

ВАРШАВСКОЕ ВОССТАНИЕ 1944 г.

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После начала немецкой кампании во Второй мировой войне (1939) Польша была разделена между нацистской Германией, оккупировавшей запад и центр страны, и СССР, занявшим восточные районы. В годы Второй мировой войны отношения Польши с Москвой были нестабильными. С приближением Восточного фронта к границам довоенной Польши массовое польское Сопротивление активизировалось, стремясь избавиться от господства нацистов и восстановить бывшую территорию страны. Освобождение силами Сопротивления хотя бы Варшавы могло способствовать нейтрализации возможных претензий Советского Союза на спорные восточные районы (Западная Украина, Беларусь, Литва), предотвращению полной советизации Польши, а также не допустить повторение ситуации на востоке страны, где Красная Армия и представители советской власти не обращали внимания на заслуги и интересы польского Сопротивления и польских властей. Анализируются причины, ход и последствия неудавшихся попыток Армии крайовой и жителей Варшавы самостоятельно освободить город и тем самым создать условия для свободного послевоенного существования страны.

Ключевые слова: Сопротивление; Польша; польско-советские отношения; восстание; Армия крайова; преследование; военные преступления.

ВАРШАЎСКАЕ ПАЎСТАННЕ 1944 г.

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Пасля пачатку нямецкай кампаніі ў Другой сусветнай вайне (1939) Польшча была падзелена паміж нацысцкай Германіяй, якая акупіравала захад і цэнтр краіны, і СССР, які заняў усходнія раёны. У гады Другой сусветнай вайны адносіны Польшчы з Масквой былі нестабільнымі. З набліжэннем Усходняга фронту да меж даваеннай Польшчы масавае польскае Супраціўленне актывізаваўся, імкнучыся пазбавіцца ад панавання нацыстаў і аднавіць даваенную тэрыторыю краіны. Вызваленне сіламі Супраціўлення хаця б Варшавы магло спрыяць нейтралізацыі магчымых прэтэнзій Савецкага Саюза на спрэчныя ўсходнія раёны (Заходняя Украіна, Беларусь, Літва), прадукіненню поўнай савецкай Польшчы, а таксама павінна было не дапусціць паўтору сітуацыі на ўсходзе краіны, дзе Чырвоная Армія і прадстаўнікі савецкай улады не звярталі ўвагі на заслугі і інтарэсы польскага Супраціўлення і польскіх улад. Анализуемая прычыны, ход і наступствы няўдалых спроб Арміі краёвай і жыхароў Варшавы самастойна вызваліць горад і тым самым стварыць умовы для свабоднага пасляваеннага існавання краіны.

Ключавыя словы: Супраціўленне; Польшча; польска-савецкія адносіны; паўстанне; Армія краёва; праследаванне; ваенныя злачынствы.

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THE 1944 WARSAW UPRISING

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After the German campaign at the beginning of World War II (1939), Poland was divided between nazi Germany which occupied the west and center of the country, and the Soviet Union which occupying the Eastern regions. The controversial relationship with Moscow has seen several diametrical breaks from a positive alliance after the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Axis powers in 1941, to a very critical relationship with the USSR after the revelation of the so-called Katyn massacre in 1943. With the approach of the Eastern Front to the frontiers of pre-war Poland, massive Polish Resistance was also activated to get rid of nazi domination and to restore of pre-war Poland. The neutralization of possible claims by the Soviets on the disputed eastern areas (Western Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania), respectively to prevent the crushing sovietization of Poland, it was also intended to serve a clear and world-wide resistance act in the sense of liberating at least Warsaw from the German occupation. This was to prevent the repeat of the situation in the east of the country, where the Red Army and the Soviet authorities overlooked the merits and interests of the Polish Resistance and Polish authorities. The contribution will therefore focus on the analysis of the causes, assumptions, course and consequences of the ultimate outcome of the unsuccessful efforts of the Armia Krajowa and the Warsaw inhabitants to liberate the city on their own and to determine the free post-war existence of the country.

