

Karski's reports: the story and the history

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Declaration

I, Wojciech Rappak, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.



Wojciech Rappak

Abstract

The widely disseminated view of Jan Karski sees him as a Polish resistance courier who left Warsaw on a clandestine mission to London carrying reports about the Holocaust to the West. It was late 1942, by then Nazi Germany had already murdered millions of Jews and it had become clear that unless the Allies acted, the Nazis would carry out their plan to murder all remaining Jews in Poland and other occupied countries. Deeply concerned about the Jewish tragedy, Karski risked his life carrying reports about the Holocaust across occupied Europe. He warned Western leaders, ‘all the way up to President Roosevelt’, and tried to persuade them to act. This was the central purpose of his mission: it is why Karski is sometimes described as ‘a man who tried to stop the Holocaust’. But his mission was a failure, the powerful Western allies did nothing to save the Jews, they were focused on winning the war against Germany, not on rescuing Jews. As Karski put it many years later: ‘the Jews were left alone to perish’.

How accurate or true is this account of Karski’s actions? What historical evidence can be produced to support the claim that bringing news about the Holocaust was the central purpose of his mission? What reports about the Jewish tragedy did Karski bring to the West? How was their content communicated to Western leaders? What impact did they have? These are the broad questions pursued in this thesis which proposes to examine closely the archival evidence which the Karski story is based on.

With some significant exceptions, most of the current literature on Karski is based on his later testimony. But our focus is not on the later accounts given by Karski but on what Karski actually did during the war. It is based on the original wartime documents, especially those written by Karski himself. These have often been used selectively to confirm the account of Karski as ‘the man who tried to stop the Holocaust’ rather than to examine his actions in the light of the documents. This thesis aims to restore the balance by adopting a critical approach to the story and by examining the historical evidence it is based on, arguing that much of the story is a myth, but a significant part of it is a true account of a courageous eyewitness who

tried to include a message about the destruction of the Jews in Poland even though it was not central to his wartime mission.

Impact Statement

The Jan Karski story is one of the important public narratives told about the Holocaust. It tells us how news about the Holocaust reached the West, it presents harrowing eyewitness accounts that are credible, it raises questions about bystander attitude and about the Allied response. It is a story that can be used to convey a moral lesson about the ‘one man who tried to stop the Holocaust’, or to illustrate the indifference of the powerful Western leaders to what Hilberg called the ‘dire news of annihilation’ which Karski delivered to them. It has also been used to claim that the Polish wartime state did not abandon its Jewish citizens. The importance of the Karski story has much to do with the way it connects with current moral arguments about the Holocaust. Yet this importance is dependent on what we may call its truth value, and that in turn is established through a historical examination of the evidence the story is based on. This thesis presents a historical scrutiny of the Karski story. It aims to make a positive impact on the story by examining the myths contained in it.

A key feature of the Karski story is its heavy dependence on Karski’s later testimonies about his wartime mission. In 1978 Claude Lanzmann was gathering materials for *Shoah* (1985), his film masterpiece on the Holocaust, and after much effort persuaded Karski to talk about a mission which took place thirty-five years earlier. This was a turning point for Karski, it was the first time he spoke about the Holocaust since the war. However these testimonies tell us much about Karski after 1978 and they are framed as responses to questions which focus on the Holocaust. The picture that emerges within this frame shows a tragic wartime hero who risked his life carrying news of the Holocaust to Western leaders who showed little interest.

This thesis takes a critical view of the accuracy of this picture and looks for the key evidence in the original wartime documents, especially those written by Karski himself. But these documents do not tell us what questions to ask, the critical questions originate in the story: what evidence is there that carrying reports on the Jewish tragedy was the central purpose of Karski’s mission to London? Can we identify these reports? Are there any records of the eyewitness accounts which Karski conveyed verbally in the West? How important was a concern about the Jewish tragedy to Karski during the war?

Public debate and awareness of the Holocaust in Britain, America, Poland and elsewhere sometimes uses the Karski story to illustrate various aspects of the Holocaust. The thesis attempts to make an impact on this debate through historical research that is focused on original wartime documents rather than on later testimonies. At the same time, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of this impact, it maintains a close link between the story and the research, ensuring that they do not form two parallel and disconnected narratives which paradoxically refer to the same person, place and time.

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1 Introduction

1.1 *The Karski story*

The Karski story tells us that he was ‘the man who tried to stop the Holocaust’, a heroic Polish underground courier who in 1942 saw the horrors of the Holocaust and risked his life bringing the terrible news to the West and to Western leaders who were sceptical and uninterested. But we can make a broad distinction between the ‘Karski story’ and ‘Karski history’. It is primarily through the story that we have come to know about Karski. Unlike a piece of fiction, however, the Karski story is one which we expect to be believable and broadly true: it refers to a real person who lived at a certain time and place, we assume that it is factually accurate at least in its essentials and that there are testimonies and documents which we can, if we wish to, use as evidence which supports the believability of the story, evidence which provides the factual basis needed to make plausible interpretations. Asking for such evidence is not necessarily an expression of our disbelief, it may simply demonstrate that our belief in the story is initially suspended or not yet critically evaluated.

This thesis attempts to demythologise Karski through a historical examination of his story. It emphasises the fact that Karski was an officer and a representative of the Polish wartime state, with its armed resistance movement operating in occupied Poland and its government exiled in London. His mission was initiated and managed by the various military and civilian institutions of Polish resistance, his meetings with Western leaders were arranged by the Polish government. The reports and documents he took from Warsaw were delivered, in the first instance, to the leaders of the exiled government in London. He was also an eyewitness of the horrors of the Warsaw ghetto and a transit point near the Belzec death camp. He met the leaders of the Jewish resistance in Warsaw and brought their message and desperate calls for help to the West.

There can be little doubt that Karski was personally appalled by what he saw happening to the Jews in Poland. But a study of original documents shows that his mission was mostly concerned with the politics of the Polish wartime state; reports

on the extermination of the Jews formed only a small part of the materials he took from Warsaw. His meetings with Western leaders were focused on the worsening state of Polish-Soviet relations and not on conveying news about the fate of the Jews. Nevertheless, among the mass of materials he took with him were some of the most important reports on the Jewish tragedy. They were written in Warsaw by eyewitnesses and they had an impact in the West. The Jewish topic may not have been the focus of his meetings with Western leaders, but the source documents show that it was on his agenda, Karski raised it and it had an effect on some, but not all, of his listeners.

This thesis begins with a description of the main themes of the Karski story and in Chapter 2 it tries to highlight the moral dimension which makes the story important. We are told, for example, that in late 1942 Karski brought reports and eyewitness accounts to the West but Western leaders remained indifferent. This carries a moral reproach aimed at the major Western powers who left the Jews to their tragic fate. There is also a parallel narrative in which Karski's mission is meant to illustrate how the Polish wartime state tried to save the Jews: first, by making sure that its powerful allies were fully informed about the Jewish tragedy and second, by persuading those allies to launch reprisals which might halt the mass murder. It is a narrative rejected by historians who argue that the Polish government concealed its knowledge for some months before making an official announcement.

