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March 6, 1944THE ORIGINS OF THE CURZON LINEI. THE EASTERN BOUNDARY OF CONGRESS POLAND

From 1815 to 1912 the administrative boundary which separated Congress Poland from the rest of the Russian Empire followed the eastern boundaries of the guberniye of Vilna, Grodno and Volyn. For the most part it was well-defined by rivers, following the Niemen from the border of East Prussia to the city of Grodno, the Bobr (Biebrza) and the Narev to a point near Byelostok (Bialystok), then running southwest to the Bug and following that river upstream to the border of Galicia. This boundary roughly separated Polish-populated territory from areas with Lithuanian, White Russian or Ukrainian majorities. However, because of the inter-mingling of ethnic groups in this region, it could not be termed a clear-cut line of separation between ethnically Polish and non-Polish territory. In the north (guberniya of Suwalki) a solidly Lithuanian-populated area, and in the south (region of Kholm) an area with a large Ukrainian population, probably a majority, were left within Congress Poland. On the other hand, a considerable Polish population lived in districts lying to the east of the boundary in Russia proper, where it was strong in the cities (especially in Vilna, Grodno and Bialystok) and in certain of the rural districts.

II. TERRITORIAL CHANGES DURING THE WORLD WAR

In March 1915 the Russian Government altered the boundary of Congress Poland by separating from it the district of Kholm, a step condemned by Polish spokesmen as alienation of territory which had been an integral part of Poland for centuries. By the end of that year, however, the disposition of the whole of Congress Poland, including Kholm, was in the hands of the Central Powers, whose armies had driven out the Russians. The Imperial Russian Government attempted to gain Polish support in 1916 by announcing plans to create an autonomous Polish state "under the sceptre of the Russian sovereigns", which was to include "all Polish territories". Almost simultaneously, in November 1916, Germany and Austria proclaimed the establishment of a "hereditary and independent" Polish state. It was announced that "the more precise regulation of the frontiers ... remains reserved until after the war" but it was presumed that they would be those of the Congress Kingdom, including Kholm.

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The secret Austro-German agreement, however, upon which the proclamation was based, provided for the exclusion of the guberniya of Suwalki, which had a Lithuanian majority, from the new Poland.

In February 1918 the Central Powers made a further change when they ceded to the Ukrainian Republic, by a treaty signed at Brest-Litovsk, the district of Kholm. The Austrian Government hoped that this concession to Ukrainian nationalism would increase the chances of getting the food supplies which Austria so desperately needed. The Regency Council of the Kingdom of Poland, which the Central Powers had recently established but had not allowed to be represented at Brest-Litovsk, publicly protested against the cession of Kholm to the Ukraine; because of this alienation of territory which they held to be Polish, whatever remaining faith Polish leaders had in the Central Powers evaporated.

In August 1918 the Soviet Government decreed the "irrevocable" annulment of the treaties made by the Russian Empire partitioning Poland, "in view of their inconsistency with the principle of self-determination and with the revolutionary feeling of justice of the Russian people, which has recognized the inalienable right of the Polish people to its independence and unity.

III. THE QUESTION OF POLAND'S EASTERN FRONTIER AT THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

1. Polish Claims

The Polish case was presented to the Entente powers during 1917 and 1918 by Roman Dmowski, President of the Polish National Committee, which was recognized by them in 1917 as "an official Polish organization". In January 1919 Dmowski and Paderewski became Polish delegates to the Peace Conference. Memoranda presented to Balfour, Wilson and others by Dmowski proposed that Poland's eastern frontier should run roughly as follows: northward from the Dniester River passing to the east of Kamenets Podolsk, following the Horyń and Slucz Rivers through the region of the Pripet Marshes, passing to the east of Minsk, Borisov and Polotsk, then turning westwards to pass to the north of Dünaburg (Dvinsk), reaching the Baltic Sea at a point north of Libau. The Poles thus claimed extensive Russian territories beyond the boundary of Congress Poland inhabited chiefly by Ukrainians, White Russians and Lithuanians. All Lithuanian-inhabited territory was included, with the idea

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that the historic union of Poland with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania should be revived in modern form. Except in the southeast, this proposed line was almost as far east as the Polish frontier of 1772, before the first partition.

The Poles based their claims chiefly on the historic association of these borderland regions and peoples with Polish culture and with the Polish state. Although these peoples were not Poles, neither were they Russians, the Polish spokesmen contended, and since none of them was capable of independent political existence, their best guarantee lay in union or federation with Poland. In a formal statement before the Heads of Delegations at the Peace Conference in January 1919 Dmowski suggested that the frontier of 1772 be taken as the legal starting point for discussion of the territorial settlement in the east, but conceded that it might be modified so that "a large portion" of historically Polish territory would remain under Russia. He did not lay claim to Lithuania or to the Ukraine as parts of Poland but held that they should be united in some way with Poland, especially since anarchy or despotism was likely to reign in Russia for some time to come. On May 23, 1919 a resolution of the Polish Diet made the same claims and declared them to be consistent with the principle of self-determination.

2. The American Position at the Beginning of the Peace Conference; Recommendations of "The Inquiry"

In 1918 the House "Inquiry" undertook a study of the eastern limits of the "indisputably Polish" territory which, according to President Wilson's thirteenth Point, should be included within the future independent Polish state. Because of the unreliability of the Russian census statistics (census of 1897), it was decided that only a "minimum" boundary could be described and that any judgment as to the ethnic composition of the population in areas lying to the east of such a boundary would have to be postponed until more evidence should become available. The memorandum, written by Dr. Robert H. Lord and others, proposed a minimum boundary which ran approximately as follows: southwards from the boundary of the guberniya of Suwalki along the eastern boundaries of the districts (uyezdy) of Sokolka, Volkovysk 1/ and Bielsk, all in the guberniya of

Grodno,

1/ In another recommendation covering only the northeastern frontier of Poland, Dr. Lord suggested the inclusion of Sokolka, Bialystok and Bielsk within Poland, making no mention of Volkovysk. Such a frontier would be more reasonable ethnologically and geographically than one which jutted eastward to include Volkovysk in Poland.

