally associated their Catholic faith with their nationalism.⁸⁸ Polish intelligentsia saw Poland as a crucified nation -- a nation that suffered for the sins of Europe.⁸⁹ Polish romanticists depicted Poland in messianic terms. Adam Mickiewicz's poem, *Dziady* is an example of Poland portrayed as the Christ of Europe. In his poem, Poland will experience resurrection through divine salvation one day.⁹⁰ By describing Poland as the Christ of Europe, Polish romanticists fostered a sense of national destiny in martyrdom. Christ is the archetypical martyr – because Poland follows his path, Poland has a role of martyrdom to live up to. This historical identity helped mold the Polish view of themselves as martyrs following World War II.

⁸⁵ Waldemar Chrostowski, "The Suffering, Chosenness and Mission of the Polish Nation," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 11, no. 4 (1991): 7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁷ Norman Pounds, *Poland Between East and West* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1964), 54.

⁸⁸ Pounds, *Poland*, 33.

⁸⁹ Chrostowski, "The Suffering, Chosenness and Mission of the Polish Nation," 6.

⁹⁰ Manfred Kridl, "Adam Mickiewicz," in *Adam Mickiewicz: Poet of Poland*, ed. Ernest Simmons (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 16.

Poles find catharsis in portraying themselves in a mystical, romantic light rather than as an unremarkable, unlucky people.⁹¹ They find positive associations in martyrdom whether they believe in Poland as the Christ of Europe or not. When struggling to figure out how to reconcile themselves with the fate of their nation and people at the end of World War II, Poles again turned to the idea of Poland as a martyred nation. Poland was in a familiar position after the war – occupied and brutalized by foreign powers. It was natural for Poles to take on a martyred identity after the war. It was natural for them to feel betrayed, inasmuch as their betrayal helped to underscore their impeccable victimhood and martyrdom.

On Interpretations of Betrayal

“Western Betrayal,” as a historical concept, is a subject of contention. There are many viewpoints. Among those who do and among those who do not support the idea, there are multiple sub-positions. There is a mainstream view and a conspiratorial view in support of the idea of Western Betrayal. On the other hand, there are two positions against the concept of Western Betrayal: one that the West was unhelpful, but not complicit in Poland’s fate, and the other that the West simply had no control over the situation.

The overall position of those who support the idea of Western Betrayal is that the West was complicit towards Soviet designs on Poland. Evidence for this point of view largely rests on the actions of Churchill and Roosevelt during the Yalta Conference.⁹²

⁹¹ Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 203.

⁹² Walery Choroszewski, "Rejection of Yalta Agreement by the Polish Governments in Exile as an Element of Struggle for Universalism (abridged)." *Dialogue & Universalism* 15, no. 11 (2005): 38.

The given reasons why the Western leaders were partial to Soviet demands at the conference are both practical and, in the case of Roosevelt, ideological.

The mainstream view has its crux in the argument that the West wanted to appease Stalin. Both Churchill and Roosevelt needed Stalin to maintain pressure on Nazi Germany; otherwise, their countries would face a significantly harder military challenge in the European Theater.⁹³ The Eastern Front of World War II produced perhaps eight times more Nazi casualties than did the Western Front, and ensnared the bulk of Nazi forces.⁹⁴ As the Soviets did the majority of the fighting against the Nazis, the Western Allies thought it key to maintain cordial relations. Soviet help against Japan was also a concern. Soviet military might affected Western options even after the war's conclusion, as the Red Army significantly outnumbered Western forces in Europe. Although tensions began to run high between former allies at the war's conclusion, the West was not in a position to try to liberate Poland through military means.⁹⁵

For Roosevelt in particular, the establishment of the United Nations was a vital political goal. Stalin's support of the United Nations was crucial for its success.⁹⁶ By allowing Stalin to have a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, Roosevelt believed that he would create goodwill between Stalin and the Western powers. According to those who believe that the West betrayed Poland, a drive to foster goodwill with the Soviets caused Roosevelt to doom the Warsaw Uprising and Poland at large.⁹⁷ Roosevelt followed Stalin's direction concerning Eastern Europe and this left Churchill with no

⁹³ Anna Cienciala, "The United States and Poland in World War II." *The Polish Review* 54, no. 2 (2009): 173.

⁹⁴ Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 11.

⁹⁵ Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 336.

⁹⁶ Gardner, *Spheres of Influence*, 208.

⁹⁷ Davies, *God's Playground*, 2: 479.

room to act against Sovietization, as he would be doing so without the help of Britain's most powerful ally.⁹⁸

The conspiratorial viewpoint is fundamentally similar to the mainstream view, save it is more extreme. The conspiratorial view holds that Roosevelt conspired to Sovietize Poland after the war. This position points to the unpublished memoirs of Francis Spellman for evidence. Spellman, a cardinal from New York City, was a confidant of Roosevelt during his presidency. Spellman was privy, therefore, to some of Roosevelt's private thoughts. Spellman's memoirs, proponents claim, reveal Roosevelt's bias toward the Soviets. According to academic Witold Kiezun, "Under a 25-years confidentiality clause, Roosevelt revealed to Spellman his concept to eradicate global colonialism in joint effort with the USSR after the war."⁹⁹ For supporters of the conspiratorial viewpoint, Roosevelt pushed a pro-Soviet, leftist global agenda and Poland was one of its major casualties. However, there is no further corroborating evidence to back Spellman's claims. The lack of other evidence presents a major problem for the conspiratorial position.

In addition to Roosevelt's alleged motivations, conspiracy supporters hold that Soviet agents swayed the U.S. through manipulation of public opinion and governmental infiltration to support Soviet claims on postwar Poland. Proponents of the conspiratorial view point to Oskar Lange as an example of conspiracy in the West in favor of Soviet control of Poland. Lange, a Polish economist based at the University of Chicago, was a public intellectual held in high regard by the White House and the Polish-American community. After visiting the Soviet Union at the behest of Stalin in

⁹⁸ Ibid., 478.

