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PRESIDENT F.D. ROOSEVELT'S POLICY TOWARDS POLAND IN THE LIGHT OF THE MEMOIRS OF HIS SECRETARY OF STATE CORDELL HULL: SEPTEMBER 1938 – JUNE 1941

Słowa kluczowe: F.D. Roosevelt, Stany Zjednoczone, Polska, polityka zagraniczna, druga wojna światowa

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The United States' political stance towards Poland during World War II determined the post-war fate of the country. Although it was the expansionist policy of Joseph Stalin that finally brought Poland under the Soviet domination, President Roosevelt and his administration largely contributed to such a fate of the Polish state. The political line of the Washington administration of the time was consequent and homogenous. Largely, it stemmed from the fact that – throughout the whole war – one person, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, held the post of the president. Additionally, the main architect of the US foreign policy was one person too (Cordell Hull). Equally significant is that both had held their offices from 1933; that meant in 1939 they were both well-established politicians, confident in their skills, experience and familiar with the realities and practice of decision-making. Throughout the period, they also developed the unique skill of effective walking over the interventions of the US Congress in the President's policy at home and abroad – if such steps turned out necessary in their opinion.

The event that led to WWII more or less directly and sparked a more active American engagement in the European matters was the Munich Conference. At that time, Poland started appearing more frequently on the pages of Cordell Hull's memoirs. The wartime policies of FDR was exclusively subordinated to three main aims, i.e. heading off the economic crisis, strengthening the country and vaulting the US into prominence as the leader of

the post-war world. The strategy was consequently carried out and flexibly adapted to the ever-changing conditions and circumstances. However, can the same be said about Washington's approach to the issue of Poland? If so, the traces of that should be visible in the memoirs of Roosevelt's Secretary of State, Cordell Hull.

The primary sources on which the research is based are – as the basic sources – two volumes of Hull's memoirs (*The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*) and various other documents concerning the analysed events (such as American primary documents collections *The Avalon Project*; Ruhl Bartlett, *The Record of American Diplomacy: Documents and Readings in the History of American Foreign Relations* or *The American Presidency Project*). They provide pronounced picture of how the American policy towards the Polish interests was being constructed.

Between September 1938 and April 1945, the American approach to the issue of Poland can be divided into four phases. The first one, from the Munich Conference (29–30 September 1938) to the German aggression on Poland (1 September 1939). The second phase, between the invasion of Poland and Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union (22 June 1941). The third phase includes events happening from the German attack on Stalin to the one-sided Soviet breaking off the diplomatic relations with Poland (as a result of the outcome of the Katyn massacre scandal) on 26 April 1943. The fourth phase is the period between that moment and President Roosevelt's death on 12 April 1945. Indirectly though, the last phase lasted until 2 August 1945. Although, after 12 April 1945, the President was Harry Truman, and the Secretary of State was Edward Stettinius Jr, and (having Stettinius transferred – on 27 June 1945 – to the post of the US Ambassador to the freshly created United Nations) Joseph Grew, principally nothing changed as far as the Polish matters were concerned up until the end of the Potsdam Conference.

In the light of the above it occurs that the duo Roosevelt-Hull was largely responsible for shaping the US policy regarding Polish issues in the first three – fundamental – phases of the war; they also initiated the last stage. Whereas C. Hull's successor, Edward R. Stettinius Jr. wrapped up the previous arrangements made in Yalta and prepared the US for the Potsdam Conference, thus finishing the fourth stage.

The third and fourth phases (22 June 1941 – 2 August 1945) meant quite intensive development of the US-Polish relations and the Polish question's presence in Washington's policy. Yet, the American approach did not appear out of the blue. It was the events and decisions made before, especially in the first phase and the American lack of interest in the second phase that brought fruits like very inconvenient decisions and political-economic-strategic agreements for both the US and Poland. Those initial two phases prepared the foundation on which FDR and Stalin were to rest the post-war order of things; not only concerning Poland but much more broadly, for the next 45 years.

The paper is an attempt to analyse the conduct of President Roosevelt and his attitude to the broadly understood Polish question in the first two phases characterised above. The main perspective taken on in the research is the cooperation between Roosevelt and his Secretary of State. Therefore, Washington's decisions are filtered through Cordell Hull's perception of the matters.

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Cordell Hull's memoirs create – from the first glance – a clear vision of Poland. The index of the memoirs contains 58 direct references to Poland. In comparison to other countries, e.g. Argentina (68 references) or the Netherlands (55 references), the numbers provide a picture of the placement of Poland in the US politics between 1933 and 1944 (as that period the memoirs cover).

The first mention of Poland regards the Warsaw connection with the materiel trade with Britain that were disclosed in Gerald Nye Committee's investigation (1934–36) looking into the US involvement in arms trade with both the belligerent sides of the Great War¹. Generally though, in the initial period of C. Hull in office, Poland appears in the context of Warsaw's struggle with the Great War debt to America². The issue was a serious one; first, the Poles borrowed \$ 159 million. Among the European countries, Poland was the fifth biggest American debtor³. Thus, for Washington, the Polish failure to pay the money back and *de facto* no will of the Polish government to re-negotiate the issue, was a sign for FDR of little credibility of the Polish political elites and their poor reliability. Second, in that period, as C. Hull suggests, President Roosevelt did not engage himself in any matters connected with collaboration with Poland whatsoever; he ceded such things on the Department of State.

