THE POLITICS OF ANTI-BOLSHEVISM: 
THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT AND 
THE RUSSO-POLISH WAR, 
DECEMBER 1919 TO MAY 1920*

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On 26 April 1920 the Polish army launched a major offensive against Soviet Russia. The question of the French government’s role in the unleashing of this attack has long been a matter of historical debate. P. S. Wandycz, whose work is the most recent detailed account of French eastern policy during the early twenties, attributes no major responsibility to the French for the outbreak of all-out war on Poland’s eastern frontier. He states that the Quai d’Orsay was unenthusiastic about a Polish campaign and that the Poles had acted on their own initiative.¹ N. Davies asserts that ‘Allied policy sought to discourage Poland from attacking Russia.’ ‘Without formally forbidding a Polish offensive,’ he writes, the Allies ‘emphasized that it [the offensive] could not enjoy their support.’² On the other hand, Soviet and European Left-wing opinion has long condemned the Polish attack as a direct result of French influence.³ Vladimir Potemkin noted that Poland was incapable of waging a full-scale war with its own resources and that consequently Allied influence had to be decisive in determining Warsaw’s attitude toward a continuation of the war.⁴

A second related problem arising from the question of the French responsibility for the Polish offensive is the matter of the Quai d’Orsay’s attitude toward Polish eastern territorial ambitions and its position on the maintenance of a Great Russian state. On this issue Wandycz notes that the Quai d’Orsay’s lack of enthusiasm for a Polish offensive stemmed from its disapproval of Warsaw’s plans for ‘breaking up’ the Russian state. Paris was still committed, writes Wandycz, to the maintenance of

¹ I wish to thank Professors John M. Sherwood and Richard K. Debo for their helpful comments and criticisms of this article. Abbreviations: nd, no date; nn, not numbered; ns, not signed; pc, par courier. EMA, Etat-Major de l’Armée; EMGA, Etat-Major Général de l’Armée; GQG, Grand Quartier Général; MAE, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères; MG (sc), Ministère de la Guerre (section contemporaine); SAR, Service des Affaires Russes (MAE). Documents: MAE: ancienne série A – ‘Guerre, 1914–1918’, ancienne série Z – ‘Europe, 1918–1929’; MG: 7N, 16N.
⁴ V. Potiemkine, Histoire de la diplomatie, 111 (Paris, nd), 89.
Russia's territorial unity. The object of this article will be to re-examine these questions in the light of the material contained in the recently opened French archives in Paris.

On the morning of 11 December 1919 Georges Clemenceau, the premier of France, met privately with his British counterpart, David Lloyd George, to discuss the situation in Russia and the Allied policy of intervention against the Bolsheviks. According to Richard Ullman's account, Clemenceau told Lloyd George that he 'had come to think that the Powers had made a great mistake in interfering in the Russian Civil War'. Large sums of money had been expended in trying to do so, and without positive result. Clemenceau, therefore, opposed a continuation of previous Allied policy, and showed no interest in the recently resurrected idea of creating a united, anti-Bolshevik army of the border nationalities and the White Russians. He added that he 'was much more concerned about the future danger from Germany than he was about the spread of Bolshevism, either by force or subversion, from Russia'. In a larger meeting of Allied representatives the following day, Clemenceau stated that the Entente ought to strengthen Poland in order to erect 'a barbed wire entanglement' around Russia designed to prevent the Bolsheviks 'from creating trouble outside, and to stop Germany from entering into relations with Russia, whether of a political or military character'. Should the Allies extend the necessary backing to the Poles, Clemenceau was prepared to abandon any idea of further 'direct intervention in Russia'. 'All efforts in this direction', he said, 'would prove wasteful in the future as in the past.'

Clemenceau's declarations on the Russian question were not just personal ruminations, or conclusions drawn out by Lloyd George. On this issue the French needed no prodding to recognize that previous Allied policy had been a failure. Several papers on the Russian problem were prepared in the Quai d'Orsay in the weeks before the London Conference, and their conclusions conformed for the most part with the views expressed by Clemenceau. Most notably the Quai d'Orsay recognized the improbability, if not the impossibility, of any co-operative arrangement between the border nationalities and the Great Russians (e.g. General Denikin and Admiral Kolchak). As one note put it, the Whites opposed any concessions in this regard and were disposed, when the circumstances allowed, to settle accounts with their former compatriots by force of arms. On the other hand, when the fortunes of war turned against the Whites, and the nationalities held the upper hand, it

5 France and her Eastern Allies, p. 142.
7 Great Britain, Foreign Office, E. L. Woodward and R. Butler (eds.), British Documents on Foreign Policy, 1st series (BDFP), vol. II (London, 1949), 'Secretary's notes of a Conference held at 10 Downing Street...on December 12th at 10.30 a.m.', no. 56, pp. 744–6.
8 As has been suggested by Ullman, see II, 314.
was the latter who became intractable. Of all the disputes concerning the border states, the Quai d'Orsay regarded the problem of Poland as the most difficult to resolve because of the question of frontiers. Polish territorial claims, characterized as ‘enormous’, were recognized to go much beyond anything the Whites were prepared to accept. This impasse precluded any co-ordinated drive on Moscow and left the Bolsheviks free to concentrate their military forces against the retreating army of General A. Denikin in Southern Russia. The Quai d'Orsay understood that the Poles and other nationalities had ‘an interest in the maintenance of Russian anarchy’, but feared that if a reconstituted Russian state emerged from the chaos, the Allies would be incapable of preventing it from destroying by force the independence of the border states. An Allied mediation of the dispute might bring results if it were undertaken jointly. But London or Paris could not act unilaterally for fear of becoming embroiled with the two disputing parties. Moreover, one note implied that the French and British governments had interests of their own to reconcile before any joint action could be taken in this sense.

The gloom of French policy makers about the situation in Russia was also augmented by what they regarded as the ‘blundering political policies’ of the anti-Bolshevik governments. The Quai d'Orsay considered Kolchak and Denikin to be surrounded by ‘reactionaries’ who sought to restore the ancien régime. This circumstance was believed to have alienated the Russian population and contributed to the military defeats of the White armies in Siberia and South Russia. Thus, the indifference manifested by Clemenceau toward the anti-Bolshevik Russians at the Conference of London stemmed from a very unfavourable appraisal of their conduct in 1919 as well as from the belief that a strong Poland would suffice to maintain the Versailles settlement in the East and hold back the Bolsheviks.

Such were the views of the French government at the end of 1919. Clemenceau, at least, seemed prepared to tolerate the Soviet regime behind a Polish barricade. However, early in the new year Clemenceau would retire. Alexandre Millerand succeeded him as Président du Conseil on 20 January 1920 and took up the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. This was an important change because the French General Staff had had a very large influence on the formation of government policy under Clemenceau (who was Minister of War), especially in regard to Russia. Disillusioned with the Whites after the failure of the French occupation in the Ukraine during the early months of 1919, the General Staff had turned its support to the Poles, and to a lesser degree to the Czechs and

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Rumanians. The Quai d'Orsay approved this orientation, but would not abandon altogether the hope of fostering the recreation of a conservative Great Russian state. Consequently, it was somewhat more willing than the Ministry of war to commit French resources to the anti-Bolshevik movements in Russia.

The Quai d'Orsay's more combative attitude toward the Bolsheviks, thoughflagging at the end of 1919, would be revived by the change in governments. Millerand appointed Maurice Paleologue, the last French ambassador to Tsarist Russia, Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay, and gave him important policy-making responsibilities. Paleologue was strongly sympathetic to the White cause, and had been recalled from Petrograd in April 1917 because of a 'too conspicuous' attachment to the ancien régime.13 Paradoxically, the new Secretary General's sympathy for the White Russians was not then shared by other permanent members of the Quai d'Orsay staff. Philippe Berthelot, F. A. Kammerer, and Jules Laroche,14 who were largely responsible for the formulation of Quai d'Orsay policy toward Russia in 1918–19, had also become disillusioned (though, to be sure, more reluctantly than the General Staff) with the Whites after the defeats of 1919. Paleologue and Millerand, on the other hand, were in a sense newcomers to the Quai d'Orsay in 1920. They had not been subjected to the constant exposure of unfavourable intelligence reports concerning the White Russians, and thus did not share the gloomy mood which afflicted other members of the Department. Moreover, the appointment of Paleologue as Secretary General pushed into the background Berthelot, whom the British ambassador in Paris, Lord Derby, had described a few months earlier as 'the practical controller' of French foreign policy.15 This change was the more important because Berthelot, since the summer of 1919, had worked very closely with Clemenceau,16 and thus acted to assure a relative harmony of views between the Quai d'Orsay and Ministry of War. Consequently, the resignation of Clemenceau not only sharply curtailed the General Staff's role in the formulation of foreign policy, but also prompted an important shake-up in the Quai d'Orsay.