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Grodno, then following the line of the Bug River to the border of Eastern Galicia. The Kholm area, where the Russian census of 1897 showed Ukrainian-speaking majorities in four of the eight districts, was included within Poland because of its large Catholic majority ("and here Catholic and Pole seem to be nearly identical terms"), and because the authors of the memorandum were convinced that the census statistics for this area were clearly false. The same considerations accounted for the decision to include in Poland the uyezdy of Bielsk, Sokolka and Volkovysk, where the census showed White Russian-speaking majorities; many of the White Russians were Roman Catholics. Apart from this consideration it was thought necessary to include this area within Poland in order to establish a "fairly broad territorial connection" between Poland and Lithuania and to leave open the possibility of an eventual federal or tariff union between them.

The "Inquiry" memorandum on Poland's eastern frontier conceded that a boundary following the suggested "minimum line" would be "extremely unsatisfactory to most Poles", since some districts to the east of it, particularly in the region of Vilna, had a substantial Polish population and since strong ties existed between Poland and all the debatable territories in the east. The memorandum suggested that plebiscites, or a careful investigation on the spot by an international commission, might be held in the guberniye of Grodna and Vilna and in the western parts of Minsk and Volyn, thus holding open the possibility of eastward revision along the whole length of the suggested line.

The "Interpretation of the Fourteen Points", prepared at the request of Colonel House by Frank I. Cobb, editor of the New York World, and Walter Lippmann, Secretary of "The Inquiry", and submitted to President Wilson in October 1918, stated that "on the east, Poland should receive no territory in which Lithuanians or Ukrainians predominate". It emphasized the President's word "indisputably" in his reference to Polish territory, and envisaged the taking of an impartial census before the drawing of the frontiers.

The Report (or "Black Book") which the Intelligence Section of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace submitted to the President and to the American Plenipotentiaries on January 21, 1919, contained the final recommendations of "The Inquiry". It took note of the impossibility of settling finally the territorial problems involving Russia's western frontier so long as the Bolshevik government remained in power. The Report did, however, recommend an eastern boundary for Poland which ran as follows: from a point on the southern border of Galicia near the source of the San River, northwards to the southern

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border of the province of Lublin, then following that boundary eastwards to the Bug River and northwards along the Bug to Wlodawa, then northeastwards to include Pinsk and a large part of the Pripet Marshes region within Poland, northeastwards along the Sczara and Niemen Rivers, leaving Grodno outside Poland, then across the guberniya of Suwalki, leaving to Poland its two southeastern districts, to the border of East Prussia. Except for the salient represented by the Wlodawa-Pinsk-Grodno triangle, where it departed sharply from the ethnic limits of "indisputably Polish" territory, this line was nearly identical with the line later adopted by the Peace Conference as the provisional eastern frontier of Poland, which has come to be known as the "Curzon Line". The boundary recommended by the American experts left outside Poland virtually all territory with a Ukrainian majority, both in Eastern Galicia and in former Russian territory; but the Ukrainian-inhabited area between this line and the line of the Zbrucz and Horyn Rivers--which Poland eventually acquired by the Treaty of Riga--was considered as a "possible addition to Poland" as a self-governing province, but only in case the Ukraine should not give evidences of vitality as an independent state. It was recommended that a Ukrainian state be established "provided Ukrainian nationalism is strong enough to justify that decision". It was also recommended that encouragement be given to the reunion of the Ukraine with a federalized or genuinely democratic Russia.

The zone of mixed and uncertain ethnic character in which the White Russians, who were not considered ready for political independence, were in the majority, the Report proposed to divide between Poland and Lithuania. If the latter should remain independent of Russia and should agree to federal union with Poland, the line along the Sczara and the Niemen was recommended as the most suitable boundary between the two states; Lithuania would then be a sizeable state, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Pripet River and including the cities of Vilna, Grodno, Nowogródek, and Minsk. It was pointed out that if a federal union between Poland and Lithuania proved impossible, this boundary would certainly be unsatisfactory to the Poles and should be modified, after a careful census by an impartial commission, so as to coincide with the fairest ethnic dividing line between Polish and Lithuanian populations.

3. General Principles for the Determination of Poland's Eastern Frontier

At the Peace Conference the study of Poland's frontiers was referred to the Commission on Polish Affairs, on which

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each of the five principal Allied and Associated Powers was represented. ^{1/} The Commission felt that it would be difficult to come to any decision in regard to Poland's territorial claims in the east without hearing all sides of the case, and at that particular time it was not certain what states would border Poland on the east. The Commission hesitated to give hearings to delegations claiming to represent Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, or the Ukraine, since their governments were not recognized by the Allied Powers. Since no common policy in respect to Russia had been arrived at, it was agreed that the Peace Conference could not assign to Poland any Russian territory not specifically renounced by a recognized government of Russia. As the Kerensky government, on March 30, 1917, had declared its willingness to recognize "an independent Polish State composed of all regions inhabited by a population of Polish majority", it was agreed by the Commission on Polish Affairs that a line could be drawn marking the eastern limit of territory about whose Polish character there was no doubt.

On March 29, 1919, the Commission adopted the following "Principles for the Determination of the Eastern Frontier of Poland":

1. The Declaration of the Provisional Government of Russia which recognized the "creation of an independent Polish State, constituted of all regions inhabited by populations of Polish majority", is considered as serving as the basis for the actual determination of the eastern frontier of Poland across the territories of the former Russian Empire.
2. This frontier will be drawn according to the same principles on which the western Polish frontiers were based. (Summarily, that primary consideration be given to ethnic factors, and that secondary consideration, be given to religious, economic

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^{1/} Jules Cambon was Chairman of the Commission. The American representative was Dr. Isaiah Bowman. On April 10 his place was taken by Dr. Lord. Dr. Bowman returned as principal American representative in November. Thus, throughout the greater part of the period in which the Commission had under consideration the eastern frontiers of Poland, it fell to Dr. Lord to present the American viewpoint.

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and administrative factors; and that account be taken of the exposed situation of Poland between Germany and Russia and of the need for strengthening its defensive frontiers).

3. Regions where there is doubt regarding the ethnic character and the wishes of the population cannot, for the moment, be attributed to the Polish State.

