

Article 9

Prof. Jan Ciechanowski, Operation 'Tempest' - a general outline

In 1943 the war entered a new phase. The Allies went over to the offensive in Russia, Italy and the Far East. It was no longer a question of whether the war would be won by the Allies, but when it would be won. As the end approached the situation of the Polish government was difficult. Nevertheless General Sikorski the Polish prime minister still believed that, with the help of Churchill and Roosevelt, he would be able to come to terms with Stalin. He continued to believe that the Western Allies would sooner or later bring their influence to bear on the side of Poland.

On 4 July 1943, however, Wladyslaw Sikorski died when the aircraft carrying him crashed at the moment of take-off at Gibraltar. The normal testimonies of respect for Sikorski followed, but he left behind him a difficult situation, which was not made any easier by the appointment of his successor. On 14 July a new government was formed under Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the leader of the Peasant Party. On the other hand General Kazimierz Sosnkowski was appointed Commander-in-Chief. In this way the two functions exercised by Sikorski were separated. Mikolajczyk continued to hold to the policy of Sikorski in foreign affairs, hoping to reach an understanding with Stalin, which would allow his government to assume power in Poland, with the help of the Polish resistance movement, at the end of hostilities.

Mikolajczyk believed that he must seek to establish cordial relations with Moscow and abandon the 'demagogy of intransigence', considering that the calculations in some Polish circles, based on a possible conflict between the Western Powers and Soviet Union were 'illusory and dangerous'. He was aware that the Western Powers were not prepared to fight for the Polish eastern frontiers and that in the event of a crisis they would not support Poland. He hoped nevertheless that, in the event of a Russo-Polish understanding, Britain and the USA would be ready to guarantee Poland's independence. There was an element of exaggeration in his thinking, which made light of the difficulties of conciliating the USSR and inducing the Western Powers to take Poland's side.

Sosnkowski on his part was convinced that the government must defend the territorial and political integrity of Poland 'in spite of all and against all'. He was opposed to making concessions because, in his opinion, they would merely lead to the gradual 'Sovietisation of Poland'. He was convinced that the Western Powers sooner or later 'might be compelled to face a showdown with Russian imperialism', for which reason there was no need to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards Moscow. He maintained that the London Poles could influence neither Soviet policy nor the outcome of military operations and were therefore left with no alternative except to defend their rights and 'demand the same from the Western Powers'. He wished to turn the Polish Question into a 'problem for the conscience of the world', a test case for the future of European nations. As Commander-in-Chief he believed that he was entitled to play an important role in politics. His relations with Mikolajczyk were strained and unhappy.

In October 1943 the government issued the resistance with new directives to guide its activities during the approaching German defeat. The government stated that it might at some future date order the resistance to stage 'an insurrection' against the Germans, or alternatively to promote an

'intensified sabotage diversion' operation according to the strategic and political situation. The aim of the rising was to free Poland from the Germans and assume political power on behalf of the government, of which an important condition would be Anglo-American help. The government, however, was in a quandary because it was unable to inform the resistance what form, if any, such support would take.

From 1941 onwards the British were air-supplying the Polish resistance movement with highly-trained personnel, money, arms and equipment for its intelligence, sabotage and diversionary activities. The British authorities refused, however, to provide the Home Army with weapons and equipment for its planned 'insurrection'. The responsibility for launching such an insurrection was left by the British Cabinet in the hands of the Polish government. On 5 October 1943 Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, told the British War Cabinet that the question of supplying the Home Army with arms was difficult and such an action, undertaken without consultations with the Russians, might antagonise them. In fact, from 1941 to 1945 the Home Army received only some 600 tons of supplies from Anglo-American sources.

In accordance with the government's instructions the policy to be adopted towards the advancing Soviet forces was complicated. The directives laid down the principle that, if Soviet-Polish relations were still not restored at the time of the Soviet entry into Poland, the Home Army should act only behind the German lines and remain underground in the areas under Soviet control until further orders from the underground. The decision to conceal the Home Army was a dangerous proposition because, in all probability, it would have led to an open clash with the Soviet security forces with tragic consequences. The instruction contained a contradiction of which its authors appeared unaware. The 'intensified sabotage-diversion' was intended to be a political demonstration, but if the Soviet Union entered Poland, it would have to be carried out as a clandestine action, with units, which had been involved in fighting the Germans going underground again. The government was demanding that the Home Army first perform an active role and then disappear, a course which invited the hostility of both the German and Soviet forces.

General Bór-Komorowski, C-in-C of the Home Army, received these unrealistic orders with dissatisfaction and decided to ignore them. He ordered his men engaged in action with the Germans to reveal themselves to the Soviet forces and 'manifest the existence of Poland' He believed that otherwise all the Home Army operations against the Germans would be credited to the communists.

The Home Army was to stage either 'general and simultaneous insurrection' or 'an intensified diversionary operation', which received the code name of 'Tempest' ('Burza'). The state of the German forces was to determine which of these alternatives was to be adopted. The insurrection was to be undertaken at the moment of German collapse, whereas 'Tempest' was to be launched during a German general retreat from Poland. 'Tempest' was to begin in the east and move westwards as military operations moved into Poland. The essence of the 'Tempest' plan was a number of consecutive uprisings initiated in each area as the German retreat began, rather than a synchronised operation beginning in all areas simultaneously. No operations were to be taken against the Soviet forces or the Polish army raised in the USSR. The Home Army was to conduct its operations independently of the Red Army in view of the suspension of diplomatic relations. The success of 'Tempest' depended above all on timing. Premature engagement with the German forces unassisted by the Red Army could turn Polish attacks into disaster. The Home Army had to wait for the last hours of the German retreat.

'Tempest' was a simple plan fraught with hazards and dangers in execution. Its chances of success would have been greater if it could have been co-coordinated with Soviet military operations but, in the nature of the situation, this was not possible. Initially large towns were excluded from the 'Tempest' in order to spare their populations suffering and loss of property but, in July 1944, Bor-Komorowski reversed his decision, ordering his men to occupy large towns

before the arrival of the Soviet troops, because he had finally realised that the capture of towns was essential to the policy of acting as hosts to the Soviet authorities.

The political intent of Bór-Komorowski's decision was clear: 'By giving the Soviets minimal military help, we are creating political difficulties for them.' In February 1944 Bór-Komorowski's decision to reveal the Home Army to the Soviet forces was approved by the government. From this moment the die was cast. The government believed that the Home Army operations would result either in securing political power for itself in Poland, or the intervention of the Western Powers on its behalf, and would defend the cause of Poland against the USSR. This view contained a strong element of wishful thinking.

Operation 'Tempest' began first in February in Volhynia and then was extended to Wilno (Vilna), Lwów (Lvov) and Lublin areas. During 'Tempest' in Volhynia a certain pattern of events emerged which was soon to reappear in other parts of Poland; it became apparent to all concerned, Russians, Germans and Poles alike, that immediately before the arrival of the Red Army into a particular area of the country, some of the local Home Army units would be mobilised, concentrated and thrown into battle against the Germans. During the fighting temporary contact and co-operation with the Russians would be established. Initially relations between both sides would be cordial and friendly. After the fighting, those of the Home Army units, which found themselves in Russian-held territory would be disarmed, incorporated into the Berling army, or deported into Russia. As 'Tempest' proceeded, it became clear that Stalin was not prepared to co-operate militarily and politically with the Home Army.

Jan Ciechanowski, Oxford