These changes within the French government pose important questions. Paleologue's sympathy for the White Russians was inconsistent with the policy of the barbed-wire barricade and even with the attitude of his own colleagues at the Foreign Ministry. Would then the shift of the Présidence du Conseil to the Quai d'Orsay and Paleologue's appointment as Secretary General portend a more aggressive French policy toward

14 Respectively Directeur Politique, Chief of the Service des Affaires Russes, and Sous-Directeur d'Europe.
15 Curzon Papers, India Office, London, box 22, diary entry, Friday, 14 Nov. 1919.
Moscow, and a deviation in the government's attitude toward Poland as a strictly defensive bulwark against Bolshevism? If there was movement in the government's policy, what would be the reaction of the French General Staff? Would the relative harmony of views which had existed in regard to Russia between the Ministry of War and the Quai d'Orsay in the final months of the Clemenceau ministry persist under Millerand? The answers to these questions bear directly upon the French responsibility for the launching of the Polish offensive in April 1920.

The question of the new government's attitude toward the Russian problem would be raised immediately, because the Poles since the middle of December 1919 had shown increasingly anxious signs of wanting to act militarily on their eastern frontier. It was not the first time Warsaw had queried Allied opinion on military action against the Bolsheviks, but beginning in December Polish feelers became more frequent and more urgent. This resulted from the shift in Allied policy toward the Soviets initiated by Lloyd George at the Conference of London. The British prime minister wanted to come to terms with Moscow and if the French went along, the Poles would have to make peace. Moreover, the collapse of the White armies in Russia would gradually permit the Bolsheviks to even the balance of forces on the Polish front which at that time weighed heavily in favour of Warsaw. Hence, the circumstances required the Polish president and commander in chief, Josef Pilsudski, to act quickly, if he was going to act at all.

Polish feelers in Paris seem to have begun on 17 December when a representative of the Polish Embassy, de Romer, queried the Quai d'Orsay about the future French attitude toward Bolshevism. He stated that Warsaw was very uneasy over the apparent shift in Allied policy, and feared that the Entente intended to abandon those states disposed to continue fighting against the Soviet regime. The following day the Finnish General Carl Gustav Mannerheim passed on unofficially to Berthelot the substance of conversations he had held recently with Pilsudski in which the Polish chief of state had indicated a desire to launch a spring offensive against the Red Army. Pilsudski had not said that he was soliciting encouragement, but he expressed the 'fear of being discouraged by certain of the Great Powers'. He complained particularly of the 'zig-zag' policy of the British. On 31 December Stanislaw Patek, the Polish Foreign Minister, met with Berthelot to probe again the French

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19 Ibid., 'Visite du Général Mannerheim', nn, initialled Laroche, 18 Dec. 1919, p. 185. The French Minister in Warsaw, Eugène Pralon, had reported the previous day that Mannerheim told him that Pilsudski 'was perhaps not hostile to the idea of a Polish offensive' against the Bolsheviks. See Z – Russie, v. 286, Pralon, no. 450, 17 Dec. 1919, p. 47.
attitude, this time in regard to a Soviet proposal for peace negotiations made on 22 December. Berthelot responded that France would ‘never’ treat with Moscow, and that his government would regret any Allied movement to this end.20

From Warsaw the French Minister, Eugène Pralon, reported on 3 January 1920 that the Political Director in the Polish Foreign Ministry, Okecki, had told him that the recent Soviet peace proposal would increase socialist opposition in Poland to the war and thus make a continuation of hostilities more difficult. Under these circumstances Okecki stated that Warsaw would need to know the Entente’s ‘exact intentions’ in regard to Poland’s eastern frontiers in order to enable the government to undermine anti-war opposition and rekindle the army’s ‘taste for the offensive’. Pralon observed that Okecki’s declarations appeared to confirm his earlier telegrams indicating that Poland was anxious to push its borders eastward.21 Still, the Quai d’Orsay did not seem alarmed by Pralon’s conclusions and informed the Ministry of War on 6 January that Berthelot had told the Polish Foreign Minister that the French government ‘did not envisage in any way a peace with the Soviets, and invited him to inform Warsaw of this point of view in order to cut short any inclination to this end’.22

While the French government continued to advise the Poles against making peace, it was at the same time terminating its commitments to the White Russians. It should be recalled that in December 1919 the last of the intact anti-Bolshevik armies under Denikin was in full retreat in Southern Russia. General Charles M. E. Mangin, the chief of the French Military Mission in South Russia, and General L. F. M. François Franchet d’Esperey, the commander in chief of the Armée d’Orient, had requested Paris to exert pressure on Poland for military action against the Red Army in order to divert enemy troops away from Denikin’s beaten forces and save an otherwise lost situation.23 But the Quai d’Orsay knew full well that any request for Polish assistance would be, as Kammerer put it, ‘impossible, inefficacious, and not opportune’.24 Consequently, on 8 January Clemenceau informed Franchet d’Esperey that foreign military

21 Z. – Russie, v. 286, Pralon, nos. 1–2, 3 Jan. 1920, p. 64.
22 Ibid., Berthelot (Pichon, the Foreign Minister, was ill) to Clemenceau, no. 26, 6 Jan. 1920, p. 89.
24 See Kammerer’s marginal note on Franchet d’Esperey’s 29 Dec. telegram, ibid., p. 192; and Z. – Russie, v. 286, Berthelot to Clemenceau, no. 33, 7 Jan. 1920, p. 92. Pilsudski told Mannerheim that he could not launch an offensive before the spring because of the weather and the insufficient readiness of his troops. See note 16. But Kammerer’s remark also stemmed from the realization that Pilsudski had no intention of serving the interests of the White Russians.
intervention of any kind was out of the question. Given the understanding of Denikin's situation, any serious French interest in the anti-Bolsheviks in Southern Russia could be said to have ceased by early January 1920.

The declining French commitment to the White Russians coincided with an increasing effort on the part of Lloyd George to facilitate an end to the civil war and an accommodation with the Bolsheviks. On 16 January the Allied Supreme Council acting on British initiative approved the resumption of trade with Russia, thus raising the naval blockade which had been maintained around the Soviet state since the October Revolution. Lloyd George continued to push this policy in February during further meetings of the Supreme Council held in London. This time his attention was directed at the border states, mainly Poland, which he wished to discourage from prolonging the war against the Bolsheviks. The French for their part continued to oppose an improvement in relations with Soviet regime, but could put forth only a negative alternative. Berthelot in his speech before the Council acknowledged that it was illogical to push the non-Bolshevik states along the Russian frontier to refuse apparently advantageous Soviet propositions for peace, and at the same time declare that the Entente was no longer desirous of waging or supporting a war against the Bolsheviks. He therefore recommended the fixing of a line of demarcation stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea over which the Bolsheviks should not be permitted to pass. The border states along this line would be urged to maintain themselves on the defensive without menacing the Soviet regime, but without any contact with it either. Berthelot told the Council that since the Bolsheviks on their own would probably not be able to establish a stable government, recognition of any sort or the resumption of commercial relations would only help to reinforce their authority. Such a step would be 'an act of moral weakness', would shock public opinion, and strengthen 'elements of disorder, hatred, and revolution'. 'The fate of Europe', Berthelot intoned, would risk being imperilled by a 'peace of capitulation'. Lloyd George was not moved by these apocalyptic visions of revolution, and put forth an argument which he had made before, to wit, that the Entente was in no position to advise the border states not to make peace with Moscow because the Allied powers would incur responsibilities which they could not discharge. In the end the French capitulated, and a declaration representing British views was issued. The Quai d'Orsay interpreted the February declaration to mean that no further 'military assistance' would

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be extended to Denikin, and in early March instructions to this effect were sent out to the French Naval Command in the Black Sea.27

As these dispositions were being taken, Soviet cavalry breached the last major defensive position of Denikin’s army and forced the evacuation on 27 March of the final anti-Bolshevik refuge of Novorossisk in the Kuban. Remnants of White forces held out in the Crimea, but on 2 April the British informed General Baron P. N. Wrangel, Denikin’s successor as commander of the Volunteer Army, that they would halt further aid to his forces if he did not undertake armistice negotiations with the Bolsheviks. Paris did not oppose this démarche. Indeed, Millerand informed Cambon in London on 10 April that the French government would maintain its attitude concerning Southern Russia entirely in conformity with that of the British.28 In short, the Quai d’Orsay considered the situation in the Crimea as untenable, and foresaw no further Allied role there other than the evacuation of refugees.29 Since the French government, as Wandycz has pointed out, ‘was unwilling to antagonize Britain when the issue of German reparations and disarmament hung in the balance’,30 it would seem that the Quai d’Orsay was prepared to abandon the White Russians in order to appease Lloyd George. However, did this mean the French government would also conform to British policy on Poland, and therefore oppose Pilsudski’s pointed suggestions of an offensive against the Bolsheviks? Warsaw did not know and continued to press the French for an answer.