As a fourth principle the Commission proposed that it should designate certain territories located east of the line which would be drawn on the above principles, where an inquiry should be made as to the ethnic and religious character and the wishes of the population; that this inquiry should be made on the spot if possible; and that a definitive solution should be given to the question of the eastern frontier of Poland as soon as a Russian government, with whom the Allies could deal, was established.

Early in April an Inter-Allied Mission to Poland, on which Dr. Lord and General F.J. Kernan represented the United States, returned from Warsaw to Paris. Its report to the Peace Conference recommended that the eastern frontiers of Poland be determined when circumstances permit, "on the basis of ethnographic considerations and of the wishes of the populations, without such frontiers in any case being more restricted than those of the old Congress Poland". This last recommendation concerning the boundary of Congress Poland was not accepted by the Peace Conference, since it had been decided that the greater part of the guberniya of Suwalki should not go to Poland.

4. The Tracing of a "Minimum Boundary" for Poland

The task of fixing a line conforming to the agreed principles was left to the Sub-Commission specially created to study this problem. Its Chairman was General Le Rond (France), and its other members were Dr. Lord (United States), Mr. Paton (British Empire), and Marquess della Torretta (Italy). The Sub-Commission had little difficulty despite the British delegate's reluctance to concede the southeastern portion of the district of Suwalki to Poland, in reaching agreement on the extreme northern part of the line, from the frontiers of East Prussia to Grodno, where it separated Polish-speaking from Lithuanian-speaking territory, nor on the central part, where the Bug River, from Mielnik to Opalin, was considered the line of ethnic separation between Polish and non-Polish populations. All but one member favored following the line

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of the Bug from Opalin to the border of Eastern Galicia, but since the British delegate was of the opinion that some districts west of the Bug (e.g. Tomaszów and Hrubieszów) were more Ukrainian than Polish in population, consideration of this sector of the line was postponed until the status of Eastern Galicia should have been clarified.

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The most controversial part of the line was the sector between Mielnik on the Bug and Grodno on the Niemen. Dr. Lord favored leaving the districts of Sokolka, Bialystok and Bielsk to Poland. He admitted that the statistics showed a White Russian majority in Sokolka and in the eastern parts of all three districts, but argued that White Russians were Catholics, that their dialect was partly Polish, and that "Polonization" was making rapid progress among them. He felt that Poland should be given the benefit of any doubt in this area, since the restoration of order in Russia was not likely to be effected for a long time. General Le Rond also favored a "generous" solution for Poland in this region. Mr. Paton, however, objected to any departure from ethnic criteria, and suggested a line cutting through the three districts, passing to the west of the cities of Sokolka and Bielsk and to the east of Bialystok.

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The Sub-Commission finally agreed, on March 27, that Grodno should be left outside Poland but that Poland should have the city of Bialystok and the railway line from there to the junction five kilometers southwest of Grodno, and that the boundary should be drawn somewhere between the eastern boundaries of the districts of Sokolka, Bielsk and Bialystok and a line running parallel to the Bialystok-Grodno railway about five kilometers to the east of it.

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The British representative then proposed that, since the population of this whole area seemed clearly more White Russian than Polish, the boundary should run as close to the railway as possible, all the way from Grodno to the Bug River, leaving the cities of Bialystok and Bielsk to Poland and leaving the junction of Kleszczeli, situated south of Bielsk on the line from Brest-Litovsk to Volkovysk, to Russia. At this point Dr. Lord proposed that the Sub-Commission abandon too close adherence to the line of ethnic separation, which was a scant 70 miles from Warsaw, in order to take account of Poland's "imperious strategic necessities", in accordance with the principles upon which Poland's western frontier was based. "Doubtless these necessities could be neglected", he said, "if it was a question merely of tracing a provisional frontier; but since the other Delegations believe that the frontier

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which the Sub-Commission is studying will perhaps be definitive, Poland should not be deprived of all protection against Russia by having the Russian frontier only 70 miles from Warsaw". Torretta, representing Italy, said that he considered the boundary under discussion to be the definitive frontier. Dr. Lord, on being asked whether, in taking the view that it was to be only provisional he was speaking in the name of the American Government, replied that he was giving only his personal opinion. The chairman, General Le Rond, then remarked that, at the moment, it was impossible to say whether the line should be a provisional or the definitive frontier, and that only events could decide that question. The discussion then continued, with much greater attention paid to the strategic and economic aspects of the lines under consideration.

Dr. Lord suggested giving Poland the advantage of the defensive barrier formed by the Swislocz River and the Bialowieska Forest. General Le Rond immediately supported Lord's suggestion as a good solution for military and economic reasons and a natural geographic boundary. He admitted that the British proposal, which the Italian member favored because it was fairer on both ethnic and strategic grounds to "our ally, Russia," was a much better ethnic line, but argued that the population in this region was so mixed and had so little national consciousness that ethnic considerations should not be decisive. Lord and Le Rond, after rejecting Paton's proposal of a compromise line following the Swislocz but in its southern portion leaving the Brest-Litovsk-Volkovysk railway entirely on the Russian side, finally persuaded their British and Italian colleagues to accept the Swislocz-Bialoweska line, to avoid a lasting disagreement. The line adopted, in the sector between the Niemen and the Bug Rivers, ran as follows:

From the confluence of the Niemen with the Lososna, following the Lososna to a point about two and one-half kilometers upstream, then taking an approximately south-easterly direction, cutting the Grodno-Kuznitsa railway at a point 500 meters north-east of the junction of Kielbasin, turning south-south-east to reach the Likówka River at a point one kilometer west of Baranowo; following the Likówka and Laszanka Rivers to the Swislocz River; following the Swislocz upstream to a point four kilometers north of Yalówka; following a line to be traced on the ground reaching the Hainówka-Swislocz railway at the point where that railway is cut by the Narew-Narewka road, running towards the southwest so as to reach the north-south forest road which passes about two kilometers west of

Skupowo;

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Skupowo; following that forest road southwards to the point where it meets the Lesna-Prawa River; turning towards the south-west and following a line to be determined on the ground cutting the Brest-Litovsk-Bielsk railway at the point where the Visoko-Litovsk-Kleshcheli road crosses that railway (about 10 kilometers south-south-east of Kleshcheli), reaching the administrative boundary between the districts of Bielsk and Brest-Litovsk at the point where it forms an acute angle nine kilometers north-east of Mielnik, leaving to Poland the villages of Wolka, Pieszcátka, Stolbce and Wierpole, and following that administrative line to the Bug River.