Another mention of Poland in C. Hull's memoirs concerns the Munich crisis. On the night from 25 to 26 September 1938, the President and his Secretary of State wrote a telegram to N. Chamberlain, E. Daladier, E. Benes and A. Hitler appealing to continue negotiations. The telegram was edited in the peace-loving and indistinctly circumlocutory tone – no facts, no details, lots of rhetoric and avoiding initiatives or responsibility:

I earnestly repeat that so long as negotiations continue, differences may be reconciled. Once they are broken off, reason is banished and force asserts itself. And force produces no solution for the future good of humanity⁴.

¹ Cordell Hull, *Memoirs of Cordell Hull*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1948, 380.

² *Ibidem*, 370.

³ *World War I: Recovery and Collapse*. Access: 10 March 2014, http://pages.ucsd.edu/~jlbroz/Courses/Lund/handouts/Lecture9_WWI_Recovery_Collapse.pdf.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 592.

From the Polish viewpoint, it seems significant that the Department of State sent the telegram to the US diplomatic missions in Poland and Hungary with instructions to communicate the contents to the Polish and Hungarian Ministries of Foreign Affairs, as – according to Hull – ‘Poland and Hungary had added their voices and menaces to the crisis by claiming sections of Czechoslovakia’⁵. That proves the US pro-Czechoslovak (actually pro-Czech) likings with no regard to the realities or historical-social circumstances. Nowhere does Secretary Hull mention the Czech attack on Zaolzie in 1919 and the overtaking the area by force, the Czech army brutality, crimes and arrests of innocent Poles⁶.

Furthermore, Hull completely disregards the social structure of Slovakia, where – paradoxically – the Slovaks were a minority (sic!) as compared to the (discriminated by Prague) Hungarians. That is the first sign that the Washington administration was set unfavourably to the ‘accomplices’ – as that was how Hull perceived Poland and Hungary – in dismantling Czechoslovakia, which enjoyed very good media coverage and liking and had good relations with the US in the interwar years⁷.

Hull states that Chamberlin, Daladier and Benes answered the telegram already 26 September 1938. To the chagrin of the President and Secretary of State, Berlin did not respond. C. Hull remains meaningfully silent as for the answers from Warsaw and Budapest – which did not arrive either. Secretary Hull openly declares that anyway Washington waited almost exclusively for the response from Hitler. His silence and the lack of reaction from Poland and Hungary – in the memoirs – seem quite suggestive in the sense of how FDR and Hull perceived both the countries.

On 30 September 1938, ‘As Poland’s and Hungary’s demands on Czechoslovakia for cession of territory still created a dangerous situation in Central Europe’⁸, the US Ambassador in Warsaw, Anthony J. Drexel Biddle suggested to the President he initiate another conference inviting Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. Hull, however, having consulted FDR, concluded that was not a good idea. To state that the justification for that was odd would be an understatement: ‘[...] since the Polish-Czech dispute had been discussed at Munich, we did not consider the suggestion favourably’⁹. Nonsensical the argumentation it was since no Polish representatives had taken part in the Munich Conference. Moreover, in the signed post-conference agreement, there is no mention [sic!] concerning either Poland or Polish-Czechoslovak or

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Por.: Andrea Orzoff: *Battle for the Castle: the Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1918–1948*. New York: OUP, 2011, Chapter 3.

⁷ Por.: Ladislav Cabada, Sarka Waisowa, *Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic in World Politics*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 22–31.

⁸ Ibidem, 596.

⁹ Cordell Hull, op. cit., 596.

Polish-Czech disputes¹⁰. Secretary Hull writes FDR ordered Ambassador Biddle inform the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck that FDR trusted that Poland would solve the disputes without resorting to military conflicts¹¹.

Also, C. Hull describes the reaction to the above of the Polish Ambassador to the US, Count Jerzy Potocki. Secretary Hull claims that Count Potocki stated that the Polish government strengthened in the terms of prestige, in which Hull allegedly doubted. Yet, which is most intriguing, from the account of C. Hull it turns out that once Count Potocki passed his declaration to Hull 'unfortunately, our conversation was interrupted before I had a chance to comment on this remark'¹². He does not inform, regrettably, what the circumstances of the incident were neither what the cause of such a sudden and violent disruption of the meeting was. Secretary Hull was not a politician of shy or timid conduct. It seems little likely that an ambassador of a remote and insignificant – from the US perspective – country, in the office of the US Secretary of State in the seat of the UD Department of State in the Capital of the US allowed himself the liberty of not allowing the host to speak And apart from all other issues, nowhere does Secretary Hull mention in his memoirs the Polish initiatives towards Czechoslovakia before Munich. Kazimierz Wierzbiański, the press *attaché* of the Polish legation in Prague in 1930s, concluded in 1985 in 'Przegląd Polski' that

In 1938, before the partition of Czechoslovakia, we proposed negotiations to Benes Unofficially, we sent an offer to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in which we suggested that if Czechoslovakia puts forward an initiative of [...] realistic military and political talks, Poland was not going to turn down such negotiations [...]. Ten days later [...], we received a refusal [...]. In exile in Jerusalem, I met one of my intermediaries responsible for the contacts with Benes; he confirmed that – quite simply – the Moscow did not agree¹³.

