

## Międzynarodowa konferencja naukowa

### *Współpraca Polski in Niemiec w obszarze bezpieczeństwa: dwadzieścia pięć lat wspólnych doświadczeń*

Profesor Anita J. Prażmowska

Władysław Gomułka's German policy

When in December 1970 Willie Brand, the Chancellor of the German Federal Republic and Józef Cyrankiewicz the Prime Minister of the Polish People' signed a normalisation treaty, the one which came to be known as the Treaty of Warsaw, this represented Gomułka's life time achievement. In his role as First Secretary of the United Polish Worker's Party (Zjednoczona Polska Partia Robotnicza – PZPR) since October 1956 he had consistently tried to obtain guarantees of Poland's western border. The signing of the treaty confirmed that the Oder-Neisse line was henceforth Poland's internationally recognised border and, at the same time, a confirmation that the GFR would not challenge the post war territorial changes. To Gomułka this meant that Poland's territorial security was guaranteed for the first time since the war. The achievement had a personal and a political dimension.

#### **I. 1944-1951**

Gomułka's political career can be divided into stages. In November 1943 he became the First Secretary of the war time Polish Workers Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza) which operated in German occupied Poland. On 20 July 1944 the first provisional administration (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego – PKWN) was formed in the liberated town of Lublin. This authority brought together Polish communists from the Soviet Union and some from the German occupied territories. Gomułka retained the post of party secretary, though his role in the establishment of the new post war government was insignificant. Bolesław Bierut and a team of Poles from the Soviet Union dominated the decision making processes mainly because of the links they had with with the Soviet leadership. <sup>1</sup> In any case the neither the PKWN not the Provisional Government of National Unity (Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narowowej – TRJN) into which it transformed itself on arrival in Warsaw in January 1945 enjoyed any genuine freedom to formulate its own foreign policy. The pretence of the TRJR

---

<sup>1</sup> Prażmowska, A, 2016, *Władysław Gomułka. A biography*, London, I.B.Tauris, p.123

being a provisional government was played to the full with Bierut in his capacity as Poland's President being invited to discuss and sign a number of treaties with the Soviet Leadership. Poland's post war borders were decided at the Potsdam Conference (17 July – 2 August 1945). Gomułka, who attended the conference firmly believed that Soviet support for Polish demands that German territories up to the Oder and Neisse line should be incorporated into Poland, had been crucial in overruling British and US objections.<sup>2</sup> The three war time allies had agreed at the Potsdam Conference that the final decision concerning Poland's border with Germany were to be postponed until the peace treaty with Germany was signed. For the time being though the previously German territories between the Oder Neisse line and Poland's pre war border ceased being part of the Soviet occupation zone and instead came under the administration of the Polish state.<sup>3</sup> The Potsdam powers had at the same time agreed that the German population of the region should be removed from those territories.

At this stage Gomułka's thinking on Germany was in line with policies presented by the TRJN at Potsdam and furthermore one which most Poles would support irrespective of their political allegiances. His views were in fact formed on the basis of the haunting war time experiences as a result of which he identified Nazism as the biggest enemy of humanity. At the same time he accepted Poland's geopolitical situation was such that even though he had some personal reservations about Soviet aims, he accepted that Poland's security was wholly dependent on Soviet assistance. Thus in some of the speeches which he made during this period these two themes are presented by him as reasons for Poland to remain closely allied to the Soviet Union.

The little evidence we have of his thinking on Germany during the months following the end of hostilities suggests that he firmly believed in the need to destroy Germany's capacity for aggression. He furthermore was of the conviction that in the long term only international collaboration would be a guarantee that Germany militarism would not resurface.<sup>4</sup> The Soviet Union was critical if European stability was to be guaranteed and if against German *revanchism* was not to resurface. From the outset Gomułka took the view that the incorporation into Polish borders of previously German areas east of the Oder and Neisse line was to be permanent. In an article following the Potsdam Conference he intentionally misrepresented the decisions made there as a final agreement on the incorporation of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Werblan, A, 1988, *Władysław Gomułka Sekretarz Generalny PPR*, Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, pp.276-8

<sup>3</sup> Gelberg, L, 1978, *Normalizacja stosunków PRL-RFN*, Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, pp.205-6

<sup>4</sup> Gomułka, W, 1971, *O problemie Niemieckim. Artykuły i przemówienia*, Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, pp.40-41

areas into Poland's borders, whereas he must have known that the US and Britain merely agreed to Poland administering these areas.<sup>5</sup>

Within the TRJN which functioned as a provisional administration until the first post war elections which took place in January 1947 Gomułka held the portfolio of deputy prime minister and minister for the Recovered Territories. He also continued to be the First Party Secretary. His influence on policy making was limited at that time but in his role of minister for Recovered Territories he was given a high degree of freedom to formulate policies. The result was that while on the one hand he had not input into foreign policy formulation, his views on Germany and his critical assessment of Soviet actions offer us a reliable insight into his thinking.