General Paul Henrys, the chief of the French Military Mission in Poland, reported upon his return to Warsaw from Paris on 12 February that the Polish government was anxious to have some indication as to ‘Allied intentions concerning the Russian question’. According to Henrys, Pilsudski was uneasy about the imprecision of Allied policy and wished to have exact information as rapidly as possible on the material and financial aid which Poland could expect from its allies. Pilsudski stated that the resolution of this matter was ‘tied’ to the ‘problem of peace or a continuation of the war with the Soviet government’. He indicated to Henrys that he intended to stall peace talks with the Bolsheviks by posing unacceptable demands until Allied policy became clearer.31

Although Henrys, a ‘devotee’ of Pilsudski,32 was not critical of these plans, Pralon was seriously alarmed. He warned Paris on numerous

29 Ibid., ‘Note pour S.E. Monsieur Paléologue’, p. 93.
30 France and Her Eastern Allies, p. 155.
32 France and her Eastern Allies, p. 147.
occasions in February and early March that Warsaw had not the slightest interest in making peace with the Bolsheviks except on terms which were out of all touch with reality and which would certainly result in a continuation of hostilities in the East. Pralon stated clearly that the Polish government would only engage in peace negotiations with Moscow in the hopes that the talks would rupture. The situation would then, in the thinking of Warsaw, oblige the Allies to reinforce the Polish army which could push eastward, permitting the formation of Byelorussian and Ukrainian states under Polish influence or direct administration. Pralon noted that the Poles were showing little interest in making their policies conform to those of the Entente and that they would continue to pursue their annexationist objectives unless restrained by the Allies. In addition, he pointed out that the French government had supported the creation of a Polish state as a barrier to German eastward expansion. By encouraging the Poles to continue a long military effort out of all proportion with their capacities of resistance, France would be destroying the Polish means to maintain its national existence. The high expenses of maintaining the Polish army were undermining government finances, and delaying the work of reconstruction. Moreover, the extension of Polish frontiers had only generated hatred among the non-Polish population. Consequently, Pralon urged Paris to restrain the Poles.

I will repeat what I have said several times in my previous correspondence, to wit, that the Polish army is awaiting the order to move on Bolshevism only in order to attain certain long coveted objectives: Kiev..., Mogilev..., [and] Vitebsk... The time appears to have come when we must find the words to convince the Poles that if they can rightfully count on our support against Bolshevik violence and treachery, we will not give them any aid if they insist against all our advice on continuing to exhaust themselves pursuing megalomaniac ends which ceaselessly jeopardize the peace of Europe and even the very existence of Poland.33

One could praise the Poles, said Pralon, if their attitude was inspired by a justified mistrust of Moscow or at least by a conscientious desire to proceed in conformity with French policy. However, instead of prudently fearing the threat of the Red Army, the official Polish view was that Lenin’s peace overtures were a sign of weakness, and that Bolshevik military successes were due to the feebleness of their opponents rather than to their own strength. Warsaw seemed to believe that the Polish army would prevail in any contest with the Bolsheviks. It was this kind of reasoning which explained the ‘immoderation’ of Polish peace terms. Pralon predicted that the Polish misjudgement of Soviet intentions could lead to rude surprises for Warsaw and for Paris.34

The Quai d’Orsay also received similar indications from the Polish Minister in Bucarest, Count Skrzynski. Skrzynski told the French Chargé


d’Affaires, Henri Cambon, that the Polish government had been obliged to prepare a response to Soviet peace propositions because of the Allied inclination to enter into contact with the Bolsheviks. He noted, however, that the Polish reply would be made in such terms that Moscow could well break off the negotiations. More explicit the following month, Skrzynski stated on 25 March that Polish demands for peace were ‘so extensive that the Bolsheviks could not accept them’. ‘Alors, c’est la guerre. Elle aura lieu.’ The Polish army could be beaten. But should it succeed, the Poles would be beholden to no foreign power and could establish their eastern borders without outside interference.

What was the Quai d’Orsay’s reaction to these persistent and sometimes urgent warnings of Polish intentions to intensify the war against the Bolsheviks? In the middle of February Millerand told Patek that peace with the Soviet government would offer no security and was only a manoeuvre by which the Bolsheviks could choose an appropriate moment to attack Poland. While advising against an ‘aggressive attitude’, Millerand warned Patek of the consequences of ‘an ill-considered confidence’ in the goodwill of the Bolsheviks, and stated that if Poland was attacked by the Red Army, France ‘would assist it by all the means within [its] power’. Millerand’s advice to the Poles was vague and did not satisfy Warsaw. But the Quai d’Orsay could not give more direct encouragement to Pilsudski for fear of antagonizing Lloyd George or even the French labour movement, which was active during the first months of 1920. Nevertheless, on 22 February Millerand approved the dispatch of 80 million francs worth of powder, and rifle and artillery ammunition for the Polish army – urgently needed ‘because of operations in the coming spring’. This seems to have been Millerand’s response to Henry’s telegram of 12 February (p. 170), but there appears to have been none whatsoever to Pralon’s numerous warnings of danger.

It is interesting to note that, while Millerand cautioned Patek about the dangers of peace with a perfidious Moscow and while Berthelot told the Supreme Council that the Bolsheviks were incapable of setting up a stable government, the French General Staff was taking a somewhat different view of the situation in the East. The 2e Bureau, contrary to the Quai d’Orsay, estimated that the major objectives of Soviet policy were peace with its neighbours, especially Poland, the restoration of commercial and diplomatic relations with the Great Powers, economic recovery, and the

38 Z – Pologne, v. 25, Matériel de guerre et ravitaillement de l’armée, 1 jan. – 15 juillet 1920, A. Lefèvre (Minister of War) to Millerand, no. 870 BS/1, 18 Feb. 1920, p. 28; and Millerand to Lefèvre, nn, 22 Feb. 1920, p. 30.
re-establishment of Russian unity. It was thought that the political and economic disorder generated by the civil war had made the conclusion of peace an urgent necessity for the Soviet government. The 2ª Bureau also noted that Bolshevik forces were being transformed into ‘armées du travail’ for economic reconstruction, that the density of Bolshevik forces facing Poland was extremely thin, and that even after a noticeable reinforcement of the Red Army, the Poles still held a 25 per cent superiority in men on the Russian front. Consequently, it concluded that rumours, then circulating, of a possible Soviet offensive against Poland or Rumania were without foundation. As for Berthelot’s avowal that the Soviets could probably not form a stable government, the Bulletin of the 2ª Bureau for February concluded that in spite of its revolutionary objectives, the Soviet government was accomplishing a ‘national work of considerable importance’ by overcoming the danger of disintegration and in resisting economic domination by those of the Great Powers ‘favoured by their resources or their proximity’ to Russia. The reconstitution of a great Russian state, said the Bulletin, was ‘necessary for [the maintenance of] a balance of power in Europe. By an unexpected turn of events, it seem[ed] that this Russia of the future might [well] develop from the present efforts of Lenin and Trotsky. Nevertheless, the 2ª Bureau began to draw attention to the growing build-up of forces on the Russo-Polish front and the mounting danger of all-out war. It strongly implied, however, that Soviet peace overtures were genuine, and that the reinforcement of Bolshevik forces was a response to the menacing activities of the Poles.

The most interesting aspect of the 2ª Bureau’s intelligence reports is their positive appraisal of the Soviet government. These summaries clearly foresaw the possible emergence of an independent Soviet Russian state strong enough to maintain a balance of power against Germany. Since the first step toward rapprochement is the recognition of common interests, the 2ª Bureau’s projections could have served as a basis for a long-term accommodation with the Bolsheviks. The Quai d’Orsay, however, still resisted the movement toward peace. The characterizations of Soviet strength and intentions circulated by the French government among its allies stood in direct contradiction with those of its own military intelligence service. These discrepancies are evidence of a reluctance to give further substance to the British argument in favour of a limited accommodation with the Bolsheviks. They also suggest that the Quai d’Orsay did not wish to discourage Pilsudski’s warlike ambitions.