Thus, Warsaw could have justified concerns as for the loyalty of the Czechoslovaks in negotiations. It is unlikely that Washington was not aware of such initiatives; unless the Soviet infiltration of Prague was so advanced that Benes wanted to hide it from Roosevelt. Not to mention that Hull completely did not know or understand the history of the Cieszyn Silesia and one-sidedly represented the pro-Czech stance.

As for the effects of the Munich Conference, Hull and FDR – similarly to their British and French counterparts – had no illusions whatsoever; the

¹⁰ Neither the Munich Agreement nor the conference protocols mention any Polish-Czechoslovak settlements whatsoever. See: Yale Law School, the Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, *Munich Pact September 29, 1938*. Access: 5 March 2014, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/munich1.asp>.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Cordell Hull, *op. cit.*, 596.

¹³ *Zaolzie: Polski Biuletyn Informacyjny*. Nr 6, Cieszyn, 23 June 2004, access 22 March 2014, <http://www.zaolzie.org/zaolziearchiwum/biuletyn6/biuletyn20040623.htm>.

negotiations had just bought the West a little time and nothing more than that¹⁴. FDR proved it in his radio speech of 26 April 1939: 'It is becoming increasingly clear that peace by fear has no higher or more enduring quality than peace by the sword'¹⁵. Therefore, the events that came about after 1 September 1939 were no surprise at all to Washington.

The matter gathered dynamism when – 13 May 1939 – American *Chargé d'affaires* in Berlin, Alexander Kirk, telegraphed Washington informing that other diplomatic officers in the German capital expressed conviction that the Polish-German military confrontation was looming ahead¹⁶. 24 June 1939, the sources quoted by Kirk reported on the intensified activities of the *Wehrmacht* and constant military mobilisation in Germany. It gave the impression of ongoing preparations for war. Simultaneously, Kirk suggested Germany – in the logistic, military and political terms – is ready to attack Poland nay day soon¹⁷. Then, American were more than aware of the situation. Even more so, as the US Ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt, reported to Hull on 28 June 1939 on the information received from the Polish ambassador to France. The Pole claimed that the chances of the outbreak of Polish-German war by mid-August were like 80 to 100. Additionally, 30 June 1939, Bullitt passed to Secretary Hull the opinion of a French Foreign Office official, Alexis Leger, that – by mid-August 1939 – a crisis on a large scale was bound to happen¹⁸.

In the above situation, the US diplomacy was in a difficult situation. On the one hand, the investigation of G. Nye Committee set the society – and, first of all – the US Congress – reluctantly, if not against, the US engagement in the European matters. On the other hand, both the President and the Secretary of State realised the situation was becoming gravely serious and – maybe – the active US involvement in the conflict would become inevitable. C. Hull's memoirs offer no evidence that – at that time – the US decision makers had any idea how, and if at all, the conflict looming ahead in Europe could be headed off and – simultaneously – Poland could be saved from Hitler. FDR and Hull were also clueless as for what role the US should play in that highly complicated situation.

26 June, Polish Ambassador Count Potocki informed the Secretary of State that Poland was getting ready to fight in case of German aggression. The response from C. Hull proves how slight the American political strategy an initiative was in the case of the European war breakout.

¹⁴ Cordell Hull, op. cit., 650.

¹⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt: *135 – Radio Address to the Herald-Tribune Forum. October 26, 1938*. The American Presidency Project, access 26 February 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15557>.

¹⁶ Cordell Hull, op. cit., 651.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 652.

I commented to him that conditions in Europe were not favourable. Increasing signs and circumstances of an ominous nature were appearing. Sooner or later – no one could say when – with Europe so highly geared to a war basis, something very serious was likely to occur unless in the meantime steps were taken to avoid it¹⁹.

Nothing more nothing less as far as the American vision of how to avoid the outbreak of World War II is concerned. From the Polish perspective, it is important that FDR and C. Hull were regularly receiving reports concerning the pressure of Berlin on Poland²⁰. Moreover, Washington had reliable information proving that the assistance to Poland by Great Britain and France was deceptive. Hull claims that a potential embargo on Germany, based on the US Neutrality Acts, would only push Hitler to act even more energetically. Indeed, difficult it is to imagine how Berlin could behave in more dynamic a manner.

Additionally, the head of the German Foreign Affairs Ministry, Joachim von Ribbentrop, assured Hitler in his conviction – true, as the future was to demonstrate – that London and Paris were incapable of providing any effective assistance to Poland. Anyway, such assistance would have to be founded on the American supplies, which – except the legislative neutrality limitations in the US – could easily and effectively be blocked. The memoirs do not mention at any place that Americans passed such kind of information to the Polish side.

Another bit of evidence how insignificant – from the US perspective – Poland was in that first phase of the analysed events is the American treatment of the question of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 24 August 1939. In his memoirs, Hull openly claims that Washington had information concerning the extra Soviet-German arrangements regarding Poland and the Baltic states. He states that he kept persuading the Soviet Ambassador, Alexander A. Troyanovski, the war could be avoided once the US, Britain, France and the Soviet Union worked on peace altogether²¹. Yet, the American approach – first – ignored the situation, in which it was Hitler who ruled the game. The joint US-British-French-Soviet influence on his decisions was close to none by then. Second, in no way were Poland and/or the Baltic states taken into consideration by the potential peacemakers. Unfortunately for both the subjects of the pact, such an attitude of the US towards the issues of Central and Eastern Europe and the perception of Stalin as a regional ‘stabiliser’ was to remain unchanged up till 1945.