1.2 *Historians on Karski*

The Karski story is to a large extent based on the work of historians who examined how news about the Holocaust arrived in the West and how the Allies responded to it. Martin Gilbert is the first historian to refer to 'Karski's report' in this context. In his 1981 classic, *Auschwitz and the Allies: The Politics of Rescue*, he refers to the arrival in London of a report on:

‘the liquidation’ of the Warsaw ghetto, and the gassings at Belzec. It was brought from Poland to the Polish Government-in-Exile in London by an eye-witness, Jan Karski, a non-Jew.¹

¹ Martin Gilbert, 1981. *Auschwitz and the Allies: The politics of rescue*, London: Michael Joseph. p. 93.

Gilbert then describes how on November 25, 1942 ‘the Karski report’ was passed on by the Polish government to Jewish leaders who then showed it to senior officials at the Foreign Office where it was accepted, with some reluctance, as presenting solid evidence about Nazi Germany’s systematic mass murder of Jews in occupied Poland. This marked the start of a political and diplomatic campaign which led to the December 17 Allied Declaration condemning Nazi Germany for its ‘bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination’ of the Jews. Gilbert and other historians have described this campaign in detail.² With some hesitation, Walter Laqueur regarded the Declaration as a landmark in the history of the Holocaust: the Allies had finally ‘confirmed the news about the mass slaughter in a common declaration’.³ Allied knowledge about the extermination of the Jews was now official, after the Declaration the key question concerned the Allied response. Richard Breitman neatly summed up the problem by pointing out that the Declaration was a ‘necessary precondition to any official consideration of what Western governments might do to mitigate the slaughter’.⁴ It marked the point in time when an Allied response could no longer be avoided, it was now up to the Allies to decide what that response might be.

Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis examine the connection between Karski and the Allied Declaration. Following on from Gilbert, in 1994 Wood and Jankowski wrote that the ‘Karski report’ was the Polish government’s two-page English summary of reports which Karski had taken from Warsaw and which were placed on a separate route to London when he reached France.⁵ The latest research by Adam Puławski

² See Martin Gilbert’s close examination of the Foreign Office papers, FO 371/30923, in Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*. Richard Breitman adds references to Jewish and American sources in Breitman, R., 1998. *Official Secrets: What the Nazis planned, what the British and Americans knew*. London: Allen Lane. More recently, Michael Fleming examined Polish sources and emphasised the importance of press reports in Fleming, M., 2015. *Auschwitz, the Allies and Censorship of the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. In his 2019 book on the Polish wartime state’s perception of the Holocaust in late 1942, Adam Puławski combines a detailed examination of Polish sources with an argument about the *realpolitik* calculations of the Polish government during the campaign leading to the Declaration, see Puławski, A., 2018. *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu": Rząd RP na uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, AK a eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej od "wielkiej akcji" do powstania w getcie warszawskim*. Helń: Rocznik Chełmski.

³ Laqueur, p. 6.

⁴ Breitman, 1998, p. 153.

⁵ Wood, T. E. & Jankowski, S., 1994. *Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust*. New York: John Wiley & Sons

has shown that they reached London on November 13, nearly two weeks before Karski.⁶ This means that what Gilbert and other historians refer to as the ‘Karski report’, released by the Polish government on November 24, could not have been written by Karski who arrived in Britain a day later, it was based on reports he carried from Warsaw which reached London two weeks earlier. It is this that is meant to establish the connection between Karski and the campaign leading up to the December 17 Declaration.

Once it is shown in Chapter 3 that Karski did not write the ‘Karski report’, it becomes misleading to use a label which strongly suggests that he was the report’s author. To avoid confusion, after Chapter 3 the thesis refers to this document as the Polish government’s ‘Report of November 24’.

In 1982 the Polish historian Teresa Prekerowa suggested that the materials carried by Karski included one of the most important reports on the Holocaust produced by the Polish underground state, the *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* [Liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto] report and its six attachments. Later historians added some additional details. Wood and Jankowski included it in a brief list of similar reports, Dariusz Libionka described the attachments, Michael Fleming cited original despatch documents, and most recently, Puławski provided a complex but thoroughly documented analysis of the report’s presumed route from Warsaw to London via Budapest and Lisbon.⁷

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 of this thesis examine in detail the evidence which might show that Prekerowa’s suggestion was correct. There can be little doubt that the *Likwidacja* report was the basis for the summary contained in the ‘Karski report’, it was also the basis for the December 10 diplomatic note sent by the Polish government to the Allies. A comparison of the English texts of the ‘Karski report’ and of the diplomatic note with the original Polish text of the *Likwidacja* report shows an almost direct translation and a nearly-identical sequence of paragraphs,

⁶ Puławski, 2018.

⁷ Prekerowa, T., 1982. *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942-1945*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy; Wood and Jankowski, 1994; Libionka, D., 2006. ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec exterminacji Żydów polskich. In: *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939-1945, Studia i materiały*. Warszawa: IPN, pp. 15-207; Puławski, 2018.

there are frequent attempts to replicate a Polish turn of phrase into English, such as ‘*uwierzcie w rzeczy nie do wiary*’ by ‘believe the unbelievable’. Translated and summarised into English and then released by the Polish government to its Western Allies, to Jewish organisations and to the Western press, the *Likwidacja* report had a clear impact on the December 17 Allied Declaration.

A few days after November 13, Polish government officials sent messages back to Warsaw confirming that Karski’s materials had arrived. These included the *Likwidacja* report and other important documents on the Jewish tragedy: a letter from the leader of Warsaw’s Bundist resistance, Leon Feiner, to his London counterpart, Szmul Zygielbojm, and a pamphlet from a Polish Catholic organisation describing the Polish response to the mass murder of Jews. In chapter 8 of this thesis, I argue that counting the *Likwidacja* attachments, it was a set of nine documents which Karski carried from Warsaw.⁸ Raul Hilberg referred to Karski as one of the non-Jewish ‘messengers’ who risked their lives bringing ‘the dire news of annihilation to the outside world’.⁹ In Karski’s case, the news was contained in the nine documents which arrived in London on November 13.¹⁰ This thesis attempts to present a definitive list of these documents by giving their current archival references and a brief analysis of their content. They focus almost entirely on the Warsaw ghetto deportations which began on July 22 and ended on September 21, 1942.

