

M I I Poland/USSR

Mr. Boggs, GE

March 21, 1945

A. R. Hall, GE

CURZON LINE

At the time of the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 Russia was in the midst of civil war and had no stable government with which the Allies could or would deal. On the other hand, the Polish government, recognized by the Allies, was under the necessity of having a well-defined area within which it could organize an administration. These factors had to be taken into account by the Conference in attempting to delimit the boundary between the two countries. The task of laying down this line was assigned to a Sub-Commission of the Commission on Polish Affairs consisting of General LeRond of France, Dr. Lord of the United States, Mr. Paton of Great Britain, and Marquess della Torretta of Italy. The final Declaration of the Supreme Council to the Polish government, December 8, 1919, was very largely the result of the discussions in this Sub-Commission. This declaration stated that:

The Principal Allied and Associated Powers...without prejudging the provisions which must in the future define the eastern frontiers of Poland, hereby declare that they recognized the right of the Polish Government to proceed, ...to organize a regular administration of the territories of the former Russian Empire situated to the West of the line described below.

The described line was that from the intersection of the Bug River with the former northern boundary of ~~the~~ Austria-Hungary (the northern boundary of Eastern Galicia), down the Bug to the vicinity of Mielnik, thence northeastward to the vicinity of Grodno, thence to the frontier of East Prussia. (The red line north from Krylow to the German frontier as shown on the accompanying map, "Eastern Frontiers of Poland, 1912-1923", GE, April 29, 1944). The declaration further stated that:

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

The problem of a Polish boundary in Eastern Galicia was considered separately from that in the area to the north, since Galicia had formerly been Austro-Hungarian rather than Russian. Western Galicia was to be given to Poland. In November, 1919 the Supreme Council accepted a draft statute allowing Poland to take Eastern Galicia under mandate from the League of Nations for a period of 25 years. The western boundary of Eastern

VITAL STORAGE

-2-

Galicia was fixed as running to the north and west of Rawa Ruska, and to the east of Przemyśl. (The southern end of the red line as shown on the accompanying map.) This mandate project was later abandoned. However, on the map accompanying the text of the Declaration of December 8 the proposed western boundary of Eastern Galicia was indicated, although this line was not mentioned in the Declaration. It was represented on the map as a southern extension of the line described in the text.

In July, 1920, during the hostilities between Poland and Russia, the British government secured Polish consent to an armistice providing that the Polish army retire to the line fixed by the Supreme Council, December 8, 1919, and that in Eastern Galicia the Polish and Soviet armies each retire ten kilometers from the line which they had reached at the time of the armistice. Lord Curzon, British Foreign Secretary, communicated these terms to the Soviet government on July 11, 1920. In addition to reciting the terms, Lord Curzon described in very general words, the line of December 8 as well as the proposed western boundary of Eastern Galicia. The Curzon note was accordingly ambiguous so far as Eastern Galicia was concerned for it mentioned both the military line at the time of the armistice and the western boundary as proposed by the Peace Conference. Probably because the two lines were represented as one on the Peace Conference map and were described as one by Lord Curzon, the western boundary of Eastern Galicia and the line of the Declaration of December 8 have often been lumped together as the "Curzon Line".

The Polish government did not recognize the Curzon Line at any time, even as a provisional boundary. The Soviet government took the same position, and in the summer of 1920 after the British proposal, made some proposals of its own. The Polish-Soviet war continued until the Poles were able to force Soviet recognition of the boundary over 100 miles east of the Curzon Line, embodied in the final draft of the Treaty of Riga, March 18, 1921.

Useful references for this subject are:

Territorial Studies Document T-462, March 6, 1944, The Origins of the Curzon Line.

Witold Sworakowski, An Error Regarding Eastern Galicia in Curzon's Note to the Soviet Government of July 11, 1920. Jour. Central European Affairs, vol. 4, No. 1 (April, 1944) pp.11-13.