Cordell Hull, in his memoirs, frequently – having met foreign diplomats and politicians – more or less explicitly expanded on their arguments²². Interestingly enough, the arguments of the Polish side at that time are not

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem, 653.

²¹ Ibidem, 656–7.

commented on, sometimes not even outlined. That poses a question how much attentively the Secretary of State listened to those arguments; and then, how precisely and conscientiously he presented them to the President.

In August 1939 FDR appealed to Hitler and the President of Poland, Ignacy Mościcki, not to give up the negotiations²³. Hull claims he was sceptical about the initiative in terms of its real effectiveness. Yet, when Mościcki responded merely 24 hours later declaring Poland was ready for any sort of talk, Hitler remained silent. That was a unique moment when – in his memoirs from that period – Hull presents the Polish politicians not as a group of adventurous troublemakers, stubborn and preferring settlements by force (as it kept happening to C. Hull before and after²⁴); they are pictured as willing to cooperate and consequent. In the telegram to Mościcki and Hitler, Hull sees an FDR's attempt to make Germany the direct culprit of the war if the conflict were impossible to avoid²⁵. From the viewpoint of the international law, such a conclusion might have had substantial weight. Sadly, Polish assurance of the readiness to negotiate never received any American response. C. Hull states that 28 August 1939, President Mościcki complained to Ambassador Bullitt in France that FDR had not responded to his telegram. Hull's explanation seems less than weak – the Americans allegedly waited for the answer from Berlin. For Warsaw, that was yet another factor proving the little interest of the US in Poland²⁶.

On 5 August 1939, the US Ambassador to Paris, William C. Bullitt, advised the President to appeal to Poland, Germany, Britain, France and Italy to refrain from bombing civilian. The direct and practical effect of such an initiative was clearly none; still, a response from all parties but – presumably – Hitler, might put the belligerents in the desired in Washington light. FDR would be provided with a possibility to assist the 'civilised, and – in the public eye – would stigmatise the 'barbarians'²⁷.

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After the Nazi attack on Poland, on 1 September 1939, the first step of Washington was to send telegrams of the above content to the appropriate addressees. As presumed, Hitler scorned the appeal, which put Poland in the perspective of a victim, attacked and deserving help²⁸.

²² Ibidem, 526, 1480.

²³ The telegram itself: Ruhl J. Bartlett (ed.), *The Record of American Diplomacy: Documents and Readings in the History of American Foreign Relations*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1960, 596–598.

²⁴ Ibidem, 597, 1439, 1445.

²⁵ Ibidem, 663–4.

²⁶ Ibidem, 663.

²⁷ Ibidem, 671.

²⁸ By 14 September 1939, FDR had received a telegram from Warsaw; Ambassador Biddle reported that the Germans indeed bombed the civilian locations and civilian groups. Cordell

In the terms of foreign policy making that was it when it comes to the US activities at the moment of the outbreak of World War II. Cordell Hull telephoned Paris and London to inquire what the two warlike superpowers that had guaranteed Poland's integrity planned. The facts quickly came from the US Ambassador in London, Joseph Kennedy. He reported the matters flew out of handle and the British help was doubtful²⁹. Later that day, the Secretary of State talked to Poland's Ambassador Count Potocki. At the diplomat's request for information from Europe, Hull writes in his memoirs, he passed on to Potocki whatever he knew. Nevertheless, C. Hull does not put it straightforwardly what exactly he told the ambassador, especially when it comes to Kennedy's conclusions³⁰.

In the face of war, the US Department of State started standard security procedures in the case of war: evacuation of the diplomatic personnel and the embassy as such, organising analyst committees to assess the level of threat to the US trade and freedom of shipping³¹. Yet, first and foremost, the US Congress the *US Neutrality Acts*, which forbade the US government any sort of support to whichever side of belligerents, were kept valid³².

5 September 1939, the President announced – drafted by C. Hull's Department of State and FDR himself – the US declaration of neutrality. In it, FDR referred to the above mentioned Neutrality Acts' limitations and, in points, informed about the US attitude towards the European conflict. In no way did the document state what – if anything – Washington was planning to do for the invaded Poland, which – in the document – appears just once, in the preamble; oddly it informs that: '[...] a state of war unhappily exists between Germany and France; Poland; and the United Kingdom, India, Australia and New Zealand'³³. In such a context, Hulls' remarks below sound most peculiar:

Hull, op. cit., 678. The American attempts at making Hitler an aggressor in the legal sense do not seem well thought-out. No matter whether a belligerent was an invader or an invaded party, according to the Neutrality Acts, it had to be excluded from the US assistance. Therefore, the purpose of the US initiative like the above is difficult to justify. Indeed the Americans did not plan to exclude Poland from the restrictions. The actions might – again – suggest that it was a short-range and symptomatic treatment without a fuller vision in the matter.

²⁹ Cordell Hull, op. cit., 672.

³⁰ Ibidem

³¹ Ibidem, 673.

³² The reading of the *Neutrality Acts* proves how much – at least ostensibly – FDR was to be supervised and limited in his initiatives concerning belligerents anywhere in the world. See the contents of the *Acts*: Digital History, http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=4057; http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=4059; http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=4072; http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=4074; access: 5 March 2014. Also see.: Krzysztof Michałek, *Na drodze ku potędze: Historia Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki, 1861-1945*. Warszawa: KiW1993, 366–370.

³³ Cordell Hull, op. cit., 685.