This focus on the deportations is a key feature of the official announcements, reports and the diplomatic note which the Polish government released on and after November 24. The ‘Karski report’ is very clear on this, its opening one-sentence paragraph states that ‘News is reaching the Polish Government in London about the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw’. The December 10 diplomatic note is almost entirely devoted to this topic and an analysis of its 21-point text, presented in this thesis, shows that an account of the deportations begins at point number 3 and

⁸ Puławski argues that the *Likwidacja* report was not taken from Warsaw by Karski but by other, mostly unidentified, couriers. See Puławski, 2018. In this thesis, I consider Puławski’s analysis but conclude that the evidence he produced is not strong enough to show that what arrived in London on November 13 was not the one set of materials taken from Warsaw by Karski.

⁹ Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*, pp. 217-224

¹⁰ Karski also brought with him ‘verbal’ reports which included his eyewitness accounts of the Warsaw ghetto and a transit point near the Bełżec death camp. But these were delivered in meetings which took place sometime after December 1, when the campaign leading up to the Allied Declaration had already started in earnest.

ends at point number 18. In both cases, it is made very clear that this news has reached the Polish government in London quite recently, note the use of the present continuous tense in ‘News is reaching the Polish Government...’, the December 10 diplomatic note begins its account of the deportations with an assurance that it is based on ‘recent reports’.

This assurance seems at first to be entirely justified. An analysis of the ‘Karski report’ and of the diplomatic note presented in Chapter 9 of this thesis shows that they are indeed based on documents which arrived in London on November 13, on the *Likwidacja* report in particular. Given the time which Polish officials needed to process what they described as a vast amount of material, it thus seems reasonable to claim that the announcement which the Polish government issued on November 24 is based on reports which arrived ‘recently’. But this clearly suggests that prior to the arrival of these reports in mid-November the government did not have reliable information about the Warsaw ghetto deportations or had not yet received news which it could accept as credible.

1.3 Engel’s concealment hypothesis

This has been vigorously disputed by a number of historians who argue that the Polish government knew about the Warsaw ghetto deportations as early as August 25, but concealed what it knew for three months. In 1987, David Engel first presented a scholarly examination of internal messages received from Warsaw by the Polish government during the deportations. The most significant of these was sent on August 19 by the commander-in-chief of the Home Army, General Stefan Rowecki. On August 25 it was decrypted and, we assume, read by the leadership of the government in London. It clearly stated the basic facts about the ‘liquidation of the ghetto in Warsaw’: the deportations started on July 22 and by mid-August 150,000 Jews had already been deported and murdered in Bełżec and Treblinka, the aim was to deport nearly all 400,000 inhabitants of the ghetto, leaving only a few tens of thousands of qualified workers. The Polish government, argued Engel, maintained an ‘official silence’ about the Warsaw deportations until November 24,

when it released the 'Karski report'.¹¹ Engel's 'concealment hypothesis' is examined in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

The Rowecki message was studied in detail in 2007 by Puławski who noticed that the original radiogram containing the decrypted message included a handwritten annotation stating that it should not be circulated beyond the inner circle of the Polish leadership. To Puławski, this provided additional evidence that the government intended to conceal what it knew about the deportations.¹² Concealment was accepted as a fact by Fleming who argued that the Poles were simply following the rules of a 'discursive environment' controlled by the British (and American) news management and propaganda policies.¹³

This thesis takes the view that the concealment hypothesis needs to be closely examined because it seriously undermines the Karski story. The problem is best summarised by Engel: Karski did not bring new information to the Polish government, 'in fact he added only minor details to what was already known'.¹⁴

One historian has raised doubts about concealment. Dariusz Stola claimed that, 'for unknown reasons', the Rowecki message 'did not play any role in history'. Internal Polish government documents issued in the three months after its arrival contain no references to it. According to Stola, these documents show that even as late as mid-November, Polish officials knew astonishingly little about the deportations and mass murder in the Warsaw ghetto.¹⁵ This conclusion is largely based on an interpretation of messages sent to Warsaw which suggest that London was unaware of what was happening in the ghetto, and also on messages in which London claimed to be unable to confirm news coming from Stockholm and Tel Aviv about the deportations. To Stola, these messages show that Polish officials in London were genuinely unaware of what was happening in Warsaw. To Engel and

¹¹ Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*. Also, Engel, D., 1994. Readings and Misreadings: A Reply to Dariusz Stola. *Polin, Studies in Polish Jewry*, Volume 8, pp. 350-400.

¹² Puławski, A., 2007. Nie ujawniać czynnikom nieoficjalnym: Depesze AK o Zagładzie. *Więź*, Issue 7, pp. 69-80. Puławski widened his study of the Rowecki message in Puławski, A., 2018. *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, where he argues that the Poles concealed the message because they did not want Jewish suffering to overshadow major Polish concerns at the time.

¹³ Fleming, M., 2015. *Auschwitz, the Allies and Censorship of the Holocaust*.

¹⁴ Engel, *Readings and Misreadings*, p. 370.

¹⁵ Stola, D., 1995. *Nadzieja i Zagłada. Ignacy Schwarzbart - żydowski przedstawiciel w Radzie Narodowej RP (1940-1945)*. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, p. 166-169. See also Stola, D., 1997. Early News of the Holocaust from Poland. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 11(1), p. 12

Puławski, they show how the leadership of the Polish government sought to conceal what was already known.

In Chapters 4 and 5, this thesis examines the messages in detail and concludes that the unawareness and the inability to confirm is mentioned in messages sent before November 14, but not in those sent afterwards. This would clearly suggest that the arrival of Karski's reports on November 13 made a difference. There is, however, another factor which has to be considered in a discussion of the concealment hypothesis. If members of the inner circle of the Polish government decided to maintain an official silence about the Warsaw ghetto deportations, they would not conceal this knowledge in the confidential internal reports they sent to each other. They would not make statements in these reports which are directly contradicted by what they agreed to conceal.

Although rarely cited, an internal and highly confidential October 16, 1942 report from the deputy prime minister, Mikołajczyk, to the premier and commander-in-chief, Sikorski, provides an example of what the very core of the central leadership of the Polish government knew about the Jewish tragedy at the time. It was a report comparing the number of Polish and Jewish victims. None of the facts mentioned in the Rowecki message are mentioned, there is nothing in the report about the Warsaw ghetto deportations and the mass murder of nearly 300,000 of its inhabitants. The number of Polish and Jewish war victims given in the report is more or less the same: 200,000. This report, drafted almost a month after the end of the deportations, seems to present the state of the Polish government's knowledge about the Jewish tragedy in mid-October 1942. It is examined closely in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

The concealment hypothesis raises another difficult question which is considered in detail in Chapter 5: why did the Polish government decide to break what Engel called its 'official silence' on November 24? Did it decide that an opportune moment has finally arrived? Was it pressured to do so? Engel suggests that the government was concerned that news about the ghetto deportations and, more generally, about the systematic mass murder of Jews, would be released by other sources. It would thus no longer remain the main source of credible news about what is happening in Poland and its ability to control that news would be seriously weakened. But by what appears to be a coincidence, on November 24 in

Jerusalem the Jewish Agency released news about the testimonies of Palestinian Jews who recently arrived from Poland in an exchange for Germans interned in Palestine. They reported witnessing horrific scenes of mass murder. In the evening of the same day in Washington, the head of the World Jewish Congress, Rabbi Stephen Wise, held a press conference at which he told reporters that the State Department had just confirmed his ‘worst fears’ about the systematic mass murder of Jews in occupied Europe.