Keywords: Resistance; Poland; Polish-Soviet relations; uprising; Armia Krajowa; persecution; war crimes.

The outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising is an important part of Polish history and a symbol of the courage and struggle of the Polish people against tyranny, oppression, foreign domination and occupation to this day. Nevertheless, critical voices are emerging from time to

time, saying that the uprising was not well prepared and had been destined to fail from the beginning. However, to better understand the context and the reasons for the outbreak of the uprising, it is necessary try to imagine the situation Warsaw was in during August 1944.

German occupation

Poland, including its capital, had been subjected to the pressure and terror of the German occupation since 1939. From the very beginning, the German command practiced a controlled Germanisation and systematic eradication of the Polish population in General Governorate. In practice, this meant the abolition of the Polish school system, absolute ban on publishing newspapers and magazines, liquidation of Polish theatres, cinemas and museums, cafés and restaurants. These steps should ultimately lead to the total destruction of Polish culture and identity [1, s. 31]. In addition, random raids, unreasonable arrests, public executions, mass murders, deportations into concentration camps or forced labour transportations took place in Warsaw. As a result, up to 680 000 citizens of Warsaw died in less than five years¹.

Another very important factor influencing the outbreak of the uprising was the success of the anti-Hitler coalition in 1943 and 1944. In February 1943, the Soviets won a significant victory against Marshal F. Paulus' 6th Army in the Battle of Stalingrad, followed by another German defeat at Kursk, in the largest tank battle of the World War II. From this moment on, the Soviets began to advance to the West at a relatively fast pace and to prepare a large summer offensive called *Bagrator*. Meanwhile, the other allies were prepar-

ing for the long-awaited opening of the second front, which Stalin had been asking for since 1941. The landing of allied troops, known as operation *Overlord*, took place on 6 June 1944, on five beaches in Normandy, France, and marked a major breakthrough in the war against nazi Germany, because A. Hitler was forced to fight on two fronts at once. The Soviet Union did not hesitate to use this situation, thus launching the operation *Bagrator* on 23 June 1944, many times exceeding operation *Overlord* in numbers of men as well as military equipment. While over 160 000 soldiers fought on the shores of Normandy I. Stalin involved nearly 2 million Red Army members, about 5000 aircrafts and 3000 tanks in the summer offensive. As it turned out, a thorough preparation and a massive deployment of military assets paid off after all [2].

During operation *Bagrator*, the Germans suffered more damage than in the Battle of Stalingrad and, in the course of a few days, the USSR scored significant achievements. On 29 June, the Red Army secured Babrujsk, Minsk fell on 3 July, Vilnius was conquered on 13 July, then Brest-Litovsk and later Lviv. On 18 July, the Soviet forces under the command of Marshal K. Rokossovsky crossed the River Bug. That caused I. Stalin to react and, on 21 July 1944 in Moscow, the *Polish Committee of National Liberation* (PKWN)

¹Varšavské povstání 1944 [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.sppw1944.org/index_cz.html (date of access: 05.01.2019).

was created, also known as *Lublin Committee*. It was composed of communists from the Polish Labour Party and of those without any affiliation. According to I. Stalin's ideas, after the war, PKWN was supposed to represent an official government on Polish territory under Soviet influence, replacing the existing Polish

exile government residing in London. Shortly after its establishment, I. Stalin signed the mutual agreement with the PKWN concerning the future Polish border [3, s. 77–79], practically corresponding with the *status quo* set by the loss of eastern territories of pre-war Poland.