During the first three months of 1920 while Warsaw attempted to ascertain the French attitude toward a continuation of hostilities on the

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39 MG (sc), Fonds Pologne, carton no. 12, dos. ‘sorties 2ª Bureau 1920’, Buat to Foch, nn, nd (Jan. 1920); see also attached note ‘avis de la section NE’, nn, nd, ns; and Bulletins mensuels, 2ª Bureau, EMA, Bulletin du 1er fév., du 1er mars, du 1er avril 1920.
40 MG (sc), Bulletin du 1er mars 1920.
41 Ibid., Bulletin du 1er avril 1920.
42 See especially ibid., Bulletin du 1er juin.
Polish front, the Soviet government pursued its efforts to reach agreement with the Poles. On 28 January Georgi Chicherin, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, renewed his offer of 22 December to begin peace negotiations. The Polish government procrastinated in its response but was obliged by public opinion to prepare counter proposals. War aims were discussed in the Polish Sejm in February and finally on 13 March Warsaw responded with an official note demanding as a condition for settlement a Bolshevik withdrawal to the Polish borders of 1772. These were far-reaching demands which, the 2e Bureau noted, had caused ‘violent displeasure’ in Soviet Russia. As for Pilsudski he would acknowledge in early April that his terms to the Bolsheviks were ‘severe’, but observed that ‘they were more moderate than the conditions imposed upon Germany by the victorious allies’. The Polish government’s annexationist objectives, as reported by Pralon and other French agents, are fully corroborated by Wandycz’s monograph on Soviet–Polish relations. Pilsudski’s intention was plainly to recreate a greater Poland which would include large areas of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, and push back Russia to its ethnic frontiers.

As Warsaw made known its conditions for peace, Eugène Pralon was relieved as the French Minister in Poland by Hector de Panafieu. Millerand’s instructions to the new French envoy are very important, not only because they lay out the basic lines of French eastern policy but because they represent a response to the accumulation of evidence pointing to a Polish spring offensive. Although Millerand warned Panafieu against the dangers of hostile German propaganda in Poland, he devoted a much larger portion of his instructions to the problem of Russia. In this regard, Millerand noted that the peace talks between the Polish and Soviet governments took precedence over all other questions. Prior Soviet peace initiatives, said Millerand, had not prompted a Polish response in spite of Warsaw’s interest in fixing its eastern frontiers and in establishing a definitive peace. This provisional situation could not long continue, and if the Allies had decided to accord Poland all the assistance possible in case of a Bolshevik attack, they could not advise the Polish government not to make peace with the Soviets. ‘In this delicate question which was of the utmost importance to Poland and to the Allied powers’, Millerand reckoned that Warsaw ‘should envisage above all its own interests’. As for France, it could neither advise the Poles to make nor not

43 France and her Eastern Allies, p. 143.  
44 MG (sc), Bulletin du 1er avril.
45 Soviet–Polish Relations, p. 182.
46 Wandycz’s characterization of Pilsudski and Polish foreign policy is much less severe than the impression which emerges from the French documents. These archives paint a picture of a bellicose, bullying Polish state – submissive when weak, but constantly biting off the neighbouring territories of weaker governments when strong. Pilsudski emerges as a small-time East European imperialist whose visions of a revived Greater Polish state led him at times to lose all sense of reality.
47 Soviet–Polish Relations, pp. 169–71 and passim.
to make peace with the Soviet government. However, when talks did open, Millerand observed that the Polish government should not manifest ‘exaggerated territorial ambitions’. It would be ‘imprudent’ for Poland to demand the frontier of 1772, and the Allied powers could not support such a claim which was ‘manifestly unrealizable’ and contrary to the principles of the treaties of peace.48

French policy, therefore, was not to encourage Warsaw to make war, but not to advise the conclusion of peace either. On the face of it this represented a softening of the French position since in late December Berthelot did in fact tell the Poles not to make peace. But substantially Millerand’s position represented the more aggressive stance since, in spite of counselling against exaggerated territorial claims, he was prepared to leave the Poles a free hand to pursue their own interests. Wandycz notes that the French government, still favouring the policy of the barbed-wire barricade, ‘had not encouraged the Polish offensive’. He also draws a distinction between warning against the dangers of peace and encouraging war.49 But this distinction is not valid if the French government was sufficiently well informed to know that declining to advise peace would lead to war. It is quite true that the Quai d’Orsay did not goad the Poles into attacking the Bolsheviks, but under the circumstances they did not need to. The Quai d’Orsay knew that Pilsudski would march at the first opportune moment. Paris had only to prevent him from being discouraged by Britain. This the Quai d’Orsay did by telling Warsaw that Bolshevik peace proposals were insincere, and by refusing to recommend peace even when the 2\textsuperscript{e} Bureau believed that Moscow was prepared to make a territorial settlement coinciding with the existing military situation at the front.50 In such a way the Quai d’Orsay could keep the war going against Moscow without alienating Lloyd George, whose support was needed on other issues. Moreover, Millerand’s caution against immoderation was intended to avoid alienating Russian national feeling and to make possible the formation of a Great Russian anti-Bolshevik government. If this motive was not clearly apparent on the eve of the offensive of 26 April, it would become so in the aftermath of the battle of Warsaw when the Quai d’Orsay invited the Rumanian and Polish governments to join Wrangel in a general offensive against the Red Army.51

By early April Soviet–Polish negotiations had broken down over the failure to agree on a site for the talks and over the question of an armistice. The Poles were prepared to accept only a partial armistice and insisted on Borisov, a town just behind Polish lines, as the site for the talks. Pilsudski’s

49 France and Her Eastern Allies, pp. 141, 147.
50 MG (sc), Bulletin du 1er mars, borne out by Soviet–Polish Relations, p. 177.
intention in putting forth these terms was to retain his military freedom of action and minimize Allied interference in the talks.\textsuperscript{52} The Bolsheviks objected to the choice of Borisov – too close, they said, to the heart of the military zone – and regarded a local armistice around Borisov as irregular and unacceptable. But essentially, Moscow refused to take the part of a defeated military power which the acceptance of Polish terms would have entailed.\textsuperscript{53}

Panafieu’s reports on these events were for the most part uncritical and quite inferior to those of Pralon. Like Henrys, the new French Minister appears to have become a ‘devotee’ of Pilsudski and an advocate for his cause. Nevertheless, in one of his seldom disapproving dispatches, he echoed Pralon’s previous warnings on the recklessness of Polish policy. The Poles, observed Panafieu, took pleasure in comparing the situation existing on their eastern front with that leading to the 11 November armistice in France. Warsaw’s insistence on Borisov, an important junction of railway and road networks, stemmed from the desire to oblige the Bolsheviks to negotiate in the midst of a powerful concentration of Polish military forces. Panafieu’s observation supports Wandycz’s statement that ‘Pilsudski thought of Russia as a defeated country to whom Poland could dictate terms’.\textsuperscript{54} But it is surely a measure of Polish dementia that Warsaw imagined it had the Red Army at a military disadvantage similar to that of the Germans just before Compiègne. It is also indicative of the wishful thinking in Paris that the Quai d’Orsay did not react with alarm to this report or to those that would soon follow it.

In the final days before the Polish offensive, Paris received at least two more direct warnings of Warsaw’s intentions. On 12 April Pilsudski told Panafieu that he was ‘convinced’ the Polish army would have ‘no difficulty’ in ‘defeating definitively’ the Bolsheviks, but believed that the success of his policies would depend on those adopted by the French government. He pressed Panafieu to obtain some indication from Paris as to its attitude, but there seems to have been no response by the Quai d’Orsay.\textsuperscript{55} Finally, on 21 April Panafieu reported that the Polish army was preparing to launch an offensive to carry its front lines to the Dnieper. He stated that the Poles hoped to end the inconclusive military situation, deliver a mortal blow to the Red Army, and give some significance to the accord concluded on 21 April with the Ukrainian ‘government’ of Simon Petliura.\textsuperscript{56} The Quai d’Orsay appears to have made no response even to this ultimate indication of an imminent, all-out war between Poland and Russia.