Engel suggests that after the news from Jerusalem was released, the Polish government could no longer ‘continue to draw a curtain over its knowledge’.¹⁶ Fleming argues that the Stephen Wise press conference was a means through which the US State Department sent a signal to the Poles (and others) that the rules of the ‘discursive landscape’ have changed and it was now possible to speak publicly about the Jewish tragedy.¹⁷ In other words, on November 24 the Polish government officially announced something it had known for months either because the news had just been released by other sources, or because the news management regime controlled by the big powers now allowed it.

By examining the timing of what are essentially press events, this thesis shows that there is a basic problem with this analysis. The Polish announcement was made in London sometime on November 24. The Stephen Wise press conference took place in Washington in the evening of the same day. Allowing for time difference, however, by London time that conference took place sometime in the morning of November 25, too late for the Poles to react to it. The Jewish Agency press release was reported to the *New York Times*, and, one assumes, the press in general, in Jerusalem on the 24th. At about the same time the Polish government released its report in London. Given the timing, this could not have been made in response to news released by other sources.

Engel suggested another reason why the Polish government broke its ‘official silence’: on November 16 news about the arrival of reports on the ghetto deportations was leaked to the Jewish member of the Polish National Council, Ignacy Schwarzbart. According to Engel, the government correctly assumed that he

¹⁶ Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*, p. 198.

¹⁷ Fleming, *Auschwitz*, p. 110.

would pass on information to his colleagues at the World Jewish Congress and decided to pre-empt this with the November 24 announcement.¹⁸ Puławski offers another explanation: in the second half of November Polish officials were gathering materials in preparation for Sikorski's official visit to America, newly arrived reports on the Jewish tragedy would reinforce the message he wanted to convey to Jewish organisations and help gain their support for the Polish cause.¹⁹ However, in both cases it is assumed that sometime around the middle of November the Polish government received materials containing fully credible information about the Jews. It then focused on the politics of its release in the West. But this may be taken to mean that prior to the arrival of these materials it did not have such information and could not be in a position to conceal it.

The concealment hypothesis thus seems to fail a number of basic tests. The argument put forward in this thesis broadly agrees with Stola who concluded that the Polish government leadership's 'knowledge of the deportation of the Warsaw ghetto in early November was very limited', it is as if they never saw, read or believed Rowecki's August 25 message.²⁰

If that conclusion is correct then the arrival of materials from Poland on November 13 marked an important milestone. These materials included the key reports on the Jews, listed and examined in Chapter 8 of this thesis, with the *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* report being probably the most significant. As already mentioned, this thesis shows that this report was the basis for the English summary which the government released on November 24, and also for the diplomatic note it issued to the Allies on December 9. Both of these were important in the campaign leading up to the December 17 Allied Declaration.

If we accept that it was Karski who took these reports from Warsaw then Hilberg's description of him as a 'messenger' and a 'risk-taker (...) who brought the dire news of annihilation to the outside world' seems broadly correct.

Two difficult questions are raised here. In his most recent book on the Polish wartime state's perception of the Holocaust, Puławski argues that a detailed examination of source documents shows that Karski did not carry the *Likwidacja*

¹⁸ Engel, op. cit., p. 197 and note 175.

¹⁹ Puławski, 2018, p. 745.

²⁰ Stola, 1997. *Early news of the Holocaust*. p. 14.

getta warszawskiego report from Warsaw. The materials which arrived in London on November 13 were made up of two sets which officials mistakenly thought was the one set Karski carried from Warsaw. According to Puławski, the *Likwidacja* report was carried by unidentified couriers via Budapest, Karski carried his materials via Berlin. The two sets were combined in France into one and then sent as a single shipment to London via Lisbon. The report which was the basis of the two-page English summary which the Polish government released on November 24, and of the December 10 diplomatic note, was not carried by Karski.²¹

Puławski's analysis is examined closely in Chapter 10 of this thesis where his conclusion is acknowledged as raising serious doubts about whether it was Karski who carried the *Likwidacja* report. However, it is a conclusion based on an elaborate examination of many different sources combined with speculation about numerous gaps. Despite the doubts, therefore, this thesis maintains that the *Likwidacja* report was carried from Warsaw by Karski.

There is another, more basic, question examined in this thesis that is not considered in Puławski's analysis. In later testimonies, Karski remarks on the huge volume of microfilmed materials he took from Warsaw; he mentions many hundreds of printed pages. This is confirmed by some internal Polish government messages sent at the time. It is therefore not surprising that he told Lanzmann in 1978 that 'he had not the slightest idea' of what reports he carried from Warsaw. This must, of course, include the *Likwidacja* report. But if he did not know that he was carrying that report then he would not be a 'messenger' in Hilberg's sense. The risk he was taking on his clandestine trip across occupied Europe applied to the reports sent by Polish political parties to their counterparts in London just as much as it did to a report which contained the 'dire news of annihilation': the *Likwidacja* report.

1.4 Karski the eyewitness

A few days after he arrived in London, Karski wrote an important internal report about the central purpose of his mission. The November 30 report is closely examined in Chapter 6 of this thesis to see what importance it assigns to Jewish matters. It soon becomes very obvious that the mission's purpose was to

²¹ Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordy"*, Especially p. 307-389

communicate the viewpoints of political parties active in occupied Poland to their counterparts in London. This was to be done through printed reports, which arrived on November 13, and verbal reports which Karski was to convey in meetings. Jewish matters were included in both, the letter from Leon Feiner, the Bundist, was among the printed materials. In Warsaw, Karski spoke with leaders of the Bundist and Zionist resistance in Warsaw and was asked to convey a verbal report. He delivered it at a December 2 meeting in London with the two Jewish representatives of the National Council, Szmul Zygielbojm and Ignacy Schwarzbart.

