

Ninety years since the coup of Piłsudski

The Strategy of the Intermarium—Part 2

The Intermarium from 1921 to 1989

Clara Weiss
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May 12 to 14 marks the 90th anniversary of the coup by Józef Piłsudski in Poland with which the Polish bourgeoisie tried to save its rule from the threat of socialist revolution. Today, he is being idealized by large sections of the Polish bourgeoisie and the US imperialist elite.

In large measure, this is bound up with the increasing popularity of his conception of the Intermarium, a pro-imperialist alliance of right-wing nationalist regimes throughout Eastern Europe that was primarily directed against the Soviet Union. The resurgent interest in the Intermarium has been bound up with the increasing drive toward a new world war which, as the ICFI stated in its resolution “Socialism and the Fight Against War,” has been accompanied by a revival of geopolitics among the ideologists of imperialism.

This series reviews the history of the Intermarium, the main basis of which emerged in the period leading up to World War I, as a bourgeois nationalist antipode to the United Socialist States of Europe that were proposed by Leon Trotsky.

This is the second in a four-part series. Part 1 was posted May 31.

The Intermarium in the inter-war period

Although the victory against the Red Army constitutes something of a founding myth of the Second Polish Republic and is glorified by the Polish bourgeoisie to this day, in reality, the country found itself in a deep political crisis with vicious infighting within the ruling elites, which eventually forced Józef Piłsudski to formally leave the political scene in 1922. For the next few years, which were a period of uninterrupted political and economic crisis, he remained politically active “behind the scenes.” In particular, he continued to maintain ties to numerous nationalists and military leaders from the mostly exiled, former elites of the countries that now formed part of the Soviet Union, and formed the basis of the so-called Promethean League.

American Professor Timothy Snyder (Yale University), who devoted an entire book to one of Piłsudski’s closest associates, Henryk Józefowski, described the Promethean League as follows:

“The Promethean Movement was an anticommunist international, designed to destroy the Soviet Union and to create independent states from its republics. ... It brought together grand strategists of Warsaw and exiled patriots whose attempts to found independent states had been thwarted by the Bolsheviks. Symon Petliura and his exiled Ukrainian People’s Republic joined forces with other defeated patriots from the Caucasus and Central Asia. ... Prometheanism was supported by European

powers hostile to the Soviet Union, morally by Britain and France, politically and financially by Poland.” [1]

These policies were institutionalized and intensified after Piłsudski’s seizure of political power in the May Coup of 1926. In domestic affairs, the promotion of this anti-communist, right-wing nationalist alliance was compounded by a brutal crackdown on the communist and socialist parties in Poland and the establishment of an authoritarian regime with fascist elements.

From both a political, economic and a geographical standpoint, Piłsudski continued to regard the Ukraine, now a Soviet Republic, as the main springboard for an assault on the Soviet Union and its dismemberment.

The Polish secret service, whose upper echelons were to a significant extent recruited from military leaders who had fought alongside Piłsudski in the Legions and the Polish-Soviet War, developed extensive activities in the Soviet Union, above all Soviet Ukraine. Adherents of Symon Petliura, who himself was murdered in 1926 in Paris, and numerous Ukrainian nationalist military leaders were given political asylum.

In 1927, the army of Petliura’s wartime “Ukrainian People’s Republic” was re-founded in secret on Polish territory. Its general staff developed plans for an invasion of the Soviet Union. In 1930, when Soviet Ukraine was on the brink of a civil war because of the mass famine caused by the criminally adventurous policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the Ukrainian army was ready to exploit the crisis and invade the USSR. However, the Polish government ultimately rejected the proposal, most likely because of the military superiority of the Red Army, which had developed rapidly in the 1920s. [2]

Then as now, the plans for the Intermarium were developed and pursued entirely behind the backs of the Polish people. It was never proclaimed official state policy and never discussed among the parties in the open. In the words of Timothy Snyder, “Poland was too important to be entrusted to the Poles.” [3]

The Polish government built up an entire infrastructure with military and educational training for actual or prospective adherents of the Promethean network and numerous publications. This included the Institute of the East in Warsaw, dedicated to studies of the Near and Far East; scholarship programs for Promethean students in Warsaw, Vilnius, Poznań, Kraków, Paris, Berlin and Cairo; four Promethean clubs in Warsaw, Paris, Helsinki and Kharbin, and numerous journals, including *Promethée* (in Paris) and *Prometheus* (in Helsinki) that propagated and discussed ideas surrounding the Promethean movement. In addition, separate Institutes and publications were founded to discuss and promote the Promethean project in Ukraine, in relation to the Tartars, the Caucasian peoples and the Cossacks. [4]

However, during the 1930s, Piłsudski gradually lost support for his

Intermarium policy in the Polish elites and military. For much of the 1930s, he tried to manoeuvre between Hitler's Third Reich and the Soviet Union. On July 25, 1932, Poland and the USSR signed a non-aggression pact. As a consequence of this, the Polish government somewhat slowed down its activities with regard to the Promethean movement, without shutting them down, however. The centre of planning and directing was now transferred from various ministries, who had divided the work among themselves, to the Second Department of the Second General Staff. [5] In 1934, Piłsudski's Poland concluded a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany.

Five years later, in August 1939, in a desperate attempt to prevent a war against Nazi Germany and having already murdered most of the communists in Poland, Russia and throughout Eastern Europe, Stalin struck a pact with Hitler to divide up Europe into spheres of influence in case of a Nazi assault on Poland, which then followed a few weeks later on September 1, 1939.