The President and I, long before the outbreak of war, saw clearly that it would be to our national interest to assist Britain and France, first in the effort to keep the war from coming, and second, to win the war if it came. [...] a German victory over Britain and France would place us in direct contact with the ruthless leaders of Germany riding a powerful military machine. With Japan on a rampage in the Orient, our position in that event would be of the utmost danger³⁴.

The Americans carefully followed the September events in Poland. & September 1939 already, Ambassador Bullitt telegraphed from Paris that he received information from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the imminence of the Soviet attack on Poland. From the memoirs, or rather from the silence in that matter, it can be concluded that the Americans did virtually nothing with that knowledge. Most certainly Washington did not pass the information on to the Poles. It waited until 17 September 1939, when the US Ambassador to Moscow, Steinhardt, received the note from the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, V. Molotov. The note informed about the USSR government's decision to enter the Polish eastern territory in a military way to: 'protect the lives and property of the people inhabiting the areas of Ukraine and Belarus'³⁵. Allegedly, according to Commissar Molotov, neither Poland nor the Polish government existed any more. Simultaneously, Molotov emphasised that Moscow planned to act in a neutral way towards the US³⁶.

The American decision made in that situation turned out – maybe – one of the most consequential ones during the war. As Hull himself put it:

Although Russia's invasion of Poland could be considered an act of war, the President and I decided not to include Russia in our application of the Neutrality Act. We did not wish to place her on the same belligerent footing as Germany, since to do so might thrust her further into Hitler's arms. We had the feeling that Russia and Germany would not become full allies and that Hitler had not abandoned his ambitions with regard to Russia³⁷.

It seems unbelievable: Cordell Hull happens to forget about the long-lasting traditions of the German-Soviet collaboration dating back to the Rapallo Agreement of 1922. He also ignores – which the American had perfectly known – the pre-war German-Soviet manoeuvres training the German tank forces and *Luftwaffe* in the USSR, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Agreement and its secret arrangements. 17 September 1939 the USSR entered the war – actively and in a military manner – at Hitler's side. In the light of the international law, both the aggressions were identical (e.g. both lacking the declaration of war on Poland).

³⁴ Cordell Hull, *op. cit.*, 684.

³⁵ *Ibidem.*

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

³⁷ *Ibidem.*

Apart from the Polish-Russian perspective, the American decision on the treatment of the USSR after the invasion of Poland, was – technically speaking – and act of inconsequence or open disloyalty towards France and Britain, the countries which the US had declared to support in peace and war. For the British, it was one of the first signs to what extent the interests of the US and the British Empire were discrepant, regardless some common values, a number of shared purposes and FDR declarations.

In such a situation the Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms grew stronger, which both C. Hull and President Roosevelt wanted to avoid. Their action, however, turned out completely ineffective, passive and – simply – incorrect. Could A. Hitler and J. Stalin become 'even more perfect allies'? What else would they have to do to be perceived full allies on exactly the same side of the barricade? It is difficult to resist an impression that the above Hull's commentary concerning the treatment of Russia – written as a flashback assessment when many decisions and their outcome were known and verified – was actually an unsuccessful attempt to justify Washington's lack of determination, loss and the inability to lay out the country's policy in a consequent and clear-cut way. It is also an effort – how futile though – to hide the lack of interest, knowledge and thus the proper perspective as for the strategic world region of Central Europe.

The inconsequence of the American decision makers seems shocking. Even if the Soviet deed was indeed just a tactical move aimed at pushing back the line of potential defence against the Germans, which – according to Hull was confirmed by the information from the Chinese Ambassador to Washington, Hu Shih³⁸, it was carried out as an open, unprovoked, unjustified by the international law attack on an independent state being an ally of the powers enjoying – theoretically – the US support and liking. Moreover, if Stalin indeed mounted his defence lines against Hitler, their conflict was sure to happen anyway.

Along with the development of the warfare in Poland, the situation became too dangerous for the Americans residing in the country. By 24 September 1939 the American diplomatic corps was evacuated through Romania to Paris (Ambassador Biddle and his staff) and to Berlin (Consul General John K. Davies and staff)³⁹. Secretary Hull was of high opinion about their work and congratulated them on their achievements although, in his memoirs, he does not explain what significant merits of his diplomats in Poland he meant.

Then, a number of changes happened to the Polish authorities. President Mościcki having been interned in Romania and resigned from his post, the so-far Speaker of the Polish parliament, Władysław Raczkiewicz was sworn as the new president (2 October 1939). After FDR-Hull consultations, the US

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem, 685.

government decided to acknowledge the new Polish authorities and assumed them as a continuator of the previous government. Also, Count Potocki was acknowledged the Polish ambassador of the new government in the US. Ambassador Biddle in Paris was instructed to continue as the representative of the US with the Polish government. In the memoirs, in the context of the above events, C. Hull wrote something that was to be a glaring contradiction to the later stance of Washington (in Teheran, 1943 and Yalta 1945): 'Mere seizure of territory, however, does not extinguish the legal existence of a Government'⁴⁰.