It was a meeting at which Karski also gave an eyewitness account of his visits to the Warsaw ghetto and to a 'sorting camp near Bełżec'. Breitman cites a 'reconstruction' of what was said and notes that it was sent to the Jewish Labor Committee in New York. An article in the March 1, 1943 edition of a newsletter issued by the American branch of the Polish Bund, *The Ghetto Speaks*, provides what seems like the most detailed report on the December 2 meeting. Entitled 'Eye-Witness Report of the Annihilation of the Jews of Poland', it is presented as a series of excerpts from the stenographic notes taken at the meeting. Puławski notes that Karski's eyewitness accounts reinforced the credibility of the printed reports which the Polish government had been releasing since November 24. Wood and Jankowski, for example, refer to a telegram Schwarzbart sent to his World Jewish Congress colleagues in New York on December 1, it begins with 'Have read all reports from Poland...'. On December 5, after he had met Karski, he sent another telegram saying the he had just met a 'Special official envoy', who confirmed 'all most horrible mass atrocities'. In his memoir of the war years, the Polish foreign minister, Raczyński, wrote that 'on December 1 I had just met an eyewitness who confirmed the recently arrived reports'.²²

In Chapter 11 this thesis examines *The Ghetto Speaks* article in some detail. This detail, combined with testimonials Karski gave later, also helps us understand Zygielbojm's distress and the tragedy of his suicide five months later.

²² The 'reconstruction' is quoted by Breitman, 1998, p. 148. Puławski on Karski confirming report: Puławski, 2018, p. 691. Wood and Jankowski, 1995, p. 150 quote Schwarzbart's December 2 telegram. Raczyński, E., 1960. *W Sojuszniczym Londynie: Dziennik ambasadora Edwarda Raczyńskiego 1939-1945*. London: Orbis. P. 157.

In early 1943 Karski had a number of high-level meetings in London. These included Anthony Eden and many senior members of the British government and the press. They were all arranged by the Polish government which presented Karski as a member of the resistance, newly arrived from Poland. In March and April, Karski wrote two detailed reports on these meetings and it is clear that the main topic was the deteriorating state of Polish-Soviet relations. The Jewish topic was on the agenda but Karski's reports show that his listeners did not seem very interested in it. According to historian Andrzej Żbikowski, in the 1990s Karski claimed that Eden and the American ambassador Drexel Biddle were, in fact, very interested in what he told them about the Jews at these meetings.²³ But this is not apparent in the internal reports they wrote about Karski a few days later or in Karski's own meeting reports.

The agenda which Karski prepared for his London meetings was made up of seven items and in both meeting reports the Jewish topic was the last item on the list. According to Puławski, the list was arranged in order of importance and this might suggest that Karski regarded the fate of the Jews as less important than, for example, social attitudes in occupied Poland towards the London government (item no 2 in the March report).²⁴ In Chapter 12 of this thesis, I argue that Karski's listeners were not bound by an agenda presented by a relatively junior representative of the Polish government. They could focus on any item that interested them. We can be fairly sure that Karski presented the Jewish topic by giving an eyewitness account of his visits to the Warsaw ghetto and a 'sorting camp near Bełżec'. This made a deep impression on some of his listeners: Arthur Koestler, Victor Gollancz and Alan Lane.

In July 1943 Karski was in Washington where he had numerous meetings arranged by the Polish ambassador, Jan Ciechanowski. Two of these meetings are particularly significant: with Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter (and others) on July 5 and with President Roosevelt on July 28. The Frankfurter meeting is an important feature of the Karski story, it is meant to illustrate how the powerful could not believe Karski's eyewitness accounts of what is happening to the Jews in occupied Poland. At the July 5 meeting, Frankfurter is 'unable to believe' Karski's eyewitness

²³ Żbikowski, A., 2011. *Karski*. Warszawa: Świat Książki, p. 303.

²⁴ Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordy"*, p. 291.

account about ‘the Jewish leaders, the ghetto, Bełżec...’. The Polish ambassador assures him that Karski is not a liar. To which Frankfurter makes his famous reply: ‘Mr Ambassador, I did not say that this young man is lying. I said that I am unable to believe what he told me. There is difference, Mr Ambassador’.²⁵

For Laqueur, this difference illustrates the ‘riddle of disbelief’, the rejection of information which is at the same time accepted as true. Tony Kushner refers to a ‘psychological mechanism’ which accepts the information but applies a blocking mechanism which ensures that nothing follows from it.²⁶

In Chapter 13 this thesis proposes a rather different interpretation of Frankfurter’s disbelief. It is worth noting that his apparent disbelief is first mentioned during the Lanzmann interview in 1978, none of the contemporary documents which refer to the July 5, 1943 meeting refer to it. According to a report ambassador Ciechanowski wrote a few weeks after the meeting, Frankfurter was ‘overwhelmed’ by what Karski had to say and suggested that the President should meet Karski. According to the ambassador, Frankfurter saw the President a few days after the meeting and told him about Karski. He also wrote a letter to the Commerce Secretary, Morgenthau, asking him to help persuade the President to see Karski. The ambassador’s description of Frankfurter’s reaction is partly confirmed by letters written by Oscar Cox, who was also present at the July 5 meeting. Cox wrote to Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt’s close advisor, saying that Karski’s story ‘will make your hair stand on end’. He wrote a similar letter to Walter Lippmann, the prominent journalist. If the ambassador’s report is accurate, Frankfurter’s ‘disbelief’ was not an expression of a blocking mechanism which rejected what Karski had to say and stopped any further action. His efforts to persuade Roosevelt to see Karski would not make any sense if he refused to believe what he had already heard from Karski on July 5.

On July 28, 1942 Karski, accompanied by the Polish ambassador, met Roosevelt at the White House; the meeting was scheduled for thirty minutes but

²⁵ USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*. P. 60.

²⁶ Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*, p. 237. Kushner, T., 2004. *Different Worlds : British Perceptions of the Final Solution during the Second World War*. In: D. Cesarani & S. Kavanagh, eds. *Holocaust: Responses to the persecution and mass murder of the Jews*. London: Psychology Press, p. 257.

overran to one hour. In the days that followed, Karski wrote an internal report in the form of a verbatim transcript which shows that it was Roosevelt who led the conversation: he asked the questions and Karski answered. An analysis of this document strongly suggests that the Jewish topic was discussed for just over two minutes, most of the time was taken up by Polish issues. Historians often note that it was Karski who introduced the Jewish topic, Timothy Snyder remarked that what Karski told Roosevelt about the Jews was ‘unbidden’,²⁷ Roosevelt did not ask a direct question about the Jews. David Engel is more cautious, he points out that Karski’s account of the Jewish situation was part of a reply to Roosevelt’s question, ‘what does German terror look like?’.²⁸ After describing how German terror affects the Poles, Karski makes a clear distinction between the suffering of the Poles and the Jews: German terror aims to turn the Poles into a nation of slaves, but it aims to exterminate the Jews completely. He tells Roosevelt that 1.8 million Polish Jews have already been murdered and without an Allied intervention, the remainder of the Jewish population of Poland will soon cease to exist. Engel refers to this part of Karski’s reply as a ‘recitation’. In Chapter 14 of this thesis, the brief report on the Jews which Karski presented to Roosevelt is viewed as the delivery of a message, particularly from the Jewish resistance leaders he met in Warsaw about ten months earlier. It is the moment when he completed the mission they assigned him.