Although the Soviet authorities had supported Polish requests that previously German territories east of the Oder and Neisse line should be incorporated into Poland's borders there were many contradictions in the way these areas were treated by the Soviet military authorities. The ministry for Recovered Territories was established in November 1945. Before the signing of the Potsdam Treaty the Soviet military authorities treated previously German areas as coming under their jurisdiction and that meant that all industrial capacity was dismantled and transported to the Soviet Union. But nothing changed after Potsdam even though formally the areas were to be administered by the Poles.<sup>6</sup> This meant that in his efforts to consolidate Polish control over previously German areas Gomułka had to contend with lack of security, Soviet dismantling, theft and pillaging by Red Army soldiers and pilfering by Poles. But for Gomułka this was not just an issue of appropriation of goods which the Poles needed, it was a larger issue of establishing Polish state control over the Western Territories and in effect making them Polish. This meant the removal of Germans, plans for colonisation by Poles from Poland and from the previously Polish territories which were incorporated into the Soviet Union and restarting economic activities.<sup>7</sup> Gomułka's thinking on land distribution makes it clear that while he wanted the area to be fully integrated into Poland he believed fundamentally in creating economic stability as a precondition of that process. This was the reason why he insisted that land should be

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 48

<sup>6</sup> Skrzypek, A, 2002, *Mechanizmy uzależnienia stosunki polsko-radzieckie 1944-1957*, Pułtusk, 2002, Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna im. A.Gieysztora, pp.80-1

<sup>7</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw, (henceforth AAN), 196/50. Final Report.

allocated to individual farmers and that the farms should be larger than was the allocation norm in the Polish territories. In the end Gomułka was able to insist on allocation of 7 to 15 hectares.<sup>8</sup>

In 1948 Gomułka fell out of favour. In August 1948 he was relieved of his role as party secretary. On 2 August 1951 he was arrested and placed in detention. The accusations, never formally put to him, were that he represented a nationalist deviation within the party.<sup>9</sup>

## **II. 1956-1970**

In December 1955 as part of the de-Stalinization process Gomułka was released from internment. Gradually he was invited back into the party work. This culminated in his being invited to a meeting of the Politburo on 12 October 1956. When invited to speak Gomułka took the opportunity to review Soviet-Polish relations and the way the Soviet Union had treated Poland over the German question. He felt that the latter was indicative of the imbalance between the two states. Gomułka reminded the party leaders that the Soviet Union had handed over to Poland territories east of the Oder Neisse line but then proceeded to dismantle the productive capacity of the region and as a final insult, demanded that Poland pay reparations to the Soviet Union for the region. The insult rankled with Gomułka even more so as one of the members of the politburo was Marshall Konstantin Rokossovsky, who the Poles had been made to appoint as Minister of National Defence even though he was a Soviet and not a Polish national. In 1945 Rokossovsky had been the Soviet military commander of the area which came to be known as the Recovered Territories. At that time when Gomułka had repeatedly asked him to curb the dismantling and to impose discipline on the Red Army soldiers, Rokossovsky ignored him and generally treated him as a person of no significance. In 1956 Gomułka made it quite clear that the German issue was as much a Polish concern as it was a Soviet one and Poland had to be treated as a partner.<sup>10</sup>

On 17 October the crisis in the Polish party leadership deepened and Gomułka was appointed as First Party Secretary. When the Soviet delegation headed by Khrushchev flew in on 19 October Gomułka confronted them. After a stormy debate the Russians left in the hope that the Poles would deal satisfactorily with the situation. One of the important reasons for

---

<sup>8</sup> AAN, 196/50. Final Report

<sup>9</sup> Prażmowska, A, 2016, *Władysław Gomułka. A biography*, pp.164-7

<sup>10</sup> AAN, PZPR, V-41, 12 OCTOBER

Khrushchev withdrawing was because he had received an assurance that Poland would not leave the Warsaw Pact. What united the Soviet leaders and the new Gomułka led party leadership was unity on the German question and with that on the role which the Warsaw Pact would have to play.

