Because of the delicate position in which the Polish government found itself in 1943, the selection of an acceptable successor to Prime Minister Sikorski was not an easy task. Opposed to anyone harboring strong anti-Soviet sentiments, the British government favored Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the Peasant Party leader and Sikorski's Deputy Prime Minister, as the most suitable candidate and presumably the most acceptable to the Soviet Union. As the leader of one of the largest political parties, Mikolajczyk would provide the Polish government with a broadly democratic make-up. He was clearly favored over General Sosnkowski, another strong contender. Churchill reportedly told Retinger, a close confidant of General Sikorski: "You have a general called Sozzle-Something. We don't want him. He would upset the Russians." When Retinger pointed out that Wladyslaw Sosnkowski was the senior ranking general, Churchill replied "We ought to be able to get over that." Although moderately experienced in the affairs of government, Mikolajczyk probably was not the most capable politician in Polish circles. Certainly, he did not inspire the admiration and trust with which the Poles in London endowed Sikorski, but with the possible exception of the National Democrats he was acceptable to his compatriots. A key to his policy can be found in an address to the National Council on July 27, 1943, in which he indicated that he intended to follow in Sikorski's footsteps in directing Polish foreign policy. While admitting that Polish-Soviet difficulties posed the main challenge, he struck a positive note for understanding and collaboration based on "regard for mutual rights and interests." Like General Sikorski he favored a modus

1 Hugh Dalton, *The Faithful Years: Memoirs, 1931-1945*, Vol II (London: Frederick Muller, 1957), p. 418. As regards the composition of the government, since July 1941 Sikorski's government essentially had been composed of members from two parties, the Peasant and the Socialist. Mikolajczyk's government was made up largely of members of these two parties as well. The National Democrats, Wladyslaw Komarnicki and Marian Seyda, entered the government as individuals and not as representatives for their party; Kazimierz Popiel was a representative of the Christian Labor Party; and General Marian Kukiel (Minister of Defense) and Tadeusz Romer (Foreign Minister) were not members of any party.

vivendi with the Kremlin. Furthermore he believed that a democratic regime could be established in postwar Poland on the basis of what was really a mythical solidarity between the Eastern and Western Allies. Whether he was equal to the task was another matter. As Edward Raczyński commented, Mikolajczyk “was ambitious and believed that he could play the part of a leader inside Poland with the support of the peasant masses. He had no experience of Russia or the brutality and duplicity of Soviet methods.”3 What took place throughout Mikolajczyk’s tenure in office was a diplomatic game in which he was subject to increasingly ruthless pressure from all sides – by Soviet demands for unconditional recognition of its territorial claims as a prerequisite for conversations on the re-establishment of relations; by British prompting to comply with these claims; and by the pressure of his colleagues within the Polish government and by Polish public opinion both in London and in Poland not to compromise.

The re-establishment of Polish-Soviet relations was important to the Polish government if it intended to return home and assume administration over the liberated territories. As early as October 1943 in a memorandum to Eden, Mikolajczyk outlined his government’s opposition to any Soviet occupation of Polish territories regardless how temporary.4 Forseeing the probability however of an occupation as the unavoidable result of military operations, he made a point of stressing the necessity of a Polish-Soviet agreement preceding the anticipated occupation – an agreement in accordance with the resolution taken at the Quebec Conference of August 1943 which authorized the Polish government as head of an Allied nation to take over the administration of a liberated Poland. The Polish government assisted by the Polish Underground movement claimed to be in a position to assume such administration – all that was needed was an understanding with the Soviets. In the absence of such an agreement Mikolajczyk warned that “one would have to reckon with a deliberate attempt on the part of the U.S.S.R. to impose on Poland a Communist regime.” As any agreement presupposed a working relationship with the Soviet Union, the re-establishment of Polish-Soviet relations assumed top priority. The difficulty in accomplishing this objective stemmed from the fact that the Kremlin had already formed within the Soviet Union the Union of Polish Patriots – the nucleus of a puppet government – and was differed fundamentally from Sikorski’s. A military man, Sikorski had been both head of the government and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.