On April 14 the Sub-Commission submitted to the Commission on Polish Affairs its recommendation on the eastern frontier of Poland from the border of East Prussia to Opalin, a town on the Bug River due east of Kholm. Determination of the frontier south of that point was postponed because of the uncertainty over the status of Eastern Galicia. In describing the application of the chosen principles to special areas, the Sub-Commission's report explained that between Grodno and Brest-Litovsk the recommended line ran a certain distance to the east of the limit within which the Poles were known to have a compact ethnic majority, in order to secure adequate communication between central Poland and the Polish part of the Suwalki district, and to give Poland a "satisfactory defensive frontier" following a natural geographic line of division. The report stated that the line of the Bug, between Brest-Litovsk and Kholm (Opalin) had been taken as the frontier because the whole region to the west of it was historically and economically connected with Poland, and the Ukrainian element in the population was comparatively small and had little national consciousness; in addition, the Bug was the only natural defense line in this area. The recommended line left the fortresses of Brest-Litovsk and Grodno outside Poland, although two of the outlying forts of the former stronghold were situated west of the Bug and therefore fell to Poland; the Grodno fortifications situated west of the Niemen were left to Russia. In the case of both cities, the Sub-Commission based its decision on both economic and strategic considerations, trying to balance the need for unimpeded navigation on the two rivers and for the free economic development of the two cities against the strategic value of the two fortresses to Russia.

The Commission on Polish Affairs accepted without modification the recommendation of the Sub-Commission and

embodied

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embodied it and its own Report No. 2 to the Supreme Council (April 22, 1919). The recommended frontier diverged from the boundary of Congress Poland in the former Russian guberniya of Suwalki, of which only 4,400 square kilometers, with a population of 213,000 (census of 1897) fell on the Polish side of the recommended line; the rest was expected to become part of Lithuania. Between the Niemen and the Bug Rivers the recommended frontier included in Poland some 10,670 square kilometers of the guberniya of Grodno, which had been outside the boundary of Congress Poland. According to the census of 1897, this area was inhabited by 138,000 Poles, 179,000 White Russians, 80,000 Ukrainians, 26,000 Russians, and 109,000 Jews; only 241,000 Poles inhabited the areas to the east of the recommended line.

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In August 1919, after the Supreme Council's decision that Eastern Galicia should have provisional autonomy under Polish sovereignty, the Sub-Commission for the Study of the Eastern Frontier took up the question of the sector between Kholm and the northern border of Galicia. The American, French, and Italian members pronounced categorically in favor of the line of the Bug, which had the advantage of being a clear geographical frontier. Dr. Lord stated that it was impossible to trace an ethnic boundary in this confused region, since there had never been a national movement among the Ukrainians living west of the Bug in the Kholm area, he saw no reason to separate from Poland a territory intimately bound to it for 600 years. The British member, Col. Kisch, felt that there were serious objections to this line, since the population in the southeastern part of the province of Lublin (the Kholm area) was largely Orthodox and Ukrainian-speaking, as was the majority of the population in the neighboring regions of Volhynia and Eastern Galicia. Kisch proposed a line which would leave the Bug below Hrubieszów and run southeast to Belzec, the northern terminus of the line which had been accepted as the western boundary of Eastern Galicia. The other members, stressing the unreliability of the population statistics and the known fact that great numbers of Ukrainians had migrated eastward from the Kholm area during the War, refused to retreat from their position. Kisch reluctantly abandoned his proposal, and the line of the Bug was unanimously accepted (August 27, 1919). It was in turn accepted by the Commission on Polish Affairs, which, in its Reports No. 2 (April 22) and No. 6 (September 1), recommended to the Supreme Council the entire agreed line running from the border of East Prussia to the border of Eastern Galicia.

5. Character

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5. Character of the Proposed Boundary

Report No. 2 stated that the Commission had unanimously decided: 1) "to propose the described line as the eastern frontier of Poland" from East Prussia to Kholm, and 2) "to draw the attention of the Peace Conference" to the following proposals, made in another part of the Report: a) that in certain territories situated to the east of that frontier, to be determined by the Commission, an investigation should be made as to the extreme linguistic and religious character and the wishes of the population; b) that this investigation should be made, if possible, on the ground; c) that a definitive settlement be made of the question of the eastern frontier of Poland as soon as a Russian government with whom the Powers would deal on this question should be established."

Report No. 6 stated that the Commission had unanimously decided that it would be impossible, in the near future, to take any steps with regard to the attribution of the territories of mixed populations situated east of the recommended line, since they were then occupied by Polish troops engaged in fighting Bolshevism and since the Supreme Council had already laid down the principle that the final frontier was a matter to be settled either by direct agreement with a recognized Russian Government, set up by a democratically elected constituent assembly, or through arbitration by the League of Nations. The report then proposed that the recommended line be accepted as the provisional eastern frontier of Poland, with the understanding that to the other territories, situated east of it, might in the future be joined to Poland. It was proposed that full Polish sovereignty be recognized over territories situated west of the line.