The American step that symbolically concluded the US activities as far as Poland was concerned in the first phase of the analysed period was Roosevelt's initiative to offer the ex-President I. Mościcki refuge in the US. 28 September 1939 Secretary Hull, having consulted the President, instructed the US Plenipotentiary Minister in Romania, Franklin Mott Gunther, to pass on to the Romanian government the American offer regarding Mościcki. Roosevelt was ready to write a personal letter to King Charles of Romania asking him to release the ex-President of Poland. In his memorandum to C. Hull of 19 October 1939, FDR put the whole case like that:

Now that a definite Polish Government has been set up in France and former President Mościcki is no longer President, I recur to the historic United States friendship for Poland and the historic fact that we have always welcomed refugees from defeated democracies. [...] The United States would be glad to receive the former President Mościcki if he cares to visit this country⁴¹.

Having done nothing for Poland, actually blocking certain initiatives of other American politicians, such as H. Hoover's⁴², in his internal correspondence with a close collaborator, FDR cantingly mouthed platitudes; simultaneously, nonchalantly and in an arrogant manner the President labelled Poland as a 'defeated democracy' while the Polish government did not sign capitulation act, and the Polish regular army was being formed in the West as well as fought at home in the underground. Again, the absence of proper interest and care of the President and his Secretary of State resulted in simplifications and blurred image of the matters that concerned the security of the US. Finally, once ex-President Mościcki was released in December 1939, he chose to settle in Switzerland and not the United States.

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The second of the analysed phases in the US-Polish relations, September 1939 – June 194, is one of most intense stages of the WWII. In the context of the triumphs of Hitler at the time, it seems obvious that the Polish case had

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 686.

⁴¹ Ibidem 687.

⁴² Józef Smoliński, *Polsko-amerykańskie stosunki wojskowe, 1776–1945*. Warszawa: Bellona, 2004, 322.

to fade away in the US politics. The question is how much it faded away. When the underground resistance against the Germans was being organized in Poland on the mass scale, the Polish government-in-exile in London was mobilising all sorts of available reserves to support the British war effort, Poland virtually vanished from the American political war plans. The mentions in the memoirs of Cordell Hull, or rather the lack of them, confirms it. Between October 1939 and April 1943, i.e. the Polish-Soviet political crisis over the Katyń Massacre, Poland basically disappears from the memoirs. The only mention is the information that 14 June 1941 the President ordered to freeze the Polish assets 'as well as those of the occupied European countries not already frozen, such as Albania, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Danzig [...]'⁴³.

Moreover, the Polish prime minister, General Władysław Sikorski, acknowledged by Washington from 2 October 1939, on the pages of whole Hull's memoirs, appears only six times having deserved only three references in the index. In the analysed period he does not appear at all (apart from the already mentioned information on the US acceptance of the new Polish authorities in exile). It seems difficult to find a more explicit evidence for the complete evaporation of any American interest in Poland whatsoever.

The reasons for such a state of the matters are manifold. The first, and probably the most significant, was the fact that at the time the West was generally in retreat, and the US remained neutral. That neutrality and the isolationist US Congress limited any potential pro-Polish moves of Washington, even if such initiatives existed at all. Also, for a period difficult to define, Poland was to remain under German and Soviet occupations. By June 1941, Hitler went from victory to victory; and later on, until the winter 1941–42 not much seemed to indicate any breakthrough in that respect. Hence, which appears a natural course of action for the Roosevelt administration, the pragmatic and task-oriented duo Hull-Roosevelt eliminated the Polish case from their political activities at that time.

Additionally, it should not be forgotten that in the whole analysed here period the USSR and Germany were countries bound with an alliance⁴⁴. As late as 10 January 1941, the countries signed an agreement concerning trade and borders. Although the Nazi attack on the USSR began merely half a year later, in January 1941, for the West, things looked quite unambiguously: Moscow and Berlin indeed were allies in the full sense of the word – neither more nor less distrustful towards each other than the British and Americans from December 1941 onwards. That was another reason for the US neglect of the Polish issue: as long as the relations between Stalin and Hitler were as they seemed, Washington saw no reason to invest precious

⁴³ Ibidem, 945.

⁴⁴ Henry Kissinger expands on the implications of the Soviet-Nazi Alliance. See: Henry Kissinger, *Dyplomacja*. Warszawa: Philip Wilson, 2002, 358–400.

time and effort of the country's leaders into something that was classified as secondary or even tertiary priority. That was how dismembered Poland was perceived by Roosevelt and Hull. The fact that Moscow experienced a completely different treatment in Washington than Berlin additionally weakened the Polish standing.

The standing that even before had never been strong enough. Before the WWII, the United States did not have and vital interests, be it political or economic. In this part of Europe, Washington traditionally focused on the pre-war Czechoslovakia. The black PR that Poland received in the US after the collapse of Czechoslovakia and the Polish regaining of Cieszyn Silesia from Prague. Not having anything to lose in Poland, the Americans concluded – brutally yet objectively – there was no point in their involvement there.

Another issue discouraging the Roosevelt administration to at least more open pro-Polish declarations was the Nazi provocation in March 1940 – the publication of the so-called 'White Book'. In the book, it was suggested that the allegedly Polish documents confirmed that the US diplomats – and by default President Roosevelt, their employer – instigated the Poles to resist the Germans. Hitler assumed that only if Roosevelt lost the elections, could there be any guarantee of the prolonged US neutrality. Therefore, the German Ministry of Propaganda covered the cost of the publication of them 'White Book' in an impressive edition. Also, Berlin secretly sent to the US \$ 5 million to support the American isolationist circles⁴⁵. Thus, apart from anything else, FDR had to have completely different priorities in that 1940 – the year of elections.

