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*The Oder-Neisse Line Revisited: Sikorski's Program  
for Poland's Postwar Western Boundry, 1939-42\**

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The so-called "Polish Question" in World War II is one of those issues which have been so overworked in the literature of recent European history that one brazen enough to reopen any aspect of it has an obligation to reveal at the very outset whatever new and dramatic evidence he or she has which might make the exercise worth the reader's time. In this case, it is the question of the origin of the Polish-German boundary on the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers that I propose to reopen<sup>1</sup> and, in particular, the contribution made to the concept of such a boundary by the first prime minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile, General Władysław Sikorski. My justification for doing so is a brief memorandum, dated 4 December 1942, and submitted by Sikorski the following day to President Roosevelt (or, more accurately, to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles for transmittal to Roosevelt). Because this memorandum has never, to my knowledge, been published and because it has been the subject of considerable controversy, it seems appropriate to quote it here in full:

MEMORANDUM CONCERNING THE WESTERN BOUNDARIES

I. Our approach to the problem of the western boundaries is dictated by the necessity of:

\* The author wishes to express her appreciation to the International Research and Exchanges Board and the American Council of Learned Societies for making possible part of the research on which this article is based.

1. The basic facts of Poland's geographic shift at the end of the war are sufficiently familiar that they need only be summarized here: As a consequence of the Great Power agreements at Yalta and Potsdam, in February and July-August, 1945, respectively, Poland lost to the Soviet Union all territories east of a boundary closely approximating the Curzon line, amounting to some 180,830 square kilometers or just over 46 percent of her prewar total. In the west and north she gained 102,836 square kilometers, including the former Free City of Danzig, the southern half of East Prussia, and all other prewar German territories east of the Oder and Lusatian (or Western) Neisse rivers. Poland's overall area was thereby reduced by one-fifth, from approximately 390,000 to 312,000 square kilometers, with the "Recovered Territories" as they were then called (or the "Western and Northern Territories" as they are generally referred to now) comprising just under one-third of the postwar total.

—a lasting guarantee of the territories most basic to the economic development and defensive potential of the Polish-Czech federation, that is, the mouth of the Vistula and the industrial center in Silesia;

—the liquidation of the permanent threat such as East Prussia and Silesia constitute [when] held in the hands of the Germans as their base of attack;

—*control over the mouth of the Oder, which possesses paramount importance for the federation as the artery directly linking our common center of Silesian industry with the sea;*

—the opening to us permanently of a route through the Baltic and the guaranteeing of communication with allies (naval bases on Bornholm, Rügen and Fehmarn);

—the creation of conditions for our effective and rapid intervention against Germany should it attempt to remilitarize. In this regard, *Western Pomerania based on the lower Oder and, secondly, the northwestern part of the Sudetes with an outlet toward Leipzig* are of paramount importance for the federation.

II. The problem of occupation consists in guaranteeing the freedom to execute in Germany the conditions of surrender imposed on them and, on the other hand, in creating for us the possibility of rapid economic, political and military reconstruction of our country.

In this connection the range of our (federated Poland's) interests includes:

a. *the zone up to the Oder and Lusatian Neisse with bridgeheads on the left bank (as on the line of the Rhine);*

b. key points on the western Baltic as well as [points] connecting it with the North Sea (Bornholm, Rügen, Fehmarn, the Kiel Canal) as a joint zone of Polish, British and American interests.

III. A Central-European Federation is a fundamental condition of the economic existence and, therefore, also the security of the states along the Belgrade-Warsaw axis.

A federation based on strong foundations will be a guarantee likewise of the security of the United States, both in relation to Germany and also to any other forces which might again bring Europe to a state of chaos and, consequently, of war.

According to our conception, the basic elements of the federation include: Poland (with Lithuania), Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Greece, (and Hungary).<sup>2</sup>

2. Several versions of this memorandum appear in different archival collections. This translation was made from the Polish original filed in the Archive of the Polish Institute, London (formerly the General Sikorski Historical Institute): A. XII. 23/42, folio 1, doc. no. 9 [emphasis added]. An English version, differing in only minor editorial details from the one presented here, is filed in the Archives of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University: collection: Poland. Ambasada (U.S.), box 84 [formerly the Ciechanowski Deposit, box 93], folio: "General W. Sikorski's visit in Washington, Dec. 1942-Jan. 1943." That this memorandum was in fact submitted to the Americans is indicated