This position was the one which Dr. Lord, American representative on the Commission and on the Sub-Commission, had consistently maintained. He was convinced that there were solid blocs of territory with Polish majorities situated east of the provisional frontier, and he felt that the inhabitants of the districts with White Russian majorities should be given an opportunity to choose union with Poland. However, during the discussions in the commissions it was never clear to the participants whether or not the line they were drawing would become the permanent frontier. The British and Italian representatives certainly did not consider any territory east of the line as ever likely to become part of Poland. They actually favored a final frontier running west of the line finally recommended as a provisional frontier, and only accepted the latter line in

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order to avoid a complete deadlock and because of the strong pleas made in its behalf by the French and American representatives on strategic and economic grounds, i.e. on grounds valid for the location of a definitive, not a provisional, frontier. When the Sub-Commission departed from the ethnic line in the Bialystok and Kholm areas in order to give Poland a better frontier from the standpoint of defense and of communications, its members were thinking in terms not of a provisional boundary but of a permanent Russo-Polish frontier. The net result was that Poland was given a carefully worked out strategic frontier, which followed marked geographical features: the Suwalki Lakes, the Niemen, the Swislocz and the Bug. It should be noted, therefore, that while the Report of Commission specifically proposed the line as a provisional frontier, all members of the Commission considered it to lie somewhat further to the east than the line to which Poland was entitled on ethnic grounds, on the basis of the available statistics. It is for this reason that British statesmen, in 1919 and in the Polish-Soviet crisis of 1920, consistently thought of the recommended line as the frontier of "ethnic Poland" and regarded Polish claims to further territory as unjustified and based on the desire to dominate non-Polish peoples. 1/

6. Position of the Supreme Council on the Russian-Polish Frontier

In considering the line recommended by the Commission on Polish Affairs as the eastern boundary of territory which should be immediately included within Poland, the Supreme Council had to take into account its general policy towards Russia. In a note sent to Admiral Kolchak on May 27, 1919, the Allied and Associated Powers had stated that the object of their policy was to restore peace within Russia by enabling the Russian people to resume control of their own affairs, and "to restore peace along its frontiers by arranging for the settlement of disputes in regard to the boundaries of the Russian state and its relations with its neighbors through the peaceful arbitration of the League of Nations." The experience of the last few months had convinced them that it was not possible to attain those ends by

dealing

1/ A census taken by German military authorities in 1918 and the official Polish census of 1931 tended to confirm the conviction of Dr. Lord that districts with Polish majorities extended continuously from Bialystok all the way to Vilna, and that the Commission's recommended line was therefore not the true frontier of "ethnic Poland".

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dealing with the Soviet Government. They therefore agreed to give assistance to Kolchak and his associates, upon certain conditions, one of which was that Russia recognize the independence of Poland, and that in the event that the Russo-Polish frontiers could not be settled by agreement, the matter be referred to the arbitration of the League of Nations.

From this statement of policy it seems clear that the Allied and Associate Powers did not intend to make any final decision on Poland's eastern frontier or to prejudice Russia's territorial rights in any way until the return of Russia to the family of nations. The "minimum frontier" proposal of the Commission on Polish Affairs put that question squarely before the Supreme Council.

On September 25, 1919, the Supreme Council accepted the conclusions of Reports Nos. 2 and 6 submitted by the Commission. Under-Secretary Polk, the American representative, stated specifically that he approved the proposals of the Commission and concurred in the Council's decision. The Council thus decided that it alone, without the participation of Russia, had the right to recognize Poland's sovereignty over former Russian territory lying west of the recommended line, on the grounds that the existing situation of uncertainty had become very difficult both for the Polish Government and for the populations concerned, and that there was no immediate prospect of the restoration of orderly democratic government in Russia. As for the territories situated to the east of the line, the Supreme Council agreed that the rights of both Poland and Russia should be considered reserved.

7. The Declaration of December 8, 1919

At first the Supreme Council decided to draw up an instrument to be signed by the Allied and Associated Powers and by Poland, to serve as an additional protocol to the Treaty of Versailles of June 28, 1919. The protocol was to establish Polish sovereignty over all territory lying west of the agreed line. Although it was generally agreed that this was merely a question of form, since the definite attribution of the territory to Poland had already been decided, Mr. Polk, representing the United States, announced in the meeting of November 29, 1919, that, without new instructions from his government, he could not sign a treaty which seemed to close the door to any future negotiations with Russia. Representatives of the other powers argued that it had already

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been unanimously decided in previous meetings of the Supreme Council that Poland should have sovereignty over all territory situated to the west of the line in question. Mr. Polk said that he accepted that decision but questioned the desirability of embodying it in a solemn treaty, since it was not intended to be the final frontier. The Council thereupon decided to abandon the treaty form and merely to notify the Polish Government of the decision by a simple declaration.

On December 2, with Mr. Polk present, the Supreme Council approved the following declaration: The Principal Allied and Associated Powers, recognizing that it is desirable as soon as possible to put a stop to the existing conditions of political uncertainty in which the Polish Nation is placed, and without pre-judging the provisions which must in the future define the eastern frontiers of Poland, hereby declare that they recognize the right of the Polish Government to proceed, according to the conditions previously provided by the Treaty with Poland of June 28, 1919, to organize a regular administration of the territories of the former Russian Empire situated to the West of the line described below:

From the point where the old frontier between Russia and Austria-Hungary meets the Bug River, down the Bug northwards to the point where it is met by the administrative boundary between the districts of Bielsk and Brest-Litovsk; following that boundary northwards to the point where it forms an acute angle about 9 kilometers north-east of Mielnik; north-eastwards along a line to be determined on the ground, leaving to Poland the villages of Wierpole, Stolbce, Piesczatka and Wolka, and cutting the Bielsk-Brest-Litovsk railway at the point where it crosses the road between Vysoko-Litovsk and Kleszczeli, reaching the Lesna-Prawa River at the point where it is crossed by the north-south forest road passing about 2 kilometers to the west of Skupowo; northwards along a line to be determined on the ground along the above-mentioned forest road to the point where the Narew-Narewka road cuts the Hainówka-Swislocz railway; north-eastwards along a line to be determined on the ground to a point 4 kilometers north of Jalówka where the river passing through that city joins the Swislocz River; following the Swislocz downstream, then the Laszanka and the Likówka upstream to a point about one and one-half kilometers west of Baranowo; north-north-westwards to a point on the Grodno-Kuznitsa

railway

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railway about 500 meters north-west of the junction of Kielbasin; north-west to a point on the course of the Lososna River about two and one-half kilometers south-west of its confluence with the Niemen; following the course of the Lososna downstream, then that of the Niemen downstream, then that of the Igorka upstream to its source, passing Warwieszki; west-south-westwards to a point on the course of the Chernohanya (Marycha) River near Sztudjanka, along a line on the left bank to be determined on the ground; the course of the Chernohanya upstream to a point about two and one-half kilometers east of Zelwa; northwards along a line to be determined on the ground to a point on the Berzniki-Kopciowa road situated two kilometers south-east of Berzniki; north-westwards along a line to be determined on the ground generally parallel to the line of small lakes situated between Berzniki and Zegary, about 2 kilometers to the east of these lakes; westwards to a point on Galadusya Lake about two kilometers north of Zegary, crossing that lake to its extreme north-western point, leaving the city of Punszk to Poland, and reaching the northern boundary of the province of Suwalki at the southernmost point of the salient about 7 kilometers north-west of Punszk; northwards along the boundary of the province of Suwalki to the point where it meets the old frontier between Russia and East Prussia.