Superpower-political offensive

The Polish political and Resistance representatives decided to respond to this superpower-political offensive of the Soviet Union, claiming the eastern regions of interwar Poland (namely in the areas of Lithuania, Belarus and western Ukraine), by a wide-range operation *Storm*. It was supposed to provide military support to the liberation of eastern territories from under the Nazi occupation, but at the same time, this armed activity would help to maintain political control of the Polish authorities in this territory. During operation *Storm* in 1944, units of the Home Army participated in the liberation of Volyn, Podolia, Polesia, Lublin regions, eastern Mazovia and Rzeszów regions, as well as in the battles of Vilnius, Lviv, Drohobych or Tarnopol [4, s. 49]. From the military point of view, these operations were successful, however, after fighting the German army, NKVD repeatedly interfered with the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) units. They were often dissolved and their officers and soldiers imprisoned, deported to the USSR or forced into the ranks of Berling's Polish troops formed by the Soviets. Moscow thus refused to accept the authorities of the Polish Underground State, emerging from illegality, on the liberated eastern Polish territories, and appointed only people fully collaborating with Soviet power to the local government². In this situation, the eyes and the last political hopes of the Polish exile representatives and the domestic resistance linked to it were naturally cast on Warsaw as Poland's capital. If they would manage to free Warsaw as much as possible on their own, they could act more equally against the Soviets, otherwise the post-war Poland would have to rely only on Moscow's will.

Thus, the outbreak of the uprising itself was caused by a number of circumstances affecting each other. The achievements of the allies on both fronts meant that the defeat of Nazi Germany was only a matter of time. All the occupied nations had begun to expect their liberation, either by the western allies or by the USSR, in the near future. But the Poles did not want to wait for the Red Army to be liberated. They wanted to free themselves on their own. They had enough negative experiences with the Soviet Union to worry about the subsequent occupation and sovietization of Poland by their eastern neighbour. Therefore, one could say that the insurgents fought militarily against Germany but politically against the USSR. Yet the Soviet Union was

still their formal ally, and so they expected the arrival of the Red Army with some hope that they would get the necessary military assistance from the Soviets [5, s. 72–76].

In addition to Soviet help, members of the exile government and the underground were expecting help from other allies as well. During this period, they had guarantees from the US and UK promising them help and support in the fight against the Nazis, although it was clear that the issue of Poland was not a top priority for the world powers. Undoubtedly, these promises of aid gave the exile government representatives and the underground Poland the necessary confidence and assurance that they will not be left alone in the fight against Germany, and that their struggle for independence and freedom could have a real chance of success if the circumstances were favourable.

However, there was no clear consensus concerning the outbreak of an armed uprising among the main representatives of the exile government and domestic structures. On the one hand, there were the representatives of People's Party, gathered around Prime Minister S. Mikołajczyk, who believed the promises allies gave them and were convinced of the correctness of the uprising. They thought that if the uprising in Warsaw broke out, the whole world would learn that the Poles freed themselves and any possible claims of I. Stalin on the pre-war Polish territories would be inadmissible. They simply counted on the fact that the US and the UK as democratic countries would never allow USSR to act in this manner. On the other hand, the Commander-in-Chief, K. Sosnkowski, took a completely opposite stance, foresightingly anticipating the calculating actions of the Soviet Union and being an advocate of the theory of two enemies [6, s. 194–196]. General W. Anders, previously imprisoned by the NKVD, joined him in stating his concerns as follows: "The general uprising cannot succeed without foreign help, and the only real option in this regard is the support of the USSR. But whoever knows the Russians like me is sure that we cannot rely on their help. Russia has its plans... My opinion was that any action against the Germans would only bring unnecessary bloodshed..."³ [6, s. 196].

As it turned out, the first group of politicians led by S. Mikołajczyk had the decisive voice. A sentiment that the uprising should break out within the broad-

²More on operation *Storm* see: *Borodziej W. Polska Podziemna 1939–1945*. Warszawa : Wydaw. szkolne i pedagog., 1991. 403 s.