⁹⁹ Witold Kiezun, "The International Significance of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944." *Dialogue & Universalism* 16, no. 7 (2006): 39.

1943, the Soviets recruited Lange for use both as a covert agent and as a leader of post-war Poland. Lange publically backed the Lublin Committee over the Polish Government-in-Exile.¹⁰⁰ When looking for someone to act as an intermediary between themselves and the Soviets on Polish questions in 1944, the United States Government chose Lange. He was one of the worst choices to represent the interests of the United States.¹⁰¹ Not only was he a double agent for the Soviets, but also, he was an able propagandist for the cause of a communist Poland. Lange helped soften the image of the Lublin Committee in the eyes of the American Government and worked to make it appear more acceptable to Polish-Americans. Lange presents the perfect example for those in the conspiratorial camp who believe that the Soviet Union, through its agents in the West, was able to both manipulate public opinion and governmental action.

The counterpoint to the betrayal argument is the view that the subjugation of Poland was inevitable. According to this position, Poland was fated for domination by whichever side won the Eastern Front. It was too weak and small to be able to determine its own destiny. There was no way that the limited and, after the Warsaw Uprising, directionless Polish resistance could have prevented the Red Army from imposing its will.¹⁰²

There are two viewpoints to the position that the West did not betray Poland: those who believe that the Western Allies did not deliberately choose to betray their promises to the Polish people, but were preoccupied by the course of the war and those who view Poland's fate as a *fait accompli*. Those who believe that Western neglect,

¹⁰⁰ Anna Cienciala, "New Light on Oskar Lange as an Intermediary between Roosevelt and Stalin in Attempts to Create a New Polish Government (January-November 1944)." *Acta Poloniae Historica* 73 (1996): 133.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁰² Gregor Dallas, *1945: The War That Never Ended* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 220-1.

rather than perfidy, led to Poland's demise hold that, while the West had no malice towards the noncommunist Polish resistance, it was not in any sort of realistic position to make a difference in Poland's fate.¹⁰³ The West could not stop the Red Army from descending on Poland without having to start a war with the Soviets. Western leaders tried to work out an understanding with the Soviets at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences that would allow for democracy in Eastern Europe, but the Soviets used their own meanings of the terms "democracy" and "freedom."¹⁰⁴ From this viewpoint, Soviet manipulations of Western goodwill are not the fault of the West. According to this reasoning, one cannot label the West as being malicious in its treatment of Poland.

The *fait accompli* position is, essentially, an extreme version of the view that the West neglected Poland. While Western promises of support to the Polish Government-in-Exile may have been ill advised, there was nothing that the West could have done. In this fatalistic view, the Polish Government-in-Exile had impossible goals.¹⁰⁵ The London Poles imagined themselves in possession of far more support than the West could reasonably give.¹⁰⁶ Delusions of support by the West allowed Poles to think of themselves as a betrayed people. In reality, according to this view, the Polish resistance asked for far more than it could have received and did not think to alter its demands to fit the situation.

¹⁰³ Woldzimirz Kowalski, "Poland and the Western Powers, 1945-1947." *Polish Western Affairs* 8, no. 1(1967): 36.

¹⁰⁴ Vasilenko, "The Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation Project in British Policy," 223.

¹⁰⁵ Dariusz Stola, "The Polish Government-in-exile: National Unity and Weakness." *Holocaust Studies: A Journal Of Culture & History* 18, no. 2/3 (2012): 98.

¹⁰⁶ A.B. Polonsky, "Polish Failure in Wartime London: Attempts to Forge a European Alliance, 1940-1944." *International History Review* 7, no. 4 (1985): 591.

Conclusions

At the end of the war, many Poles felt that they, in the words of Radio Lightning's last transmission, "had been treated worse than Hitler's satellites." Poland was, ostensibly, one of the winners of the war. It had faithfully served the Allied coalition, in spite of its strained relationship with the Soviets. The Nazi threat to Polish existence had passed. However, the Poles felt betrayed and victimized. The largest act of Polish resistance during the war, the Warsaw Uprising, was largely unsupported by Poland's allies. Poles see betrayal in this inaction by their allies in the face of Nazi brutality. The suffering and destruction of Warsaw is a poignant example of Poland's perceived martyrdom. Politically, Polish attempts to act as an equal member of the Allies failed. Poland's allies acted in what they perceived to be their own best interests, not in the best interests of Poland. The West, ultimately, chose its alliance with the Soviets over support to Poland's resistance movement. The actions of the West concerning its alliance with Poland may appear to an outside observer perfectly in-line with the political realities of the day; however, this is not the view of the Poles. Poles see perfidy where others see inevitability. Further helping Poles adopt a view of victimhood is Poland's historical narrative. Because Poland found itself betrayed by its neighbors before, Poles found it easy to fit what happened to Poland during and after World War II in a metanarrative of betrayal and victimhood. Because Poles view their country as martyred by foreign occupation in the 19th century, it was easy for them to view their country as martyred by foreign occupation in the 20th century.

Why Poles put their history through the lenses of betrayal and victimhood is clear: Poles have a national narrative of martyrdom and the events of World War II fall

in line with this narrative. Poles see the actions of their allies within the context of the historical themes of victimhood and betrayal; therefore, the Poles do not look to the geopolitical realities of their situation, but to the self-interested acts of the West as evidence for the fulfillment of Poland's destiny as a martyred nation. Poles choose not to see themselves as failures, but rather as glorious victims; they choose not to see themselves as unlucky, but as martyred.

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