The rights which Poland may be able to prove over the territories situated to the east of the said line are expressly reserved.

This declaration, dated December 8, 1919 and signed by Clemenceau, was communicated to the Polish Government.

The line of December 8, which later came to be known as the "Curzon Line", extended southward only as far as the northern border of Eastern Galicia. In the same meeting of December 2 in which it was adopted, the Supreme Council directed the Drafting Committee to prepare a draft treaty which would attribute Western Galicia to Poland and fix its boundaries. The Council had already, on November 21, laid down the line separating Western from Eastern Galicia. This line, together with that of December 8, formed a continuous line from the border of East Prussia to the border of Czechoslovakia. The Allied and Associated Powers had definitely decided that the territory

situated

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situated to the west of that line should become part of the Polish state, although it had not yet been assigned to Poland by formal treaty. They had definitely reserved their decision as to the disposition of the territories east of the line which was claimed by Poland. In the case of the former Russian territory, the decision was to await the restoration of a representative regime in Russia; in the case of the former Austrian territory (Eastern Galicia), where no Russian rights were recognized, the decision on the regime to be established was wholly in the hands of the Allied and Associated Powers, to whom Austria had ceded it.

IV. POLISH-RUSSIAN HOSTILITIES IN 1920 AND THE BRITISH ARMISTICE PROPOSALS

A. Poland's Attempt to Realize its Territorial Claims by Force

The Polish Government did not accept the line fixed by the Supreme Council, even as a "provisional frontier", since it laid claim to a frontier much further to the east, and at the time the Polish armies were in military occupation of areas situated east of the line which the Poles regarded as parts of Poland held by right, not territories occupied provisionally at the sufferance of the Allied Powers. The Polish leaders had had ample demonstration of the impotence of the Peace Conference to enforce its decisions in Eastern Europe. Setting forth their claim to the historic boundaries of 1772, they determined to obtain a "secure" frontier in the east by initiating a military offensive against the Bolsheviks. Pilsudski planned to support an "independent" Ukrainian state (including former Russian territory but not Eastern Galicia), which was to be federated with Poland and to serve as a buffer against Russia.

When the Poles announced their intention of holding plebiscites in the occupied territory east of the line of December 8, in order to justify the annexation of that territory to Poland, the Conference of Ambassadors, in February 1920, notified the Polish Government that this procedure was "open to grave objections", since only the Allied and Associated Powers had the right to decide when and how the consultation of the inhabitants of those areas should take place; any elections held under Polish occupation would be regarded as null and void and as having no influence whatever on the ultimate territorial settlement. The American observer at the meeting of the Conference of Ambassadors, Mr. Wallace,

stated

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stated that the United States "had no objection" to the communication of this statement to Poland. At about the same time the Allied Powers agreed that they could not accept the responsibility of advising Poland and other border states "to continue a war which may be injurious to their own interests; still less would they advise them to adopt a policy of aggression towards Russia; if however Soviet Russia attacks inside their legitimate frontiers the Allies will give them every possible support." Mr. Lloyd George informed the Poles that Poland could expect no assistance from Great Britain in holding territory beyond its ethnic limits, and intimated that he desired the Poles to make peace with the Bolsheviks. The French, however, who were persisting in their attempts to form a "defensive" anti-Bolshevik Alliance including Poland, Rumania and the Baltic nations, apparently did not discourage the Poles from undertaking a military offensive against Russia.

The Polish campaign in the spring of 1920 was at first successful, and the army of Pilsudski reached Kiev in May. But the Bolsheviks, having disposed of the "white" armies of Kolchak and Denikin, were able to turn the tide against the Poles and to drive them back rapidly toward Lwów and Warsaw. Poland then made an appeal to the western powers for assistance.

B. British Armistice Proposals to Poland and Russia, July 9-10, 1920

The British Government undertook to bring about an armistice between the Poles and the Bolsheviks, in order to avert the danger that the western powers would be drawn into war with Russia to save Poland's independence. On July 10, at the Conference of Spa, Lloyd George talked with Grabski, the Polish Premier, and secured his written agreement to sign an immediate armistice with Soviet Russia on the following terms: that the Polish army retire to the line fixed by the Peace Conference on December 9, 1919, while the Soviet armies would halt at a line 50 kilometers to the east of that line; that Vilna be handed over immediately to the Lithuanians and remain outside the zones to be occupied by the Poles and by the Bolsheviks; that in Eastern Galicia the Polish and Soviet armies each retire ten kilometers from the line which they had reached at the date of the armistice; that Poland send representatives to a conference at London, to be attended by delegates from Soviet Russia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania, and held under the auspices of the Peace Conference, with the object of negotiating a lasting peace between Russia and its

western

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western neighbors. The British Government agreed to make these same proposals to Soviet Russia and, in the event of Russian refusal and of the crossing of the stipulated line by the Russian armies, to render, in conjunction with Britains' allies, "all the assistance ... possible, consistent with their own exhaustion and heavy liabilities elsewhere".