This thesis looks briefly at the impact which the Karski meeting had on Roosevelt. In the evening of the same day Roosevelt broadcast one of his regular ‘Fireside Chats’ to the American people. A study of the transcript shows that the morning meeting with Karski had very little, if any, impact. There was no reference to the Jews or, indeed, to Poland. The focus was on the war effort. Two weeks before the meeting American and Allied forces had landed in Sicily in what one historian called ‘the first assault on ‘Fortress Europa’ by any Allied force’.²⁹ In his ‘Fireside Chat’, Roosevelt was concerned about the inevitable casualties of the 100,000 American troops engaged in ‘Operation “Husky”’, he set out the key points

²⁷ Snyder, T., 2013. Biographical Essay of Jan Karski. In: *Story of a Secret State*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, p. xxx.

²⁸ Engel, 1990, ‘Jan Karski’s Mission to the West, 1942-1944’, p. 370.

²⁹ D’Este, C., 2008. *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily July-August 1943*. London: Arum Press, p. 19 and Appendix E.

of what would later become the GI Bill. There was also concern about the loyalty of Italian-American soldiers and about the support of Italian-Americans for the war effort.

It has been argued that Roosevelt preferred to talk about rescuing ‘humanity’ rather than the Jews. Richard Breitman observed that Roosevelt, ‘did not see the plight of European Jews as one that compelled decisive presidential engagement’, he avoided focusing on the Jewish tragedy because he was worried that ‘whatever he might do or say would backfire, impairing the war effort’.³⁰ In other words, he was worried that support for the war might be significantly eroded if the American public was told that a major aim of the war was to save the Jews rather than ‘humanity’.

The meeting with Roosevelt, as well as the other meetings Karski had from July 5, 1943 onwards, may have had a positive impact on the creation of the War Refugee Board on January 22, 1944. Many years later, John Pehle, the first director of the board, is quoted as saying that the talks which Karski had in Washington in July and August 1943 ‘changed U.S. policy overnight from indifference to affirmative action’.³¹ However, it is not clear when Pehle said this, it may have been during the 1981 Liberators conference in Washington where Pehle is recorded saying something similar, but does not mention Karski. A recent study of the War Refugee Board, *Rescue Board* by Rebecca Erbelding,³² focuses on Pehle’s wartime career but it, too, does not mention Karski. The evidence for Karski having any impact on the creation of the War Refugee Board seems circumstantial at best. However, his eyewitness accounts of the Warsaw ghetto and the Belzec transit camp may have undermined the ‘indifference’ which Pehle mentioned.

In the Karski story, the Roosevelt meeting is the culmination of Karski’s wartime mission. He brought news about the mass murder of Jews and a desperate call for help from the Jewish resistance leaders in Warsaw to the most powerful leader in the West. This is neatly summed up in the Medal of Freedom citation,

³⁰ Breitman, R. & Lichtman, A. J., 2013. *FDR and the Jews*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. P. 210.

³¹ Quoted in Karski obituary in the *New York Times*: Michael T. Kaufman, *Jan Karski Dies at 86; Warned West About Holocaust*, *New York Times*, July 15, 2000. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/europe/071500poland-karski.html?scp=1&sq=Jan%252520Karski&st=cse>. Accessed April 11, 2021.

³² Erbelding, R., 2018. *Rescue Board: The Untold Story of America's Efforts to Save the Jews of Europe*. New York: Doubleday.

posthumously awarded to Karski in 2012: '[Karski] voiced tragic truths all the way to President Roosevelt'. By examining Karski's report of the meeting, we can see what these 'tragic truths' are. But we can also see that although they covered the essentials, they only took up about two minutes of a one-hour meeting whose main purpose was a discussion about Poland's future. Karski himself made a telling remark about this in his interview with Lanzmann in 1978:

You realise that throughout my entire mission, for me the Jewish problem was not the only problem. For me the key problem was Poland, the Curzon line, Soviet demands, Communists in the underground movement, fear of the Polish nation; What is going to happen to Poland? This was the emphasis.³³

1.5 The origins of the Karski Story

Karski's 1978 remark may be taken as a summary of the conclusion proposed by this thesis. Original wartime documents clearly show that a deep concern about the post-war future of the Polish state determined the central purpose of Karski's wartime mission. The reports about the Jews which he carried to the West, as well as the harrowing eyewitness accounts of Jewish suffering he witnessed in the Warsaw ghetto and the Bełżec transit camp, were an important, but not a central part of his mission. But they are central to the Karski story: the *Likwidacja* report he carried had a significant impact on the campaign leading up to the December 17 Allied declaration, his eyewitness accounts were a part of the agenda in the meetings he had in London and Washington. He carried a message from the Jewish resistance leaders in Warsaw 'all the way to President Roosevelt'.

Note, however, that Karski made the 'Jewish problem was not the only problem' remark in 1978 during an interview with Lanzmann who was gathering material for his film masterpiece, *Shoah*, released in 1985. The original four-hour interview was edited down to just over forty minutes. The remark was omitted in final release of *Shoah*, but we know about it, and about everything else that was said in the interview, because the full transcript as well as the outtakes are available in the

³³ USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview* p. 55-56.

Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.³⁴ The Karski interview is just one of nearly seventy, there are over 220 hours of outtakes.³⁵

Given the transcript and the outtakes, we can see what Lanzmann and his chief editor, Ziva Postec, regarded as essential to the overall concept of the film. They excluded Karski's accounts of his meetings with Western leaders, his trip to a transit camp he mistakenly called 'Bełżec', his many references to the Polish government and its politics. They included his two trips to the Warsaw ghetto and the meetings he had with the leaders of the Jewish resistance. In general, *Shoah* excluded any references to rescue and Allied indifference.³⁶

The editing of the interview can be regarded as an artistic triumph; Karski's fame is bound up with Lanzmann's *Shoah*. In her study of the *Shoah* outtakes, Regina Longo writes that 'by all accounts, including Karski's own, Lanzmann had made him a star', she comments on 'the intensity of his on-screen testimony', on the 'emotionally and historically compelling testimony' he presents in forty minutes of screen time.³⁷ Writing in 2010, Richard Brody, *The New Yorker* film critic, commented on the way Karski describes the meetings he had with the Jewish resistance leaders in Warsaw and Allied politicians in the West:

The descriptions that, thirty-four years after the meetings, Karski summons are of a novelistic level of precision and insight that are, in themselves, literary acts of the first order.³⁸

In the film, Karski's gestures, body language, his Polish accent and the polonisms of his English syntax combine into a performance which uses the briefest of sentences to describe Hell. Soon after he saw the film in 1985, however, Karski wrote a brief commentary in which he praised it as a masterpiece, but also criticised the editing of

³⁴ The USHMM Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection is available on <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn539109>. Accessed on April 14, 2021

³⁵ McGlothlin, E., Prager, B. & Zisselsberger, M. eds., 2020. *The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its Outtakes*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. P. 12.