³Hereinafter translated by M. S., M. K.

der operation *Storm*, the aim of which was to help the liberation of Poland and to ensure that the Polish underground structures would take over the power in the liberated territories, was adopted. However, operation *Storm* did not fulfil the promised expectations, and thus the beginning of the uprising was postponed indefinitely. But the whole situation was accelerated by the turbulent series of unexpected events, which could be referred to as the immediate causes of the uprising's outbreak. On 20 July 1944 an assassination attempt on A. Hitler took place. Although unsuccessful, it nevertheless deepened the already existing crisis of the nazi regime and encouraged the soldiers faithful to the Home Army in London exile, the largest armed resistance structure in Central Europe, to attack the Germans [7, s. 246]. With the unstoppable progress of the Red Army, the tension in Warsaw escalated every day and affected not only the insurgents, but also the German soldiers, who were starting to evacuate their administrative buildings and apartments. The extensive Soviet propaganda, which encouraged the residents of Warsaw to an armed attack on the Germans through flyers thrown from aircrafts or radio broadcasting from Moscow, somewhat contributed to the outbreak of the uprising.

And along came the desired immediate approach of the front. K. Rokossovsky's troops reached the

right bank of River Vistula on 29 July 1944. The uprising then broke out on 1 August after A. Chruściel also known as Monter gave the Home Army command a report that the Red Army is present in Warsaw's Praga district. Home Army General T. Komorowski also known as Bor issued, on the basis of this information after an agreement with a delegate of the exile government J. S. Jankowski, a decision to launch the uprising exactly at 5:00 p. m. on 1 August, referred to as "W" Hour. The uprising was originally supposed to help the allies to liberate Warsaw and ensure that the Polish underground structures take over the power after the war. Given the lack of armament of the Home Army's soldiers, the uprising was supposed to last only a few days. Subsequently, a help of the approaching Red Army troops was expected [6, s. 156]. Given the situation that transpired, I. Stalin was very well aware that in the case of the liberation of Warsaw by Polish military forces, he would not only lose his political prestige but, above all, his influence on the liberated territory of Poland. One can only assume that this was one of the reasons I. Stalin stopped the Red Army troops on the right bank of Vistula. Important, however, was the fact that the Red Army had at this point overcome a distance of more than 400 kilometres and the army was considerably exhausted after operation *Bagrati*on [8, s. 50–52].

The Warsaw insurgents

The Polish insurgent leadership, naturally, did not avoid making several mistakes and improvisations while preparing the uprising, which they decided to carry out only a few days prior to its outbreak on 1 September 1944⁴. In addition, the number and commitment of potential insurgents was greatly limited, especially by the catastrophic lack of combat equipment. In several places, local shooting incidents broke out even before they were supposed to, elsewhere, many had failed to arrive on time to the agreed place of gathering and assume position assigned to them by the uprising leadership. The military command of the uprising (led by General T. Komorowski) predicted they would quickly win control over the city, secure the bridges across Vistula, Bug and Narva, occupy the communication nodes and conquer the western and eastern banks of Vistula to allow the Soviet troops to enter the capital. All this was ideally planned for 3–4 days of fighting. In various parts of the city, centres of the fighting had been chosen along with the strategic objects necessary to be controlled. After realizing the real combat strength of the insurgents and, vice versa, the training, armaments and the tactical maturity of German soldiers, the effort to win control over the city was utopia. There was a chance in case they would only concentrate on conquering some of

the strategic points, but either way the success of the uprising completely relied on a quick and massive help from the Red Army, which, in turn, depended on time alignment, military-technical capabilities [10] and, mainly, on I. Stalin's political will.

Despite their predetermined limits, the Warsaw insurgents managed to control $\frac{3}{4}$ of the city in the first days of uprising. However, they did not conquer the whole city itself, because the Germans retreated to defend strategically important buildings and areas (bridges, stations, airports, ect) and were largely successful in doing so. The temporary retreat of the Germans to defend only the important points allowed rebel forces to regroup, organise the rear, mobilise the volunteers and prepare for the defence, even though they had not completely abandoned the idea of attacking and reaching the strategic goals set. In the first stage of the battles, almost every tenth insurgent had s weapon [9 s. 10–11], later, they were able to arm themselves with the guns taken from Germans during the fighting or to make their own by improvising. The activities of the Polish Underground State structures were also legalised during this period and a liberated Poland was renewed in Warsaw for several weeks. However, after the first four days of the great losses the insurgents were forced to go into defence.

⁴See also [9, s. 9].