The next day the British Government, proposed the same terms to the Soviet Government. In a note radioed to Moscow the proposed armistice line was described as "the line laid down last year by the Peace Conference as the eastern boundary within which Poland was entitled to establish a Polish administration, running approximately as follows: Grodno, Yalovka, Nemirow, Brest-Litovsk, Dorogusk, Ustilug, east of Grubeshov (Hrubieszów), Krilov, and thence west of Rawa Ruska, east of Przemysl to the Carpathians". North of Grodno the proposed armistice line departed from the line of December 8, in order to leave Lithuania outside both Polish and Bolshevik zones of occupation; it was to run north-eastwards to Vilna and Dvinsk and to be held by the Lithuanians, not by the Poles. The British note added that Great Britain "was bound ... to defend the integrity and independence of Poland within its legitimate ethnographic frontiers; if, therefore, Soviet Russia ... will not be content with the withdrawal of the Polish armies from Russian soil on the condition of a mutual armistice, but intends to take action hostile to Poland in its own territory, the British Government and its Allies would feel bound to assist the Polish Nation to defend its existence with all the means at their disposal."

C. Analysis of Great Britain's "Curzon Line" Proposal

While the line laid down by the Peace Conference, afterwards known as the Curzon line because the British note of July 11 was signed by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, was proposed only as an armistice line and not as a final frontier, the references to the withdrawal of Polish armies "from Russian Soil" (i.e., to the line of December 8) and to the defense of Poland "within its legitimate ethnographic frontiers" (i.e., extending no further east than the line of December 8) indicated that the British Government regarded that line as a proper basis for a final frontier settlement between Poland and Russia. Statements made at the time in Parliament by Lord Curzon and Lloyd George confirm that interpretation.

The definition

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The definition of the term "Curzon Line" is complicated by inconsistencies in the text of the British note of July 11. The line described in the note ran from Grodno all the way to the Carpathians, passing to the west of Eastern Galicia, in which Poland has been authorized to establish a civil administration. It was thus a combination of the line of December 8, which ran only through former Russian territory, and of the western border of Eastern Galicia adopted by the Peace Conference in November 1919 but not embodied in any formal treaty or declaration. 1/ However, the note also contained the same provision regarding Eastern Galicia which Grabski had accepted at Spa, namely that the armistice line in that province should be the line occupied by the two armies on the date of the conclusion of the armistice. The note was therefore ambiguous, and the term "Curzon Line" can be applied either to the line of December 8; between Grodno and the border of Eastern Galicia, or to that line plus the western boundary of Eastern Galicia, extending to the border of Czechoslovakia. 2/ The Soviet Government rejected the British armistice proposal, stating its intention of dealing directly with Poland. Its reply stated that Soviet Russia was willing to agree to a final frontier more favorable to Poland than the line of December 8, particularly in the regions of Bialystok

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- 1/ The Declaration of December 8, 1919 was accompanied by an official map on which a continuous line, extending to the Carpathians was shown. This map may have been responsible for the inconsistencies of Curzon's description of the proposed line.

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- 2/ The Soviet Government's proposal, on January 11, 1944, of "the Curzon Line accepted in 1919 by the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers" as the future frontier between Poland and Russia was accompanied by a map and a description of the line, in which the line is described by naming the same cities as had the British note of July 11, 1920, from Grodno to the Carpathians. Thus, in the Soviet view, the Curzon line would leave to the Soviet Union not only all former Russian territory lying to the east of the line of December 8, 1919, but also the whole of Eastern Galicia, which never was a part of imperial Russia but was incorporated into the U.S.S.R. in 1939. The Soviet statement that this line was adopted by the Peace Conference as the final frontier and confirmed as such by the Conference of Spa is erroneous. (See Izvestiya, January 13, 1944)

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and Kholm. ^{1/} Curzon's second note, sent on July 20, mentioned the Soviet Government's willingness to concede to Poland a final frontier not less favorable than "the ethnographic frontier originally suggested by the Supreme Council", and stated the British Government's desire that the Polish-Russian frontier correspond, as far as possible, to the wishes of the populations concerned. The note repeated the threat that the crossing of the proposed armistice line by the Soviet armies would result in a decision by Great Britain and its allies to give to Poland the aid which they had promised in that event.

D. Poland's Military Victory and the Establishment of the Riga Line

The Soviet Government ignored the British warnings, while its armies crossed the Curzon line late in July and marched on Warsaw. The proposed conference in London never took place, and the Polish-Russian territorial conflict was settled not under the auspices of the Allied Powers but directly between the two states immediately concerned. In August the Poles threw back the Russian army before Warsaw and in a counter-offensive drove them eastward far beyond the Curzon line.

The Western powers urged moderation on Poland, desiring the conclusion of peace as quickly as possible, but they made

no

^{1/} The Soviet Government must have been laboring under some misunderstanding concerning the line of December 8, since that line left the former Russian district of Bialystok and the whole of the Kholm area to Poland. There is some evidence that the Soviet leaders actually contemplated a final frontier which would leave Bialystok to Russia and thus would be less favorable to Poland than the line of December 8. Whatever generosity they showed toward Poland's boundary claims was the result of their conviction that, simultaneously with the entry of the victorious Soviet army, Poland would experience a proletarian revolution, and that the frontier between Soviet Russia and a Soviet Poland would have no political significance.

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no specific statements as to what line they favored as a final frontier. The British wished to avert another "imperialistic adventure" by Pilsudski: probably they would have preferred that the frontier approximate the Curzon line, but they left the matter entirely in the hands of the Poles and the Bolsheviks. The French, who all along had been more favorable to the Polish cause than had the British, had taken no responsibility for the armistice proposals, and had not desired to invite Soviet Russia's participation in a general peace conference, saw their policy vindicated by the Polish victory at Warsaw, to which the French General Weygand contributed, and by Poland's success, after the victory, in securing a peace which satisfied its territorial claims.

Receiving no consistent advice from the western powers, the Poles made peace on their own terms, to which the Bolsheviks, anxious for peace at any price, agreed. By the preliminary treaty of Riga, concluded on October 12, 1920, Poland secured a frontier over one hundred miles east of the Curzon line, running through regions which had clear White Russian and Ukrainian majorities. This frontier was confirmed by the final treaty of Riga on March 18, 1921.

E. The American Position During the Crisis of 1920

During the Soviet-Polish war the United States took a somewhat inconsistent position. On the one hand it desired the conclusion of peace, while on the other it maintained that no territorial settlement reached by the parties at war could have any validity, since the Bolsheviks could not speak for the interests of Russia. At the time of Pilsudski's invasion of the Ukraine in the spring of 1920, the United States Government informed Poland that it did not feel in a position to give any advice, since it could not promise aid to Poland in case its independence should be threatened by Soviet Russia. At the time of the Soviet advance toward Warsaw, however, the Department of State felt compelled to state its position regarding the territorial integrity both of Poland and of Russia.