The argument of the alleged lack of support of the Polish case from Winston Churchill, the British prime minister, does not seem fully justified. Throughout the whole war, and in the here analysed period in particular, Britain was maintained by the US; had it not been for the American support, the British would certainly have lost the capability to fight Hitler⁴⁶. Roosevelt and Hull assisted Britain, but they were not interested in helping her. They mercilessly abused the weakness of the Empire methodically dismantling and enfeebled the British in all available ways, such as coercing London to sign or accept a string of – disastrous for Britain (in the imperial sense) – agreements among the US, Canada and the Empire, i.e. *Ogdensburg* (August 1940) *Destroyers for Bases* (September 1940), *Lend lease* (March 1941) and *Hyde Park* (April 1941)⁴⁷. That was possible as the politi-

⁴⁵ According to some historians: 'the size and effects of those actions are an example of one of the most massive foreign interventions in the home affairs in the history of the US.' Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy 1932–1945*. New York: OUP 1995, 226.

⁴⁶ See: Mateusz Bogdanowicz, *The Political Significance of Canada and the Evolution of Her Role within the Politics of the United States During World War II, 1939–1945*. Olsztyn, Wydawnictwo Wydziału Humanistycznego, 2012.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

cal objectives of the US and Britain were convergent only up to a point and basically on the tactical level. The long-range plans of both the countries were entirely discrepant: Churchill wanted the restoration and strengthening of the Empire; Roosevelt wanted to take the Empire over from London and promote the US to the position of the post-war superpower. Thus, the position of the British prime minister did not entitle him to challenge FDR and certainly not on the ground of the Polish case. Churchill simply did not stand a chance to force Roosevelt to do anything for Britain against the President's will, not to mention making FDR do anything for Poland under influence of the British leader⁴⁸.

Interestingly enough, C. Hull's no mention in his memoirs concerning the Polish initiatives aimed at attracting Washington's interest in Poland's case does not mean such steps were not undertaken by the Poles. As soon as 9 March 1940, Prime Minister W. Sikorski met the US President Envoy, Sumner Welles, who was informed about the German cruelties exercised in occupied Poland as well as was outlined the current war situation⁴⁹. The Polish government was hoping to provoke a reaction among the US society similar to the one that had resulted from the publicising of the German atrocities in Belgium during the Great War. The US social condemnation, general sympathy and liking towards the persecuted could create a favourable political atmosphere, the year 1940 was an election year and the US Polish diaspora was a significant electoral force. Unfortunately, the above measures turned out ineffectual, which C. Hull's no mention seems to confirm.

As for the American side, they just limit themselves to mere and meaningless declarations. 29 January 1941, another American Envoy to Europe, Wendell Willkie, during his visit paid to PM Sikorski, assured him that the US government decided to provide the Polish nation with as extensive support as possible⁵⁰. Yet, no details were agreed upon; again, no comment in Hull's memoirs prove that Willkie's words were just courteous and ostensible gestures.

Generally, the only practical achievement in the US-Polish relations at the time was PM Sikorski's visit to the US (6 March – 9 April 1941) and the initial talks on the issue of Poland's inclusion into the *Lend Lease* programme⁵¹. Formally, the final decision was made 19 June 1941; the logistic arrangements dragged on, however, and Poland received the first American di-

⁴⁸ It is clearly visible in the Churchill-FDR correspondence from any of the war periods, e.g. documents 511 and 512, Francis L. Loewenheim, *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Wartime Correspondence*. New York: Saturday Review Press, 1975, 666–668.

⁴⁹ Krzysztof Szczepaniak, Anna Herman-Łukasik, Barbara Janicka, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski – informator. Tom II: Ameryka Północna i Południowa, 1918–2007*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Askon, 2008, 167.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 169.

spatch in the early 1942. Nevertheless, as early as in December 1943, Poland was excluded from the *Lend Lease* – as a result of the joint governmental decision of Britain and the US. It was one of the elements of the pressure (blackmail?) exerted on Poland to soften Sikorski's government strict stance towards the Soviet responsibility for the Katyń Massacre.

The inexistence of whatsoever mentions of the above issues in the Secretary of State's memoirs proves that he perceived them as of secondary, tertiary if not fourth-rate importance from the US perspective. There is much more to it. The memoirs were written from a certain perspective, i.e. 1947. Although the world had transformed itself totally by then, FDR policy towards Stalin had proved disastrously ineffective, the fate of Central and Eastern Europe had been determined for the next 50 years, Cordell Hull did not change his perspective of seeing the Polish issue, which – in many aspects – turned out the key factors as far as the post-war negotiations with the USSR are concerned.

* * *

In the light of the above analyses, there appear three basic sets of conclusions.

The first concerns Washington's attitude to the Polish issue between September 1938 (Munich) and April 1939 (FDR speech on the imminence of war). In the light of the memoirs of Cordell Hull, the US foreign policy regarding the swelling military conflict in Europe appears as a chaotic bunch of loose initiatives of immediate rather than long-range nature. Nothing seems to prove that either the President or his Secretary of State had a clear vision of the consequent, effective American steps in the then current situation.

Exactly the same should be concluded when it comes to the assessment of the US attitude towards Poland in particular. Initially, during the Munich crisis, Poland was perceived – by the US decision makers and the society – as a troublemaking adventurer that was seething with revenge on the Czechs and lurking – with the Hungarians – for a convenient moment to divide Czechoslovakia, serving Hitler a favour at the same time. Thus, Washington limited its actions to mere appeals for more negotiations.

