# Kenneth W. Thompson, Cold War Theories: World Polarization, 1943 -1953 (Louisiana, 1981)

pp.83-93

* Stalin waiting until late July 1944 as Russian troops crossed the Curzon Line into Poland to establish officially the Committee for National Liberation, to administer occupied Polish territory.
* The Curzon Line was the tentative Polish-Soviet border proposed by the Allied Armistice Commission in 1919.
* A month later the committee installed itself in Lublin as the temporary capital of Poland and by the beginning of 1945 it had become the “Provisional Government” of the country.
* By then it was clear that two governments of Poland existed and, whatever their respective merits, the one within Poland would inevitable enjoy political advantages over the government-in-exile in London.
* The fact that Moscow face support to one regime and Whitehall and Washington to the other made it inevitable the first major disagreement between East and West and the ushering in of the Cold War.
* Primarily but not exclusively because of the Polish question, Yalta became a watershed between the era of wartime cooperation and the first sorties of the Cold War.
* The Yalta Conference convened 3- 11 February 1945.
* Poland was discussed at no fewer than seven of the eight plenary sessions.
* More time and effort was devoted to and more debate engendered on questions of Poland’s future boundaries and government than to any other issue.
* Stalin defined the Soviet national interest n the most unequivocal terms, narrowing from the outset the possibilities of negotiation on the essentials.
* Churchill had pointed out that for Britain the question of Poland’s future was one of honour.
* “Honour was the sole reason we had drawn the sword to help Poland,” he declared and Roosevelt, disclaiming any direct national interest in so distant a place, went on to appeal for Soviet magnanimity to help the six or seven Poles in the United States to save face.
* A one-sided settlement of the Polish boundary questions would alarm American Poles and cause the Polish government exiles in London to ‘lose face.’
* Churchill joined Roosevelt in this appeal and reminded the Soviets that over 150,000 Poles were fighting valiantly in Italy on the Western front to defeat the Nazis.
* The roots of the conflict went back to the early 1940s.
* Britain’s stake in a Polish-Soviet understanding took form in 1941, following the German invasion of the Soviet Union (although Britain had also made overtures to Russia just before the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939)
* This pact assured that the Polish-Soviet boundaries would follow the Curzon Line.
* At the request f the Soviets, Foreign Secretary Eden undertook to mediate with General Władysław Sikorski, then premier of the Polish-government-in-exile n London.
* The Russians called for the reestablishment of an “ethnographic” post-war Poland and the creation of a Polish National Committee and a Polish army in the SU.
* The London Poles recited a catalogue of grievances inflicted on Poland in 1939, including the Nazi-Soviet Pact to partition Poland; the Soviet invasion and annexation of Eastern Poland; 2000,000 POWs taken and still held by the Russians; and the deportation of 1,000,000 civilians.
* Before the London Poles would accept an understanding with the Soviets, they demanded the release of all Polish prisoners, recognition of the Soviets of the Polish government-in-exile rather than a national committee, and restoration of the Polish Soviet boundary to the *status quo ante* existing before World War II.
* The persisting boundary dispute between Poland and the Soviets virtually paralyzed discussions of Poland’s future throughout most of the war years.
* The Soviets consistently demanded frontier adjustments, which would recognize “ethnic balance,” asking in effect for all of Poland east of the Curzon Line, including Western Belorussia and the Western Ukraine.
* The London Poles were adamant in refusing to cede Polish territory in the East, demanding for themselves German territory in the West.
* The British sought with growing impatience to lead the Poles to consider some reasonable solution of the dispute.
* The Poles continued, despite British threats and arguments, to press their claims in the boundary dispute.
* At the Teheran Conference Autumn 1943, Churchill directly and Roosevelt by offering no objections accepted the Curzon Line as the Polish-Soviet frontier.
* When the Red Army crossed the old Polish frontier in the East on 4 January 1944, the new Polish premier in London, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk (Mikoli-czech) announced that the new Polish underground would cooperate with the Red Army.
* When Mikolajczyk visited Roosevelt on 6 June 1944, hoping to enlist his support, the president equivocated, saying that he and Churchill were not agreed on the division of Poland, concealing his agreement at Tehran to the Curzon Line and raising hopes of the London Poles by saying e would try to mediate the boundary question at the ‘proper time.’
* Mikolajczyk left Washington convinced that the US would support Poland strongly while Roosevelt was acting to delay tactics so as to prevent American Poles from making the boundary dispute an issue in the presidential election of 1944.
* In the end the British, having failed to influence Polish leaders in London, washed their hands of the matter and Churchill and Eden broke off their contacts with Mikolajczyk.
* In judging the Polish crisis. Orthodox historians understandably turned to the first three articles of the Atlantic Charter put forward in the statement of common principles by Churchill and Roosevelt in August 1941 and accepted five months later by the SU (and condemn Soviet policy)