If the Quai d’Orsay declined to restrain Pilsudski’s desire to pursue the

\textsuperscript{52} Soviet–Polish Relations, pp. 180–1.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 182; see also MG (sc), Bulletin du 1er mai.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., Panafieu, nos. 184–90, 13, 14 Apr., received 17, 18, 19 Apr. 1920, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., Panafieu, no. 208, 21 Apr., received 21 Apr. 1920, 145.
war against Moscow, how did French military opinion react to the prospect of a Polish offensive? Wandycz suggests in this regard that Foch might have been favourable to Pilsudski's offensive plans, and that 'the army' had 'apparently co-operated' to some degree with the Poles.\textsuperscript{57} It is not possible to say with certainty what Foch's attitude might have been toward the offensive, but on several occasions he had expressed doubts or outright opposition to an isolated Polish attack on the Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{58} Although he may occasionally have been equivocal on this issue, it is unlikely that he openly favoured the Polish offensive as claimed by the Polish Chief of Staff, A. Rozwadowski.\textsuperscript{59}

What can be said with certainty is that important elements of French military opinion were opposed to a Polish attack on the Red Army. The Polish High Command submitted a fairly detailed proposal to the French General Staff (or perhaps to Foch's staff) for an offensive into the Ukraine in December 1919 or in early January 1920. An unsigned report dated 10 January 1920 summarized the Polish proposal and expressed categorical opposition to it.\textsuperscript{60} The 'programme of the Polish High Command' called for a military advance to a new line running along the Dvina and the middle course of the Dnieper. The Polish left flank would be covered by Latvian forces, while on its right the Rumanian army would advance to the Dnieper from a point south of Kiev on a line running to the River Bug and then south to the Black Sea.\textsuperscript{61} The new line, according to the Poles, would allow a consolidation of Polish defences by taking advantage of the natural obstacle represented by the Dnieper, and thus permit an economization of Polish effective.

The French note, however, saw serious disadvantages in the proposal. The Dvina-Dnieper obstacle was only of limited value since it was frozen for five months of the year and thus easily passable during the winter. There were two important gaps in the new line, not protected by natural obstacles (between Vitebsk and Orsa and the Dnieper and Bug). The rail

\textsuperscript{57} France and her Eastern Allies, pp. 141–2, 146–7.
\textsuperscript{58} DBFP, vol. 2, 'Notes of a meeting held in M. Pichon's room, Quai d'Orsay, Paris, Monday, 19 Jan. 1920, at 10.30 a.m.', p. 922; also FR, Paris Peace Conference, VIII, 211. When General Henrys submitted a plan for the extension of Polish frontiers to the Dnieper in early January 1920, Foch wrote to Clemenceau that such a proposal, whatever its merits, could not be usefully examined until the Allies had settled upon a general line of conduct toward Soviet Russia and upon the role which the Poles were to play within this context. See Z – Russie, v. 286, Henrys to Foch, no. 4081/0, Paris, 4 Jan. 1920, p. 69, and enclosures; also Foch to Clemenceau, no. 12/2, 15 Jan. 1920, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{59} Soviet–Polish Relations, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{60} Probably written by Colonel Alphonse Joseph Georges because it is in a small collection of his private papers. Georges was a member of Foch's staff at this time.
\textsuperscript{61} Henri Cambon reported on 31 March that Warsaw had approached the Rumanian government in view of an accord which would leave Poland free to attain its 1772 frontiers, and permit Rumania to advance to Odessa. The Rumanian government responded negatively, noting 'that the Dniester was too good a defence line to abandon for adventures beyond it'. No date was given for the Polish démarche. See Z – Pologne, v. 70, H. Cambon, no. 168, 31 Mar. 1920, p. 199.
network west of the Dnieper was entirely inadequate for the rapid movement of reserves. Moreover, the rural population of these areas, having profited from the Bolshevik redistribution of the land, would not view favourably the return behind Pilsudski’s army of the great landed proprietors of the Ukraine, who were predominantly Polish. Consequently, the note concluded that the extension of Polish lines to the Dnieper would not provide a better defence nor any economization of forces. In fact, the weak military foundations of the proposal seemed to accentuate ‘above all, dissembled political motives’. An offensive into the Ukraine would give free play to Polish annexationist designs. ‘It is not doubtful’, said the note, ‘that [Warsaw] would seek to utilize its influence in order to form a local Ukrainian government attached to a Greater Poland.’ The note observed as well that an offensive would risk inciting Russian nationalism and perhaps precipitating ‘a decisive confrontation [with the Red Army], the issue of which could only be disastrous for Poland’. It concluded that ‘the Polish propositions’ were dangerous and that given the potential superiority of Russian military resources, ‘there was no interest in provoking Bolshevism by an advance on the Dnieper’.62

This note may well have described the attitude of Foch’s staff, if not Foch himself, to Pilsudski’s proposed offensive. Wandycz indicates that the Polish liaison officer with Foch’s staff, Captain Morstin, reported in March that ‘the attitude of France in the matter of our eastern borders is unfavourable to us’. But did Morstin’s appraisal really describe a generalized feeling within the French government or was it more limited in scope? There is no evidence to indicate that Morstin had any direct contacts with the Quai d’Orsay, and indeed the nature of his duties probably kept him close to Foch’s headquarters. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that his appraisal of French opinion described the mood he found there, not in the government as a whole.63 If such was the case, the Georges note explains the substance of this opposition to the offensive.

There is other evidence as well to suggest that the French General Staff did not favour Pilsudski’s offensive. General Edmond A. L. Buat, Chief of the General Staff, signed a note sometimes during late March or in April before the Polish offensive, advising the recall of Henrys from Warsaw. The principal motive behind this recommendation was Henrys’ failure to react to the increasingly dangerous military situation in the East. The Buat note viewed Poland as caught between two powerful enemies who

63 In connexion with the Morstin telegram, Wandycz notes that ‘the French government was hardly enthusiastic about Poland’s eastern territorial ambitions, and considered that Poland as a state had not crystallized sufficiently to become a centre of power in Eastern Europe’ (Soviet–Polish Relations, p. 171). But it was Foch who had stated that Poland was not a fully developed state capable of undertaking on its own a military action against the Bolsheviks (in Sept. 1919, in response to the Polish Premier Paderewski’s proposal for a Polish march on Moscow). See FR, Paris Peace Conference, VIII, 211.
could at any time consort to destroy the Polish state. It referred to recent intelligence reports emphasizing the growing risk of a German military intervention against Poland in the event of a Russian offensive. The note asserted that ‘Poland did not seem to see this double danger’. The Polish High Command had ‘imprudently stripped’ the German front to reinforce its troops facing the Red Army. Military operations on this front had obtained certain easy territorial gains, but risked provoking an adverse reaction of Soviet forces – ‘à l’intention décisive’. Henrys was the only one capable of alerting Warsaw to the growing danger, and it seemed that he ‘had not sufficiently applied himself’ to this end.\(^64\) The 2\(^{e}\) Bureau’s last *Bulletin* before the outbreak of full-scale war also drew attention to the danger of a German *coup de force* in Poland (by German troops and the indigenous population in East Prussia). It warned as well that the Soviet government was attempting to isolate the Poles diplomatically, and to obtain the support of European public opinion in order to make it more difficult for the Entente to supply the Polish war effort.\(^65\)

The General Staff’s misgivings about Pilsudski’s offensive, as events would prove, were quite sound, but appear to have been entirely ignored by the Quai d’Orsay.\(^66\) On 26 April Pilsudski sent his army forward into the Ukraine. The attack was initially successful, and the Poles occupied Kiev in early May. However, the 2\(^{e}\) Bureau’s intelligence summary of 1 June pointed out that initial Polish operations had been indecisive, and that a powerful reaction of the Red Army could be expected. The *Bulletin* noted ominously that Russia had always united during the course of its history to repel any invasion of its soil.\(^67\) Thus, even at the moment of the offensive’s greatest success important elements of the French General Staff were unenthusiastic about the war – both because of a potential

\(^{64}\) MG (sc), *Fonds Pologne*, carton no. 12, ‘*Au sujet de la situation militaire en Pologne et du remplacement du chef de la Mission Militaire Française à Varsovie*’, nn, 2\(^{e}\) Bur., EMA, signed Buat, nd.

\(^{65}\) MG (sc), *Bulletin du 1er mai*. It should be noted that the author did not gain access to the outgoing correspondence registers of the 3\(^{e}\) Bureau for 1920. If indeed these registers still exist they would be found in the section contemporaine of the Service Historique de l’Armée at the Château de Vincennes. Unfortunately, the archives of the 3\(^{e}\) Bureau after 1919 remain ‘*en vrac*’ in one of the stack areas of the section contemporaine, and until they are sorted out, there is no way to determine whether the registers for 1920 still exist.