On August 2, 1920 the Secretary of State re-stated the established policy of the United States in favor of the integrity of Poland, making no reference to its boundaries. At the same time he said that the United States, while sympathizing with the attempts to arrange a Polish-Soviet armistice, could not participate in a general European conference involving the recognition of the Bolshevik regime

or the

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or the "partition" of historic Russia without the consent of a representative Russian Government. Any such territorial settlement, in the Department's view, would inevitably fall when faced by "a restored Russia, resolved to vindicate its territorial integrity and unity". In a letter addressed to the Italian Ambassador in Washington (August 10), which was made public, the Secretary of State stated that the United States Government "would regard with satisfaction a declaration by the Allied and Associated Powers that the territorial integrity and true boundaries of Russia shall be respected", and added that these boundaries "shall properly include the whole of the Russian Empire," with the exceptions, along the western frontier, of Finland proper and of "ethnic Poland". All decisions of vital importance to Russia, "especially those concerning its sovereignty over the territory of the former Russian Empire", should be held in abeyance until a free and united Russia should return to the community of free nations.

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"Ethnic Poland" was not defined in the Secretary's letter, but in a subsequent statement of its policy (August 31); after the Battle of Warsaw, the Department held to the position adopted by the Peace Conference in the previous year, namely that Polish claims to territory east of the line of December 8 should be held in abeyance until Russia also could be heard; pending the determination of the final frontier, Poland should establish no civil administration east of that line and should accompany its military advance beyond it by a declaration of its determination to evacuate the occupied territory as soon as possible. At the same time it was hoped that Poland would take all reasonable measures to end the conflict with the Bolsheviks.

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When the Polish Government did conclude peace with the Bolsheviks at Riga, establishing a permanent frontier far to the east of the Curzon line, the Department of State made no comment. In the light of its recent utterances, it could hardly approve the boundary fixed at Riga, since to do so would have constituted recognition of the alienation of a part of historic Russia by the Bolsheviks. However, perhaps because the termination of the war was everywhere received with relief, no statement was issued expressing disapproval or refusing recognition of the treaty and of the new frontier, which the Ambassador of the Kerensky regime in Washington, in a note to the Secretary of State, condemned as "direct aggrandizement by annexation to Poland of Russian territory".

In a

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In a reply to a letter from Dr. Robert H. Lord, inquiring as to the Department's position on the eastern frontier of Poland, the view was stated that there was "a disinclination to make any hasty recognition of Polish sovereignty east of the so-called Curzon line"; however, the proviso made by the Supreme Council, that the rights which Poland may be able to establish over territories situated east of that line are expressly reserved, "has not been overlooked by the Department". Thus the American Government, throughout 1920, maintained its position that the determination of the Polish-Russian frontier must await the overthrow of the Bolsheviks; meanwhile neither the Curzon line nor any other line could be recognized as the final frontier. The United States thus held to the "ideal" policy long after Great Britain had abandoned it.

At no time in 1920 did the American Government make any pronouncement in favor of a particular line as the final frontier between Poland and Russia. However, the following conclusions on American policy on the boundary question seem justified by the evidence:

1. The Department of State did not recognize, approve, or acquiesce in the frontier laid down by the Treaty of Riga.
2. The Department regarded the Curzon line as the boundary of "ethnic Poland" but considered it subject to possible revision in Poland's favor if Poland's claims to any territories to the east of it should be recognized as valid, after an investigation of ethnic and other factors, by the Allied Powers, including a restored Russia.

V. THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE RIGA LINE BY THE ALLIED POWERS

A. The Decision of the Conference of Ambassadors, March 14, 1923

On March 14, 1923 the Conference of Ambassadors, at which Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan were represented, decided to give official recognition to the Polish-Soviet frontier established by the Treaty of Riga. No mention was made of the integrity of Russian territory, nor to the principle to national self-determination. As grounds for the decision it was stated that the line had been

determined

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determined between Poland and Russia, and that Poland already had given to the Allied Powers guarantees regarding the treatment of minorities within Poland.

By 1923 it had become clear to the British and French governments that the restoration of Russia to the family of nations would take place through the recognition, rather than through the overthrow, of the BolsheviK regime. There seemed to be no valid reason why a boundary which had been recognized as legal for over two years by the states directly concerned should not be given sanction by the Allied Powers. France had no hesitation in doing so, since the Riga frontier was eminently satisfactory to France's ally, Poland. Great Britain, once peace had been restored in eastern Europe, no longer maintained a direct interest in the boundary issues and was willing to accept as valid the existing boundary between Poland and Russia. While there may have been some tendency in official British circles to regard an ethnic frontier in the neighborhood of the Curzon line as having a greater chance of permanence than the Riga line, there was no practical political alternative to acceptance of the latter.

B. The Attitude of the United States

The United States did not participate in the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors, nor did it give any formal recognition of the boundary accepted as legal by the Allied Powers. This position was consistent with that of 1920, when the United States had refused to regard as final any settlement reached without the participation of a representative Russian government and without reference to the ethnic character and the wishes of the populations involved. In 1923, although the statements of policy made three years before were not repudiated, the American policy was put on different grounds, namely that the United States was not concerned with the merits of "purely European questions" such as boundary issues.

When certain practical matters, such as the administration of the immigration laws, called for a definition of policy, the Secretary of State informed the interested agencies that the United States "took cognizance of the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors, which was in harmony with the assertions of territorial sovereignty by Poland and effectively attributed to Poland the regions of Pinsk and Eastern Galicia". A circular instruction to diplomatic officers said that "it was the general policy of the Department

to avoid

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to avoid participating in purely European territorial adjustments and to accept such adjustments, when effected by the governments concerned, as facts with respect to which this Government was not called upon to express either approval or disapproval. Thus the United States recognized the Riga line as a fact but would make no further statement on the subject which might seem to involve a judgment on the merits of the question.

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