*First: Their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;*

*Second: They desire to seek no territorial changes that so not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned;*

*Third: They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.*

* Because of the charter, Poland before and after Yalta became a symbol for most Americans not only of violation of a solemn international agreement but of the waning ability of GB, the SU and the US to work together.
* The government and people of the US were disturbed because the SU appeared to be moving to establish its own government in Poland without the participation of the UK and US 🡪 The US had no special interests in Poland but believed the Polish citizenry should be given the right through free elections to choose its own government and Poland should be **genuinely** independent.
* Arthur Schlesinger Junior (American historian 1917-2007): “While the West saw the point of Stalin’s demand for a ‘friendly government’ in Warsaw, the American insistence on the sovereign virtues of free elections … created an insoluble problem in those countries like Poland (and Rumania) where free elections would almost certainly produce anti-Soviet governments.”
* “The Soviet Union, feeling itself menaced by the American idea of self-determination and the border-lands diplomacy to which it was leading … began to fulfil its security requirements unilaterally.” (Gardner, Schlesinger Jr., Morgenthau, 1970: 64-65)
* Although Roosevelt had urged Stalin to abstain from any major decision on Poland before the Yalta Conference and in particular not to recognise the Lublin group since only a small part of Poland had been liberated, Stalin proceeded on the last day of 1944 to declare it the Provisional Government of Poland.
* The fate of Poland and the limitations on the course of American action planted the seeds of guilt in the Unites States and led on to McCarthyism.
* “In 1945, the Yalta Conference as hailed as the dawn of a new era of peace and understanding. Five years later, it symbolized, for many people in the United States, the folly of trusting or seeking to reach accommodation with the Soviet Union.” (Gardner, Schlesinger Jr., Morgenthau, 1970: 65)
* Revisionist historians (Athan Theoharis) found that criticism of Yalta was based as much on the desire of conservatives to discredit Roosevelt as on the short comings of his policies at Yalta or upon wholly unexpected Soviet accusations.
* 1 August 1944, the Polish Home Army (made of anti-Communist forces in Warsaw) launched an attack against German troops which the Soviets refused to support leading to a 62 days fighting and loss of 15,000 of their 40,000 troops.
* McNeill: “It seems clear that Stalin resolved to crush utterly and permanently the organization which the Polish Government in Exile had created within Poland, and he chose to use the situation which had developed in Warsaw as a means toward his end.”
* The failure to find a peaceful solution to the Polish question in the first seven months of 1944 was a turning point in East-West relations.
* The most that the negotiations at Yalta could achieve was a superficial appearance of harmony. “Despite all later efforts to mend the breach … the bad blood created in Poland in 1944 proved the beginning of the end.” (McNeill, 1953: 433)
* The second event was the attempt by Churchill and Eden to persuade Polish leaders to accept the Curzon Line as Poland’s post-war boundary.
* Oct 1944 Churchill travelled to Moscow to review with Stalin 🡪 Roosevelt cannot attend because of 1944 elections.
* Churchill urged that Mikolajczyk be summoned to Moscow.
* The London Poles were willing to grant one fifth of the positions in a new Polish government to Communists but refused to accept the Curzon Line (Molotov pointed out that at Teheran Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt had accepted that line as the frontier defining Poland’s post-war boundaries).