\(^{66}\) Two Quai d’Orsay notes written in January 1920, drew attention to the dangers of a continued Polish military advance to the East. Both notes warned that the Polish government risked uniting Germany and Russia against it, and one raised the spectre of a new partition of Poland. See Z – Russie, v. 214, ‘*Note sur la question russe*’, nn, signed F. Grénard, Paris, 24 Jan. 1920, p. 38; and ‘*Russie*’, nn, SAR, ns, 27 Jan. 1920, p. 58. Fernand Grénard, the former Consul General in Moscow during 1918, appears to have become chief of the SAR at the end of Jan. 1920. Since Grenard never again spoke of the dangers of a Polish offensive, it is possible he found it unfashionable to do so in the Quai d’Orsay. However, it is hard to believe that men like Berthelot and Kammerer, who were extremely astute diplomats, would have approved the offensive given the arguments raised against it. On the other hand, the Quai d’Orsay’s hatred of Bolshevism was intense. Perhaps this sentiment blinded it to the dangers of Pilsudski’s ambitions.

\(^{67}\) MG (sc), *Bulletin du 1er juin*. 
German danger in the event of an unfavourable turn in Polish military fortunes and because of the risks involved in engaging an enemy with vastly superior military resources. Consequently, Wandycz’s characterization of the differences between French government and military opinion should be reversed. The point is extremely important because it bears directly on the motivations behind the Quai d’Orsay’s attitude toward a Polish offensive.

The French government’s first words of caution to Warsaw were not sent out until 15 May when it recalled Polish promises to respect the Ukrainian right of self-determination, and warned against an ‘adventurist policy’ capable of raising a dual Russo-German menace which could threaten the existence of the Polish state. On the 25th the Quai d’Orsay forwarded a warning from Foch advising the Poles to halt their advance, consolidate the defence of newly captured territories, and strengthen their forces facing Germany. At last, the Quai d’Orsay began to give voice to the misgivings of the General Staff, but by then it was too late. In this regard, Wandycz writes that Millerand ‘counselled prudence to the Poles…and complained later that they did not listen to him’. But Paris acted only after the offensive began. With the Red Army preparing to strike back at the Poles, French words of caution must have been very little appreciated in Warsaw.

The Quai d’Orsay noted in answer to a question emanating from the Chamber of Deputies concerning the French responsibility for the war, that both Foch and Panafieu had on several occasions ‘called to the attention of the Polish government the imprudence of the anti-Bolshevik campaign’. But the documents simply do not bear out this reply. In a telegram on 26 July again defending French policy, Millerand made reference to his instructions of 4 March to Panafieu, his telegram of 15 May, and Foch’s of 25 May, to show that France could not be held responsible for encouraging the Poles to attack Russia. However, Millerand’s instructions allowed the Poles to act in their own interests and paid little attention to the possibility of a joint Russo-German menace to Poland. The two telegrams cited by Millerand, as has already been noted, were sent only after the war began. The Quai d’Orsay’s own defence, therefore, was quite inadequate. Moreover, had other evidence existed to bolster the French case, it is fair to assume that Millerand would have

68 These two considerations were in a sense connected, since in either case, should the Poles be defeated, a major prop of the Versailles settlement would be lost.
70 Z. – Pologne, v. 71, Politique étrangère, dossier général, 11 mai – 31 déc. 1920, Millerand to Panafieu, nos. 890–9; and elsewhere, 25 May 1920, p. 16.
71 France and her Eastern Allies, p. 147.
made use of it. That he did not is an indication that no other evidence existed.

But what could the Quai d'Orsay have done, had it desired to stop Pilsudski's offensive? The Polish army was largely equipped by France. Half its rifles and machine guns and a large portion of its artillery was French; while the other half was mostly Austrian or German. In order to replenish and resupply any of these weapons stocks, Warsaw needed French consent or diplomatic support. If the Quai d'Orsay had expressed strong disapproval of an all-out war with the Bolsheviks, Pilsudski would have found it very difficult to proceed on his own. Indeed, Patek acknowledged to Millerand that the absence of a heavy arms industry in Poland obliged Warsaw to rely on the Allies, and especially on France, for the resupply of its army. Wandycz points out the importance of the French position as Poland's principal ally, and the interest in Warsaw in determining French views on a possible offensive. Given its potential levers of influence and given the mass of evidence which came into Paris indicating the probability of a Polish offensive, the Quai d'Orsay's failure to hold back the Poles must have been deliberate.

The most significant aspect of the Quai d'Orsay's complacent attitude towards a Polish offensive was its inclination to ignore the Ministry of War's arguments against such an action. Since the Germans stood to gain enormously from a Polish defeat, the Quai d'Orsay must either have discounted the danger, or at least regarded the potential advantages of a Polish offensive as greater than its risks. The willingness to let Pilsudski march signified that Clemenceau's concept of Poland as a defensive barrier had given way to a view of the Polish army as an offensive weapon aimed at the Soviet regime. Consequently, it would appear that the desire to overthrow the Bolsheviks became stronger than the preoccupation with Germany. Were this not the case, it is inconceivable that the Quai d'Orsay would have ignored, until it was too late, the opinions of the General Staff. Moreover, had Clemenceau remained in office, it is doubtful that this reversal of priorities would have taken place, or that the French government would have failed to discourage Pilsudski's dangerous ambitions. It is, thus, paradoxical that while the French attitude under Clemenceau towards a peace with the Bolsheviks was more categorical than it would be under Millerand, the latter government seems to have abandoned its predecessor's apparent resignation to the continued existence of a Soviet state. As for the French General Staff, it appears to have been more pragmatic and less blinkered than the Quai d'Orsay by political or ideological considerations regarding Russia. Its apparent

74 Z. Pologne, v. 23, Henrys to General Kazimierz Sosnkowski (Polish Minister of War), no. 121 R/4P, 29 June 1920, p. 150.
77 It is interesting to note that the French General Staff had shown a similar pragmatism toward the Bolsheviks in early 1918; and that in this instance the Quai d'Orsay had worked
unwillingness to risk the Polish army in an uncertain campaign against the Bolsheviks is evidence of a reluctance to gamble with the key prop of the Versailles Treaty in the East.

The General Staff's more pragmatic attitude was due also to the fact that it did not concern itself unduly with domestic political questions. The Quai d'Orsay, on the other hand, was obliged to keep an eye on the Commission Générale de Protection des Intérêts Français en Russie, which was the principal organization for French economic interests with investments in Russia. The Commission was formed in early 1918 with the full approval and patronage of the government, and throughout the period of the intervention maintained close relations with the Quai d'Orsay and the Ministry of Finance. Joseph Noulens, the former French Ambassador in Russia at the time of the October Revolution, had become president of the Commission in January 1920, and led a stepped-up campaign to oblige the government to assume some responsibility for the repudiated Tsarist bonds. The group further sought to stall the British–Soviet trade negotiations in order to prevent the sacrifice of menaced French economic interests. It participated as well in a government commission whose purpose was to draw up a draft treaty for reparations and indemnities to be presented to a future Russian government (prepared to receive it). Indeed, Millerand would acknowledge at the Spa Conference in July that his government could not enter into relations with Moscow because parliamentary and public opinion would not permit it unless the Bolsheviks were prepared to take responsibility for the Tsarist debt. It is, therefore, possible that political pressure generated by the Noulens Commission in conjunction with the movement of the Présidence du Conseil from the Ministry of War to the Quai d'Orsay, made the French government less prepared to adopt Lloyd George's attitude toward the Bolsheviks, and more vulnerable to the temptations for a Polish offensive.

If this was the case, what did the Quai d'Orsay hope to see evolve in the aftermath of a Russo-Polish war? Wandycz writes that 'the Quai d'Orsay still thought mainly in terms of Russia one and indivisible, manifested active interest in the last of the White Generals, Wrangel, and could hardly show enthusiasm for Pilsudski's plan of breaking up the Russian state'. But until the middle of April the French fleet in the Black Sea remained under orders not to undertake operations against Soviet authorities except to assure the security of the 'French mission in

against the Ministry of War's efforts to reach a limited accommodation with Trotsky based on the need to hold down German troops in Russia. See the author's 'The Origins of the French Intervention in the Russian Civil War, January–May 1918: A Reappraisal', to appear in The Journal of Modern History in September 1976.