That was a manifestation of the clearest appeasement the American way. Hull's memoirs prove little orientation of the US decision makers in how complicated and specifically peculiar the European matters were, and Central European ones in particular. Simplifications, (e.g. Zaolzie and Cieszyn Silesia case) if not misrepresentations (the alleged Polish-Czechoslovak settlements in Munich) contained in the Secretary's comments prove how much fudged the image of things Franklin D. Roosevelt must have had on the state of the matters in that trouble area of the world.

The second category of conclusions concern the period between May 1939 and the end of the German campaign in Poland (early October 1939). The

research brings a number of surprising constataions and inconsistencies in the US foreign policy. By the end of August 1939, the Americans had received dozens of verified, credible reports from all sorts of reliable sources that signalled the German war preparations and more and more serious atmosphere. In that situation, both Hull and FDR seem lost and insufficiently motivated for action. They took for granted the impossibility of a German victory over France; hence, the case of Poland occurred insignificant to Washington. Insignificant to such a degree that the Americans did not even pass on to Warsaw – reliable and confirmed – information on how feeble the possibility of the British or French assistance to Poland would be in case of war. At least Secretary Hull remains silent in the respect of providing the Poles with such data.

One of the ultimate proofs of how little Poland meant to Washington back then is the American holding back the knowledge on the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and its secret arrangements. Hull claims he suggested to the Soviets a settlement of the conflict; yet, without the participation of Hitler (which was simply ridiculous in those realities) and/or Poland and the Baltic states (which was an outrageous infringement of the international law). The American perception of the issue of stabilisation of the region was to remain unchanged in Washington for the whole war.

After the outbreak of the war, the US declared neutrality, evacuated its diplomatic corps from Poland and kept observing the conflict. C. Hull states that – long before the war – Washington was determined to support Britain and France against Germany in peace and war. On the other hand, the President and his Secretary held back from the British and French allies – the Poles – the information of priceless value, i.e. the planned Soviet invasion of Poland. The US undertook no sanctions and no consequences against the USSR after 17 September 1939. From the beginning, which the Head of the Department of State openly declares, the Soviets could count on a privileged treatment of Washington, even at the expense of the invaded and those who the US was allegedly willing to support in their struggle for peace⁵².

Although – in Hulls' memoirs – the Secretary and FDR hide behind the *Neutrality Act* limitations, that is an obvious trick, a dodge of low quality. In November 1939 the President – easily – caused the Congressional exclusion of belligerent Canada from the *Neutrality Act* regulations⁵³. Clearly, FDR had a much better motivation there: economic depression, business and the profits the US companies had from the trade with Canada.

The saddest constataions regard the period between October 1939 (end of the Polish campaign) and June 1941 (the attack on the USSR). Owing to

⁵² It seems likely that such a state of the matters might have been influenced by a significant level of infiltration of the Roosevelt administration by the Soviet secret service.

⁵³ Mateusz Bogdanowicz, op. cit., 99.

the completely unexpected outcome of the events in Europe and the Nazi domination, Poland disappeared from the American list of matters of any importance. The Polish assets were frozen, which additionally complicated the financial situation of the Polish government in exile. Poland, occupied by the Germans and Soviets ceased to be useful for Washington in any respect. The Germans discouraged the Roosevelt administration from any assistance through the Nazi propaganda tricks (*White Book*). Also, FDR fought any pro-Polish initiatives coming from his political adversaries (e.g. H. Hoover's attempts).

From the American perspective, however, the most prominent factor that blocked any Washington's initiatives towards Poland was undoubtedly the fact that – in 1940 – FDR had presidential elections to win. Therefore, he invested all his energy to achieve that goal, and all the other matters simply had to wait. PM Sikorski's effort to attract the President's attention to Poland through the perspective of winning the votes of the Polish diaspora for Roosevelt could not work; yet the Polish PM's influence on the Polish Americans was close to none. That way he became useless politically for Washington, which the silence around him in Hull's memoirs illustrates perfectly. The only tangible help was the short period of the US assistance within the *Lend Lease* program; but still, it did not come immediately and through the British intermediary.

The memoirs of Cordell Hull are a valuable source of data as for the period of WWII. Nonetheless, their value in the case of the Polish matters appears – in numerous aspects – debatable. The Secretary of State wrote them in 1947 and it is clearly visible – in the events he describes – they were frequently composed having considered the *post factum* knowledge of the outcome of things. Therefore, one cannot rely on the memoirs when establishing the actual views and convictions of the Secretary of State and his superior – President Roosevelt there and then.

Yet, the memoirs explicitly prove to what extent wrong – from the onset of WWII – Hull and FDR were about the USSR and Stalin, his influence on the world politics; how much they ignored the specifics of Central Europe and what chance of a different set up of the post-war Europe and the world Washington wasted that way.

From the memoirs there appears that, from 1938, the Washington administration worked hard on creating for itself a mighty and dangerous rival. It seems incomprehensible and unbelievable in the case of such a talented, political duo as Hull-FDR. Indeed, they introduced the US to the war, defeated Germany and Japan, healed the US economy and skilfully dismantled the British Empire. From that perspective, the Polish case might have been one of the very few blunders of the US foreign policy of the wartime; if that was so, it was the mistake for which many – including Americans – were to pay dearly in the forthcoming decades.