The Intermarium during World War II

Following the invasion of Nazi Germany on September 1, 1939, the Polish government fled the country. Sections of the Intermarium network were integrated in the Reichsabwehr of the Third Reich. They were employed in the war effort against the Soviet Union, which Nazi Germany invaded on June 22, 1941. During the war against the USSR, the Nazis systematically mobilized local far-right forces, particularly in the Baltics and Ukraine, to help in annihilating European Jewry and fight the Red Army. According to one author:

"The Abwehr (German military intelligence service) used Intermarium contacts as pre-war 'agents of influence' abroad as well as reasonably reliable sources of information on the large émigré communities of Europe. By the time the Nazis marched across the Continent, Intermarium had become, in the words of a US Army intelligence report, 'an instrument of German intelligence'." [6]

Meanwhile, the bourgeois government-in-exile, which was based in London since 1940, again took up the conception of the Intermarium federation in a somewhat altered form. General Władysław Sikorski, who had been a former bourgeois opponent of Piłsudski, now picked up his ideas for a federation as the head of the government-in-exile. In a memorandum he submitted to US President Franklin Roosevelt in December 1942, he proposed the formation of a Central European Federation. This federation, according to Sikorski, was necessary in order to provide for the

"... economic existence and, therefore, also of 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)." [7]

However, Sikorski's proposal was rejected. In light of the danger of a socialist revolution in Europe, which by 1943 saw growing working class struggles against the Nazi occupation, the United States, France and Great Britain agreed upon a division of Europe into spheres of influence with the Soviet Union. The Stalinist bureaucracy, in exchange, was to play the key role in blocking the emergence of a revolutionary movement by the working class.

Following the end of the Second World War, the Stalinist bureaucracy extended the property relations of the October revolution in a military and

bureaucratic way to Eastern Europe. Although the Allies had agreed upon this division of spheres of influence in order to safeguard bourgeois rule on a world scale, the deformed workers' states that emerged in the post-war period never ceased to be a thorn in the side of imperialism. In the covert warfare against the Soviet Union, the imperialist powers based themselves to a significant degree on the mobilization of those very right-wing and fascist forces that had been part first of the Intermarium and then of the Nazi war network against the Soviet Union during World War II.

Former members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) were recruited en masse by the CIA and channelled out of the Soviet-controlled zone of Europe. The same programs covered Nazi collaborators and fascists from the Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia), Croatia, Slovakia and other countries as well as other countries. (See: "Nationalism and fascism in Ukraine: A historical overview")

The single most important channel was the Vatican with its close historic ties to the far-right in Eastern Europe. Sections of the Catholic elite basically merged with the Intermarium. This included figures such as Monsignor Krunoslav Dragonovic, who ran escape routes for Ustashi (Croatian Fascist) fugitives, and served as the chief Croatian representative on the self-appointed Intermarium ruling council. The senior Ukrainian Intermarium representative was Archbishop Ivan Buchko, who helped free a Ukrainian Waffen SS legion by intervening with Pope Pius XII; Gustav Celmins, the former führer of the Nazi Latvian Perkonkrusts, became the secretary of the headquarters branch in Rome. [8]

The glue that kept together all the different alliances that the nationalists from the Promethean League underwent over the 20th century was their militant anti-communism. The Intermarium thus became one of the mainstays of Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberation from Bolshevism and many other CIA-sponsored operations during the Cold War. [9]

Most of the Polish elites and nationalist intelligentsia had left the country by 1948, when the Polish People's Republic was proclaimed. Sections of these layers continued to promote the Promethean project. In Paris, the most significant Polish émigré journal, *Kultura*, edited by Jerzy Giedroyc, openly advocated Piłsudski's Intermarium strategy.

Giedroyc had been an official in the Piłsudski government in the years 1929-35 and in the words of the American professor Timothy Snyder, who celebrates his contribution to a revival of the Intermarium, was "a central if discreet figure of the Prometheanism of the early 1930s. [10] Several other figures from the early Promethean movement also gathered around *Kultura*. A central idea of Giedroyc's journal was that Poland could only be an independent nation state if Lithuania, Belarus, and in particular Ukraine, were also independent nation states. The journal therefore closely monitored and supported the nationalist movements in these Soviet republics. Its ideas and policy advice were to exert significant influence on sections of the Polish dissidents in the trade union movement Solidarity who later actively participated in the restoration of capitalism in Poland and its first bourgeois governments after 1989.

To be continued

Notes:

1. Timothy Snyder: Sketches from a Secret War. A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine, Yale University Press 2005, pp. 40-41.

2. Ibid., p. 102.

3. Ibid., p. 26.

4. Edmund Charaszkiewicz: Referat o zagadnieniu prometejskim (12 luty, 1940) [Report on the Promethean Question, February 12, 1940], in: Charaszkiewicz, Edmund, Andrzej Grzywacz, Marcin Kwiecień, and Grzegorz Mazur: Zbiór Dokumentów Ppłk. Edmunda Charaszkiewicza [Collection of Documents of Lieutenant Colonel Edmund Charaszkiewicz], Fundacja CDCN, 2000, pp. 64-67. For many years,

Edmund Charaszkiwicz was the main coordinator of the Promethean movement.

5. Ibid., p. 77.

6. Christopher Simpson: Blowback. America's Recruitment of Nazis and Its Effects on the Cold War, Grove Press 1988, pp. 180-81.

7. Quoted in: Sarah Meiklejohn Terry: Sikorski and Poland's Western Borders, in: Keith Sword (ed.): Sikorski: Soldier and Statesman. A Collection of Essays, Orbis Books 1990, p. 139.

8. Christopher Simpson: Blowback. America's Recruitment of Nazis and Its Effects on the Cold War, Grove Press 1988, p. 180.

9. See Ibid., p. 89.

10. Timothy Snyder: Sketches from a Secret War. A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine, Yale University Press 2005, p. 250.



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