³⁶ Cazenave, J., 2019. *An Archive of the Catastrophe: The Unused Footage of Claude Lanzmann's Shoah*. Albany: SUNY Press. eBook, Location 530.

³⁷ Longo, R., 2020. Ownership, Authorship, and Access: The Claude Lanzmann *Shoah* Collection. In: E. McGlothlin, B. Prager & M. Zisselsberger, eds. *The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its Outtakes*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p. 440.

³⁸ Richard Brody, 'The Front Row Blog', *The New Yorker*, December 16, 2010. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-unicorn-and-the-karski-report>, accessed April 13, 2021

his interview. Lanzmann, he wrote, ‘omitted that part of the interview in which I described the most important part of my Jewish mission at the end of 1942’. Karski then referred to the ‘central theme of my interview’: he reached the West and informed Western leaders about the ‘tragedy and demands of the Jews’. He met Roosevelt, Anthony Eden and many other powerful and influential people. Karski claimed that by omitting that part of the interview, Lanzmann chose not to show that ‘the allied governments, which alone had the capability to help the Jews, left them to their fate’.³⁹

In the *Shoah* interview, Lanzmann presented a powerful and compelling picture of Karski the eyewitness. In his 1985 commentary on *Shoah*, Karski praised the picture but claimed that it was incomplete: apart from being an eyewitness, he was also a messenger, the central purpose of his wartime mission is clearly suggested by a reference to his ‘Jewish mission at the end of 1942’ (*Moja żydowska misja z końca 1942 roku*). For Karski, the two key elements of his story complete the picture: he was an eyewitness and a messenger, he brought news about the Jewish tragedy and the desperate demands of the Jewish resistance leaders to the most powerful people in the West. That was the main purpose of his 1942 mission. Western leaders remained indifferent, nothing was done to help the Jews.

The *Shoah* outtakes and the transcript of the full Karski interview make it possible to examine exactly what was excluded in the release version and see how the Karski story originated after 1978. But the story is about a mission that took place in 1942-43 and there are original wartime documents which bring us closer to the facts of the mission. The aim of this thesis is to examine these documents, comment on the arguments put forward by historians who studied them and, if possible, revise the story.

³⁹ Karski, J., 1985. Shoah [Zagłada]. *Kultura*, Listopad-Novembre. pp. 123-124.

1.6 Jan Karski (1914 – 2000) - A brief biography

Early life

‘Karski’ was a wartime pseudonym which Karski adopted as his surname after the war. He was born on June 24 1914 as Jan Kozielski to a Polish Catholic family in Łódź, then a city in the Western edge of the Russian empire which became a part of Poland in 1918. Karski’s father was a harness and saddle maker, his mother is described in later testimonies as a devout but very tolerant Catholic. It was an intensely patriotic family living in a newly-independent Poland; in 1921 Łódź was Poland’s third largest city with an ethnically diverse population of around 450,000 made up of 62% (280,000) Poles, 31% (140,000) Jews and 7% (32,000) Germans⁴⁰. Karski went to school in Łódź and graduated there in 1931. In later life he talked about the many Jews he went to school with.

University and the years before the war

In 1931 Karski began to study Law and Diplomacy at the university in Lwów with a view to a career in the Polish diplomatic service. After graduating in 1935 he spent a year in a military academy from where he graduated at the top of his class as an officer cadet. In 1936 he started as an intern in the Polish foreign ministry and his training included postings to the League of Nations in Geneva and to the embassy in London. In Warsaw on January 1 1939 he was appointed as secretary of the Emigration Policy department of the Polish foreign service and on June 1 1939 he became a personal assistant to Tomir Drymmer, director of Poland’s consular services and one of the most senior officials in the foreign ministry. It was the start of what looked like a promising diplomatic career.

⁴⁰ Rzepkowski, Arkadiusz. 2008. “Skład narodowościowy, wyznaniowy i językowy ludności Łodzi w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej [The ethnic, religious and linguistic composition of the population of Łódź in the Second Republic].” *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych [Review of Historical Studies]* VII (1): 87-104, p. 90.

Beginning of the war

On August 23 1939 general mobilisation was announced in Poland and Karski was ordered to join his mounted cavalry unit as a sub-lieutenant near Oświęcim (Auschwitz). Along with other Polish forces, his unit was dispersed after a heavy German air attack and Karski joined the wave of soldiers and civilian refugees escaping eastward. After some days he reached a part of eastern Poland which was almost immediately attacked and occupied by the Soviets on September 17 who arrested all Polish soldiers and officers and placed them in a detention camp. The details of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact included provisions for an exchange of refugees according to their place of residence and since he came from Łódź, soon to be renamed as Litzmannstadt and now a part of Germany, Karski was included in an exchange group which the Soviets sent to German-occupied Poland. When he was in a sealed German train transport travelling through Poland, Karski escaped and in November 1939 made his way to Warsaw where he joined the resistance movement.

Early war years, 1939-1942

In January 1940 Karski made his first journey as a clandestine courier whose mission was to improve the liaison between the resistance forces in occupied Poland and the exiled Polish government then based in France. While in France, Karski wrote an extensive report about conditions in occupied Poland, it included an important section on the persecution of the Jews. He returned to Poland and at the end of May was sent on another mission to the West but this time he was arrested and beaten by the Gestapo after crossing the Tatra mountains in Slovakia. Afraid of being tortured, he tried and failed to commit suicide and was moved to a hospital on the Polish side to recover in preparation for a further Gestapo interrogation. He was rescued by the Socialist wing of the Polish underground and placed in a safe house in the countryside until the end of February 1941 when he resumed work for the resistance, first in Cracow and then, from October 1941, in Warsaw. Until September 1942 he worked at the Bureau of Information and Propaganda, a section within the military wing of the Polish underground state, as an analyst and as a liaison officer between the military and the main political parties in occupied Poland.