After stabilizing the initial situation and the surprise of Germans about the extent and intensity of the resistance, the second phase of the uprising had started. It was marked by German reinforcement supply and heavy weaponry deployment (air force, artillery, tanks and armoured vehicles...), which gradually minimized and rounded the insurgent resistance in last few sites still resisting. At the same time, the systematic destruction of the city, which the German top command wished to see “destroyed to the ground”, had started.

During the first day of the uprising, only between 1500 and 3000 insurgents joined with a weapon in hand. Rest of the mobilised were not armed and represented only the reserve of insurgent forces waiting to get weapons or took part in the fighting holding bottles of petrol. The number of insurgent forces is estimated at about 40 000 front-line troops and supporting units, including women. Fighting them there were 15 000–16 000 thousand Germans on the left bank of Warsaw, mainly from police and order units and anti-aircraft artillery. A total of 20 different units, including collaborators from the former USSR, participated in the battle of Warsaw on the German side. In addition, an air division, 3 armoured divisions (the 19th and 25th Armoured Divisions), as well as the airborne armoured *Hermann Goering Division*, took part in suppressing the uprising. The number of German soldiers fluctuated, at some point reaching as many as 40 000 [11, s. 94]⁵.

In this situation, securing military help to the insurgents became a priority. However, the political differences between the Polish non-communist Resistance and Moscow were too great for the Polish government to “beg” I. Stalin for help. And he was too aware of who the uprising was actually politically aimed at. He coldly calculated that he would gain nothing by quickly organising adequate military help to the uprising he could not gain any other way, risking less casualties among the Red Army soldiers with greater political gain. Not to mention that by eliminating the core of the Polish non-communist Resistance movement by the Germans in the uprising, he could easily get rid of many potential opponents of his vision of post-war Poland.

However, the real front conditions must also be taken into account. While the top Soviet leadership headed by I. Stalin condemned the uprising right from the beginning as an irresponsible adventurous event with no military hope for success, K. Rokossovsky's Soviet and Z. Berling's Polish troops (fighting

alongside Red Army) located near Warsaw eventually decided to help the insurgents⁶. However, their attempt to reach the other bank of Vistula was possible only after gaining control over the right-bank Praga, what occurred in September when the uprising was already retreating. In addition, the soldiers of the Red Army concentrated or allocated here were too weak to be able to somehow change the negative development. On the contrary, the Germans significantly strengthened their troops. The evident superiority on the Soviet side necessary to defeat the German forces near Warsaw had already been gone, and time, which the uprising did not have, was needed to re-concentrate enough offensive strength [12, s. 194–195]. With a significant exhaustion of the advancing Red Army and, vice versa, the strong German defence near Vistula, not even securing two smaller bridge-heads south of Warsaw on 2 August helped the Soviets in any significant way [13, s. 151]. From the perspective of possible effective immediate help of Soviets provided to the Warsaw insurgents, the outbreak of the uprising was premature. The Soviet command, even without any ulterior political motives, did not expect Warsawians to be able to resist the German troops in the rounded city for a long time, and therefore made only a little effort to help militarily (and politically) the operation in question. However, the significance of the political aspect of helping the insurgents was certainly great, as evidenced by the aid provided to the uprising by Western powers. Even the British or Americans were aware of the military “loss” if providing help.

The Anglo-American command was not very keen on setting aside aircrafts needed on the front for the support of the Warsaw insurgents. All the while, losses the aircrafts suffered when flying hundreds or even thousands of kilometres above the protected enemy territory and ultimately flying at low altitude to drop the aid over the city heavily protected against aircrafts, were excessive. However, the moral and political concerns related to the fighting Polish civilians naturally outweighed⁷. They were dropping the first weapon, medical and food supplies as early as 4 August. Further 100 flights of American, British, South African and, especially, Polish pilots based in Italy or Britain followed [11, s. 98]. However, their usefulness was small, since the Germans gained control over bigger and bigger territory and the dropped material ended up in their hands more often than in the hands of the insurgents.