The importance of the German question to Gomułka is confirmed by the fact that when the new Polish party leadership travelled to Moscow on 17<sup>th</sup> November the German question was discussed continuously during all meetings.. As long as the German issue was not resolved, Poland would remain dependent on Soviet support. But what Gomułka intended to do was to renegotiate the way the Soviet leaders treated the Poles and furthermore to confirm this in the context of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>11</sup> Gomułka personally prepared notes and responses to the draft of the new treaty which was to regulate relations between the Soviet Union and Poland. In his notes he questioned whether by undertaking to support each other Poland was in fact obliged to defend the Soviet borders. He would return to this issue in future years. For the time being he had an assurance that the Warsaw Pact would be responsible for Poland's western border in effect the border with Germany. What he nevertheless hoped to still discuss in the future was the question of who would be financially responsible for the cost of the Soviet troops which were stationed in Poland. On the critical issue of the command structure within the Warsaw Pact, Gomułka believed was in need of reforming so as to give all the members state equal rights to define its policies.<sup>12</sup>

In the years which followed the German issue continued to be a matter which troubled Gomułka. He never convincingly felt that the Poles were in charge of the negotiations and furthermore he felt that Khrushchev was pursuing a global policy in which Polish interests and the German question tended to be downgraded in favour of topics which mattered to the Soviet Union. But lingering in Gomułka's mind was the constant suspicion that Khrushchev preferred to support the GDR rather than Poland because there he could score propaganda victories whereas the economic situation in Poland was merely an internal issue.

Until Germany accepted the post war border Polish-German relations remained unresolved. The consequence of that was a constant sense of insecurity. In June 1950 the GDR recognised Poland claim to the Oder Neisse border. This was in every respect a pyrric victory because the GFR continued to maintain that the border of 1937 was the legal one while the

---

<sup>11</sup> AAN, PZPR, XIA-71, 8 November 1956

<sup>12</sup> *Tajne Dokumenty Biura Politycznego PRL-ZSRR 1956-1970*, 1990, London Aneks, pp.15-18

1945 was a temporary one. But even in the GDR the post war border was not a matter to which the ruling party referred with any degree of confidence as it was only too well aware of the lack of public support for the agreement with Poland.<sup>13</sup> This led Ulbricht, to try and discredit Gomułka in the Soviet leaders' eyes.<sup>14</sup> When Gomułka found out that the Soviet Union supplied the GDR with more consumer goods than it did Poland, so as to score a propaganda victory in relation to the GFR, Gomułka was angry and never forgave Khrushchev the slight.

Gomułka had a genuine commitment to maintaining peace in Europe and this sentiment was increased when he observed the remilitarization of the GFR. It has been suggested that his unease at the way the Soviet Union appropriated the role of the key mediator of the German issue was increased with the emergence of the arms race. He apparently feared that the Soviet Union would site nuclear weapons on Polish soil which would preclude any agreement between Poland and the GFR.<sup>15</sup> But the GFR was not responsive to Polish attempts to restart talks on the long term German settlement. In 1957 it looked as if the situation was becoming more confrontational when in response to Yugoslavia recognising the GDR the GFR broke off diplomatic relations. This led Gomułka to declare that were the GDR and GFR make commitments that they would not site nuclear warheads on their territories that Poland would make a similar commitment.<sup>16</sup> This was the beginning of an idea which he developed further, for the demilitarization of Central Europe.

In his continuous efforts to obtain approval for Poland's post war western borders Gomułka tried to also woo the West European powers. One of the reasons for this policy was his abiding distrust of Chancellor Adenauer whom he held responsible for the failure to open successful talks with Britain and France. But in 1959 it looked as if de Gaulle was willing to break ranks and to try to persuade the GFR to agree to talks on the issue of the Oder Neille border.<sup>17</sup> During the Geneva talks in May – June 1959 Poland was not invited to the negotiating table and instead it was the Soviet Union that spoke on Poland's behalf. When the next stage of the Geneva talks collapsed in May 1960 the issue of Poland's borders did not progress. On 27 September 1960 Gomułka made his only trip to outside Europe. This was to

---

<sup>13</sup> Skobelski, R, *Polityka PRL wobec państw socjalistycznych w latach 1956-1970 Współprace – napięcia – konflikty*, 2010, Poznań, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, pp.340-1

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.344

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 354

<sup>16</sup> Gomułka, W, 1971, *O problemie Niemieckim. Artykuły i przemówienia*, pp. 137-42

<sup>17</sup> Jacek Tebinka, *Uzależnienia czy suwerenność? Odwilż październikowa w dyplomacji Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1956-1961*, 2010, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Neriton, pp. 64-6

attend a meeting of the XV Session of the United Nations where he made a speech in which the German issue was dominant. His reasoning was that it was not the division of Germany that was the source of possible conflict in the world but the remilitarization of the GFR. It was his suggestion that demilitarization of the region was the only solution.<sup>18</sup> He returned to his point on 30 September when he made a his reply to the speech made by the British Prime Minister Macmillan. In it Gomułka reminded the meeting that Poland had put forward as proposal for the creation of a nuclear free zone in Central Europe.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly during the Berlin crisis in the summer of 1961 Gomułka supported Khrushchev to the point of agreeing with the building of the wall. But he was not prepared to sanction economic support for the GDR.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Gomułka, W, 1971, *O problemie Niemieckim. Artykuły i przemówienia*, Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, p. 214

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 225.

<sup>20</sup> Jacek Tebinka, *Uzależnienia czy suwerenność?* , p. 79