78 These questions will be dealt with in more detail in subsequent work.

79 Z. - Russie, v. 289, Conference de Spa, no. 7 A. 'Notes du Secrétaire français prise au cours d'une conversation interalliés...Spa, 10-7-20...'.

80 France and her Eastern Allies, p. 142.
Russia'. However, on 20 April the Quai d'Orsay abruptly altered these orders to conform to a change in British policy which had taken place a few days earlier. George Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, offended by Chicherin's failure to respond to his attempt to mediate an armistice between the Soviet government and Wrangel, ordered British naval forces to support the White Russians until satisfactory terms for the disbandment of the Volunteer Army could be negotiated. The Quai d'Orsay adopted this policy as its own, thus modifying its previous refusal to supply or directly support the remnants of the Volunteer Army. Given Paléologue's sympathy for the White Russians, it is possible he sought to take advantage of the change in the British attitude in order to resume French material support to Wrangel. If such was Paléologue's intention, his efforts were initially successful because the Quai d'Orsay renewed its approval for this policy on 8 May in new instructions to the Ministry of the Navy and in a Paléologue letter to A. V. Krivoshein, a representative of Wrangel.

Although this limited commitment to the Volunteer Army could have been interpreted in an open-ended way, General Mangin assumed that the French government still meant to end its involvement in Southern Russia, and he consequently asked to be recalled on 24 April. Moreover, the same day on which Paléologue wrote to assure Krivoshein of continuing French support, the Ministry of War recommended to the Quai d'Orsay that arms shipments to Wrangel not be resumed. In a rough note attached to Buat's letter, Kammerer advised Laroche, [Although] I am not responsible for this matter, I venture to point out that there is a great danger in giving arms to these people [i.e. Wrangel]. It is a reserve which you furnish to the Bolsheviks. Apart from the fact that we have almost no stocks of [war matériel]...for export, it is no longer necessary to give arms to anyone, save the Poles...!!

Kammerer's view prevailed because on 22 May the Quai d'Orsay approved Buat's recommendation not to resume arms shipments to the Volunteer Army. A week earlier on 14 May the Ministry of War had granted Mangin's request for recall. Thus, while a decision in principle

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81 Z – Russie, v. 239, Millerand to Landry (Minister of the Navy), no. 293, 20 Apr. 1920, p. 144.
82 Ibid., Millerand (ns, Paléologue's stamp) to Lefévre, no. 1023, Landry, no. 293, 20 Apr. 1920, p. 143.
86 Ibid., Kammerer to Laroche, nn, 17 May 1920.
87 Ibid., Millerand to Lefévre, no. 1270, 22 May 1920.
was taken to resume military support of the Volunteer Army, the actual implementation of this policy met opposition both in the Ministry of War and the Quai d’Orsay – with the result that Paléologue’s assurances to Krivoshein rapidly became a dead letter.

Undoubtedly because of the pro-Polish orientation of the General Staff, the Ministry of War opposed the shipment of new arms supplies to Wrangel, whatever the position of the British government. But Kammerer’s note indicates that there was also disagreement within the Quai d’Orsay on this question and that he at least did not share Paléologue’s sympathy for the White Russians. Moreover, the fact that the issue was determined in conformity with Kammerer’s avis suggests that his views were shared by others in the Quai d’Orsay since he himself did not have the influence to bring about such a decision in French policy.

There is additional evidence as well to support the hypothesis of a split of opinion in the Quai d’Orsay with regard to the priorities of French policy in Eastern Europe and in Russia. During the summer after the tide of battle had turned against the Poles, Paris extended de facto recognition to the Wrangel government. Laroche recollected in his memoirs that the recognition was an idea of Paléologue’s, resisted by Berthelot, but accepted in his absence by Millerand. Paléologue’s actions, said Laroche, were influenced by his sympathy for the Tsarist regime. Berthelot, on the other hand, regarded Wrangel as a reactionary incapable of gaining popular support, and, therefore, opposed the recognition. Laroche’s recollection is confirmed by reports sent by Lord Derby to Curzon in which he noted that Berthelot had described the recognition as a serious ‘blunder’, engineered, so Derby thought, by Paléologue. This evidence, and Paléologue’s apparent attempt in April and May to reopen French supply lines to the Volunteer Army, suggests that, during Millerand’s tenure as premier, there was a continuing, if covert dispute over the objectives of French eastern policy between the Berthelot–Kammerer–Laroche circle and Paléologue. To be sure, the rivalry between Berthelot and Paléologue was generalized and as Laroche noted, ‘not marked by an open struggle’. Moreover, differences on Russian policy tended to blur because of the commonly shared hatred of Bolshevism. But these qualifications aside, the Quai d’Orsay appears to have been divided into what amounted to pro-Polish and pro-White Russian factions. Thus, while the differing perspectives of the Quai d’Orsay and the Ministry of War manifested a disagreement over the relative dangers of Bolshevism and Germany, the rivalry within the Quai d’Orsay highlighted the government’s conflicting loyalties toward the Great Russians and the Poles. Although Paléologue would hold the upper hand in the struggle for influence when the Poles were threatened during

89 Laroche, p. 127.
91 Laroche, p. 111.
the summer, his interests were not served by the circumstances of the spring. Given that the decision not to resume military aid to Wrangel was taken at the height of Polish successes in the Ukraine, it implied that the Quai d'Orsay intended to throw all its support to the Poles. If such was the case, then Paléologue was also finding his efforts to help Wrangel stymied in regard to the question of the Ukraine.

Shortly after the French government decided against resuming arms shipments to the Volunteer Army, the Quai d'Orsay made preparations to send a mission to the Ukraine (partially under Polish occupation) to size up the situation and to determine measures capable of protecting French economic interests. In the letter of instruction for the agent selected to undertake this mission, Pieyre (a sous-chef du bureau in the sous-direction d'Europe), Millerand noted that his most important task would be to determine if the Petliura regime was likely to consolidate itself and establish a regular government capable of resisting the Red Army. Should this be the case, it would be appropriate to prepare actively the resumption of French economic affairs and to study the accords which could be concluded with the Ukrainians and Poles designed to contribute to the restoration of Ukrainian industry. In these activities, Millerand noted that the French should have a 'preponderant' role. But the Quai d'Orsay's interest in the Ukraine went beyond simple economic concerns. Although quite sceptical of Petliura's ability to survive, Millerand felt that the circumstances required the French government to maintain 'good relations' with the new Ukrainian regime. The instructions added that France was ready to assist the peoples of the former Russian Empire 'in the efforts they were making to reorganize themselves, but...only in so far as these populations, freely consulted, or through the organ of a regularly constituted government, expressed such a desire'.

Millerand's instructions clearly imply that the French government was prepared to accept a Polish fait accompli, that is to say, a nominally independent Ukrainian state. It is therefore inexact for Wandycz to state categorically that the French were still committed to a policy of maintaining the territorial integrity of Russia, and incorrect to assert that Paris 'manifested active interest' in Wrangel before the Polish army was seriously threatened by the Bolsheviks. A great Russian anti-Bolshevik state was undoubtedly the Quai d'Orsay's first preference, but in a situation where this did not seem possible it was prepared to go along with Pilsudski's eastern solution if he could make it work.

When Wandycz discusses the French attitude toward the Polish offensive, he states that the government 'was sympathetic and interested in economic advantages [in the Ukraine], but hardly willing to commit itself to the support of Poland'. But this is to misunderstand the
Franco-Polish relationship. Without a conservative Great Russian state as a French ally and without the willingness to come to terms with the Bolsheviks, France was as dependent on Poland as Poland was on France. If Paris was Poland’s only sympathetic ‘great power’ ally, the Poles constituted the strongest eastern buttress of the Versailles settlement. In consequence, the Quai d’Orsay was always reluctant to bring pressure to bear on Warsaw for fear of jeopardizing what it regarded as France’s pre-eminent position in Poland.\(^2\) This dependency on the Poles, performance, obliged the French government to accept any fait accompli which Pilsudski might produce.