⁵A unique Platoon No. 535, composed mainly of Slovaks living or working in Warsaw, led by 2nd Lieutenant Miroslav Ihring also known as Stanko, was also fighting alongside Polish insurgents.

⁶On 8 August K. Rokossovsky had already proposed to the top Soviet command that on 25 August they should start an operation, which task would be to occupy Warsaw, in «full front strength». However, Moscow did not support the idea. Later, about 3000 «Berlings» tried unsuccessfully to transport/fight themselves through to the other bank of Vistula and help the insurgents. See more in [9, s. 10–11].

⁷See also: *Uhrík I.* Niektoré obmedzenia, ktoré ovplyvnili Varšavské a slovenské povstanie // Varšavské povstanie a Slovenské národné povstanie. Paralely a rozdiely / M. Syrný, ed. Banská Bystrica : Múz. Slov. národného povstania, 2008. S. 153–175.

The results of the uprising

I. Stalin's reluctance to actually help the uprising was especially evident in the dispute over granting Anglo-American aircrafts permission to use Soviet airports located closer for the necessary landings when flying to Warsaw⁸. Of course, such use of Soviet airports by foreign aircrafts would inevitably negatively affect part of their usability and complicate the Red Army's ability to operate. But if the Soviets tried a little more, the permission could come sooner than only after weeks, when the uprising had already been in agony. The Soviets, criticized by the British and Americans for ignoring the uprising, started to drop symbolic aid to Warsaw in the second half of September [11, s. 95–96]. Soon it was clear that Z. Berling's 1st Polish Army would not be able to remain in the entry area on Vistula's left bank for long and that the uprising was definitely defeated. R. Rokossovsky, commander of the 1st Belorussian Front, therefore ended the battle of Warsaw at the end of September [12, s. 195–196]. On 30 September 1944, the last defending part of the city district surrendered and negotiations with the Germans on the terms of the capitulation agreement, eventually signed on 2 October, began. The Germans granted the insurgent Armia Krajowa a status of regular troops and the resulting rights. 15 000–16 000 thousand soldiers of Armia Krajowa ended up in captivity [11, s. 96].

Direct combat casualties on the Polish or German side account to several thousand deaths (from 2500 to 10 000 dead). However, for a two-month renewal of freedom and Polish statehood (including the restoration of a number of cultural aspects of social life such as press, radio, cinema, theatres, etc.) and exemplary resistance to the Germans, the Warsawians paid a greater toll in the form of losses caused by mass killings of Warsaw civilians, especially in the first weeks of the uprising. On H. Himmler's order, the SS troops of Reinefarth Battle Group massacred the residents of Wola city district and on 5 August alone killed and burnt about 45 000 people, including women and children. After overcoming the initial indignation of the German command over the insurgent Warsaw, a more rational caginess prevailed, rather pursuing the exploitation of the civilians for forced labour in the collapsing German war industry. Those able to work, whose participation in fighting had not been proven, were only to be transported to Germany on forced labour, and the women, children and elderly were placed in different camps throughout the General Governorate⁹. Nevertheless, the total number of military and non-military victims of the uprising still reaches an incredible number of almost 200 000 people, with most of the city being demolished as part of the battles and, in particular, due to systematic liquidation of one building after another later on¹⁰.

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⁸British-Americans addressed their pleas to be able to land on Soviet base camps first on 14 August, then again on 5 September. Soviets gave reluctantly the permission to use the airport in Poltava 4 days later. For more see: [12].

⁹Overall, more than half a million residents were displaced from Warsaw. Out of those who were not freely displaced in Governorate, about 90 000 ended up in forced labour, 60 000 in concentration camps and about 18 000 insurgents ended up in prison camps. See: *Wojciuk M. Nemecké zločiny vo Varšavskom povstaní – náčrt problému* // Syrný M., editor. *Varšavské povstanie a Slovenské národné povstanie. Paralely a rozdiely* / M. Syrný, ed. Banská Bystrica: Múz. Slov. národného povstania, 2008. S. 201–226.

¹⁰Compare for example: [9, s. 15].