The French attitude towards Poland and towards the Ukraine was really part of a more generalized policy worked out by early 1919 tending to avoid any irrevocable commitment to either the White Russians or the nationalities until one side or the other had prevailed. This policy was an attempt to deal with the uncertainty of the situation in Russia without alienating any of the anti-Bolshevik factions.\(^3\) It implied that the French would seek to strip away as much territory as possible from Russia should the Bolsheviks maintain power. As one Quai d’Orsay note at the end of 1919 put it, the Allies ‘had not pushed the dismemberment of Russia’, but were ‘simply obliged to take account of certain faits accomplis, for example in Finland, in Bessarabia, and even in the Baltic provinces’.\(^4\) Had Warsaw been able to digest its territorial conquests in Southern Russia, the Ukraine would undoubtedly have been added to this list.\(^5\)

As it turned out, however, Pilsudski’s objectives were too ambitious. The Red Army counter-attacked and broke down Polish defences in early June. The Soviet offensive, striking first in the north and then in the south, forced the Polish command to commit the near totality of its forces to combat, and to strip by turns various sectors of the front in order to meet the alternating assaults of Bolshevik forces. The Polish retreat did

\(^2\) This was particularly true in regard to the Lithuanian crisis of the autumn of 1920. Millerand was not prepared to mediate in the Polish–Lithuanian dispute because he felt it would only offend Polish amour-propre and diminish French influence in Warsaw. See Z – Lituanie, v. 14, Lituanie-Pologne, 1 jan. – 31 août 1920, Millerand to Panafieu, nos. 1434–35; and elsewhere, 27 Aug. 1920, p. 181.


\(^5\) This supposition is not at all implausible in view of the fact that the French government had once before on 5 Jan. 1918 recognized the de facto independence of the Ukraine. See MAE – ‘Guerre, 1914–1918’, v. 697, Russie: Ukraine, 10 fév. – mars 1918, ‘La France, a-t-elle reconnu le gouvernement ukrainien?’, Note de Clément-Simon, 20 Feb. 1918, p. 112.
not halt until the middle of August at the outskirts of Warsaw, where the Red Army was defeated and in its turn driven back. During the summer the Quai d’Orsay abandoned its plans for a mission to the Ukraine, resumed aid to the Volunteer Army, and extended de facto recognition to the Wrangel government. Late in August it tried without success to encourage the Poles and Rumanians to co-operate with Wrangel in a joint offensive against the Red Army. But when the crisis in Poland subsided, the Quai d’Orsay reverted to its previous indifferent attitude toward Wrangel and to Clemenceau’s stratagem of the barbed-wire barricade. As if to mark the sobering of French policy, Paléologue resigned when Millerand became Président de la République in late September, and Berthelot re-emerged as the dominant figure in the new Ministry headed by George Leygues, former Minister of the Navy under Clemenceau. The personal rivalry between Berthelot and Paléologue which seems to have heightened during the summer months made Berthelot all the more anxious ‘to put right a state of affairs’ in French policy which he regarded as having been ‘entirely created by Paléologue’s stupidity’. The new government would not entirely abandon the desire to pursue the anti-Bolshevik struggle in Russia, but it found its freedom of action severely limited by a penury of financial and military resources. As one Quai d’Orsay note put it, any extension of credits to the Wrangel government (left alone to face the Red Army after the Polono-Soviet armistice of October 1920) would require a vote from Parliament – resulting in ‘discussions of a nature to create grave difficulties for the government’. In short, the Quai d’Orsay did not believe public opinion and Parliament would approve the further expenditure of limited resources for Wrangel when France had little enough to rebuild its own ruins.

In the long run the French government had always found itself crippled by a lack of means, but the objective of destroying the Bolshevik regime was so deeply embedded in the thinking of the Quai d’Orsay that it refused to abandon the anti-Red obsession even when it threatened to become self-destructive. Indeed, the circumstances of the winter of

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98 This was how Derby put it; see Curzon Papers, Derby to Curzon, 12 Oct. 1920.
99 Z. – Russie, v. 252, Gouvernement de la Russie du sud, ravitaillement et matériel de guerre, 1 oct. 1920–31 jan. 1925, ‘Note pour le secrétaire-général du département’, nn, Europe, ns, 13 Oct. 1920. This represented a return to earlier policy because during the height of the Polish crisis in August, Millerand had ordered credit extended to Wrangel. See Z. – Russie, v. 251, Gouvernement de la Russie du sud, ravitaillement et matériel de guerre, 1 juillet – 30 sept. 1920, Millerand to Foch, no. 59, 23 Aug. 1920. This was an important step because it meant Millerand was prepared either to violate at least temporarily government statutes forbidding such credits to non-de jure recognized governments without parliamentary sanction, or to accept a stiff fight in the Chamber of Deputies to obtain approval for the credits. It is also interesting to note that the Quai d’Orsay opposed a Wrangel visit to Paris in September because it threatened to provoke ‘polemics’ and ‘perhaps even very troublesome demonstrations’. See Z. – Russie, v. 242, Action des Alliés dans le sud de Russie, 16 août – sept. 1920, Note by Paléologue, nn, 12 Sept. 1920, p. 413; and an unlabelled note, nn, signed by Paléologue, 10 Sept. 1920, p. 406.
1919-20 offered an opportune moment to the Quai d'Orsay to come to terms with the Bolsheviks and to cut its losses in Russia. The Russian anti-Bolshevik armies were beaten and disintegrating. Both Lloyd George and the Soviet government were interested in reaching an accommodation. The French General Staff had observed that the Bolsheviks seemed to be organizing a Soviet state capable of maintaining a balance of power against Germany. Clemenceau had indicated just before leaving office that he was not overly concerned about the revolutionary menace of Bolshevism. It is true that French economic elements with interests in Russia were active at this time, but that in itself would not have stopped the government from following Lloyd George's initiative had the will to do so existed.

Why then did the Quai d'Orsay forgo this opportunity to come to terms with Soviet Russia? The conclusion seems inescapable that the Millerand government's desire to overthrow the Bolshevik regime was stronger than its preoccupation with Germany. To be sure, the problems of Germany and Bolshevism were interlocked. The French government was always in search of an effective counterweight to re-establish a European balance of power, but the Quai d'Orsay's inability to reconcile itself to Bolshevism made it impossible to envisage the Soviets in this role.100 Stung too deeply by the disagreeable visions of a total loss of the enormous French economic and political investment in Russia, the Quai d'Orsay refused to accept the reality of the Russian situation as it was viewed by the French General Staff. Indeed, the strength of the Quai d'Orsay's desire to overthrow the Soviet regime can be measured by the importance of the stake it was willing to commit to the realization of this objective. The Polish army was essential to the maintenance of the Versailles settlement, and yet the Quai d'Orsay did not oppose its use against the Bolsheviks in spite of the better judgement of important elements of the General Staff. Certainly, the Quai d'Orsay minimized the risks involved since it clung to the belief that the Bolsheviks were barely hanging on to power, and that one more hard knock would bring down the entire Soviet edifice. But this analysis stemmed from the inclination to appraise the situation in Russia in such a way as to justify the on-going desire to overthrow the Bolshevik regime. The consequences of this wishful thinking was a reckless, poorly thought-out policy which, had it led to the destruction of Poland, would have, in the view of the General Staff, undone a great part of the Allied victory over Germany.101

The Quai d'Orsay's refusal to style its objectives according to its means resulted in a recourse to inadequate expedients and uncertain long-term aims which accentuated the striking limitations on the French govern-

100 See Carley, 'The Origins of the French Intervention in the Russian Civil War...', for a discussion of the interrelationship between the anti-German and anti-Bolshevik motivations of French policy.

101 This at least was the view of the 2e Bureau. See Z - Russie, v. 289, 'La Pologne en danger', nn, EMA, 2e Bureau, 11 July 1920, p. 104.
ment's ability to affect the situation in Russia. But the shadow which fell between objectives and capabilities was only broadened by an almost total absence of effort to foresee the consequences of policy decisions taken in regard to the East. There seems to have been little or no thought given to what would follow in the wake of a Polish offensive. Juxtaposed to the Quai d'Orsay's desire to recreate a conservative Great Russian state was an equally strong and opposite readiness to accept any Polish fait accompli in Western Russia. The French government scrambled from the one solution to the other with an undignified hastiness that manifested the dilemma of needing to rely on the Poles and at the same time being unable to abandon hope in the re-establishment of a conservative Russian state.

The Polish offensive thus represented the last great effort of the interventionist campaign and the last important French commitment to the destruction of Bolshevism. The crisis of the summer of 1920 finally proved to the Quai d'Orsay that it was better not to provoke the Bolsheviks by impetuous and ill-conceived military action which in the opinion of the General Staff could only lead to disaster. Consequently, when the resistance of the Wrangel army collapsed in November 1920, Paris clenched its teeth and with great reluctance began to accustom itself to the continued existence of a Soviet Russia.