Mission to the West, 1942

Sometime in the early summer of 1942 Karski was asked to go on another mission to the West, this time to London where the exiled Polish government relocated after the fall of France in June 1941. He was asked to carry political reports produced by the main political parties and convey confidential verbal statements made by party leaders to their counterparts in London. News of his planned mission reached the Jewish resistance leaders in Warsaw who requested that their reports also be included in the mission. This was a time when Nazi Germany intensified its program of extermination and mass murder of the Jews and when nearly 300,000 Jews were deported from the Warsaw ghetto to be murdered in the Treblinka death camp. Apart from printed and verbal reports, the Jewish leaders asked Karski to be an eyewitness of the Jewish tragedy and organised two clandestine visits to the ghetto and a visit to a transit camp near the Belżec death camp near Lublin.⁴¹

The most recent research shows that Karski left Warsaw by train on September 27 1942 using the identity and travel documents of a French worker based in Warsaw. The materials he carried were held on a roll of microfilm hidden inside the stem of a house key. His journey took him through Berlin and then on to Lyon in Vichy France where he arrived on October 5. He was contacted by Polish agents who were in radio contact with the courier movement group of the Polish military in England and who were now responsible for the logistics of getting Karski and his materials to London. It took over a month to find the least risky route and by the beginning of November the key with Karski's materials was carried separately to Lisbon while Karski made his way across the Pyrenees and Spain to Gibraltar where he was put on a plane which landed in England on November 25. The key and the

⁴¹ In his 1944 book, *Story of a Secret State*, and in many of his later testimonies, Karski referred to his clandestine visit to the Belżec death camp. In the early 1980s historians such as Raul Hilberg showed that the place Karski visited could not have been Belżec and other historians argued that it was Izbica Lubelska, a transit camp en route to Belżec. However, original wartime documents show that Karski knew this and probably referred to Belżec in order to enhance his eyewitness account. For more on this see note 13, Section 11.1.

materials were flown from Lisbon and arrived in London nearly two weeks earlier on November 13.

Arrival in London and the ‘Karski report’, November-December 1942

On November 24 1942 the Polish government made an official announcement about the extermination of the Jews in occupied Poland and referred to information which had recently arrived from Poland. It issued a brief summary in English which was released to the press and which senior members of the World Jewish Congress took to the British Foreign Office where it made a big impact. Although Karski did not write it because he had not yet arrived in England, many historians have called this the ‘Karski report’. News about the extermination of the Jews by Nazi Germany had been accumulating for many months and this report, along with similar announcements made at the same time in Washington and Jerusalem, helped to put pressure on the powerful Western allies to respond in some way, a diplomatic campaign was launched which led to the December 17 1942 Allied Declaration condemning Nazi Germany for its ‘bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination’ of the Jews. A key element of that campaign was the diplomatic note which the Polish government released on December 10, entitled *The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland*, it was an official document issued by an allied state to its allies. The ‘Karski Report’ as well as the diplomatic note were both based on the documents which arrived in London on November 13. It is generally assumed that it was Karski who carried them from Warsaw.

The eyewitness speaks: the London and Washington meetings, December 1942-1943

On December 2 Karski met Szmul Zygielbojm, the Jewish member representing the Bund in the Polish National Council, and conveyed the verbal report from Leon Feiner, the Bundist leader Karski met in Warsaw. He also described the harrowing scenes he witnessed in the Warsaw ghetto and in the transit camp near Bełżec. In the first half of 1943 Karski had numerous meetings in London with prominent politicians, officials and journalists. On February 4 he met Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary. The meetings were arranged by the Polish

government and they focused on the resilience of the Polish underground state and on the precarious state of Polish-Soviet relations. The Jewish tragedy was on Karski's agenda and he presented his eyewitness accounts of the ghetto and the transit camp but his meeting reports show that, with a few exceptions, the topic was of limited interest to his listeners.

In July 1943 Karski was in Washington where the Polish ambassador arranged a series of meetings similar to those in London. Among the people he met were Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter, the deputy director of the Office of Strategic Services (the precursor of the CIA), military intelligence officers and influential journalists such as Walter Lippmann and George Creel. Once again, the agenda covered the Polish underground state and Polish-Soviet relations and it included the Jewish tragedy. In his contemporary reports, Karski suggests that there was more interest in the Jewish topic in Washington. In his later testimonies Karski described how Frankfurter listened intently to his eyewitness account of Jewish suffering but at the end said that although he does not consider Karski a liar, he cannot believe a word he says.

The meeting with President Roosevelt, July 28, 1943

Accompanied by the Polish ambassador, on that day Karski met Franklin Roosevelt in the White House. The meeting lasted one hour, half an hour longer than scheduled, and although Karski had a prepared agenda it was Roosevelt who asked questions and directed the conversation. In what looks like a verbatim transcript written by Karski a few days later, the discussion was focused primarily on the resilience of the Polish underground state under German occupation. When asked about German terror, Karski introduced the topic of the extermination of the Jews. He conveyed a message from the Polish government as well as from the Jewish resistance leaders in Warsaw that unless the Allies do something, within a year the Jewish population of Poland, with few exceptions, will cease to exist. The Jewish topic took just over two minutes of a one hour conversation but it can be seen as the fulfilment of a promise Karski made to the Jewish resistance leaders less than a year earlier in Warsaw: he delivered their message to the the most powerful leader of the Western allies.

Karski's American bestseller, *Story of a Secret State*, 1944

Karski was back in America in early 1944 and after difficult negotiations on how to avoid the subject of Polish-Soviet relations, signed a contract with an American publisher to write a book about Polish resistance to German occupation. He wrote the book during the summer months and it was published in America later that year. The 'Secret State' is the Polish Underground State and this was the main focus of a book written in the first person as a memoir to make it more accessible to the general American public. Two of its thirty-two chapters provide a harrowing description of Jewish suffering presented as eyewitness accounts of the Warsaw ghetto and a death camp. The book was selected for the Book of the Month Club and became an American bestseller with about 400,000 sold.⁴² Karski remained in the United States until the end of the war.

End of the war and Georgetown University, 1945 – 1978

On July 5, 1945 America and Britain ceased to recognise the exiled Polish government in favour of the communist and Soviet-backed regime installed in Warsaw. Karski lost his diplomatic status and became a private individual applying for a visa to stay in America. He was engaged for a time as an acquisition agent for the Hoover Institution archive and managed the gathering of materials left by the exiled, and now unrecognised, Polish government. In 1947 Karski enrolled at Georgetown University and in 1952 received a doctorate for a dissertation on the fall of Eastern Europe. He then became a professor of international politics at Georgetown and retired in 1984. There is no record of any statement he made between 1945 and 1978 about the Holocaust.

Claude Lanzmann's Karski interview, October 1978

In 1978, after trying for nearly a year, the French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann managed to persuade Karski to talk about the Holocaust. Lanzmann was gathering material for what would become his nine and a half hour long 1985 film

⁴²Georgetown University Press, 2012. *Georgetown University Press to Publish Jan Karski's Story of a Secret State*. [Online], Available at: <http://press.georgetown.edu/newsfeeditem/georgetown-university-press-publish-jan-karski's-story-secret-state> [Accessed 13 July 2020].

masterpiece, *Shoah*; the Karski interview provided some of the bystander footage he needed for the film. The two-day, eight hour interview was edited down to just over forty minutes in the film which Karski, when he saw it in 1985, regarded as a masterpiece. But he also thought that it was an incomplete one because, in his case, it only showed him as an eyewitness; there was a need, he said, for another such masterpiece which showed how the news of the annihilation reached the West and how Western leaders reacted to it.⁴³

The *Shoah* interview gave Karski international prominence, it made him famous. The editing omitted much of the material but it presented an eyewitness appalled by what he saw. Karski's performance made a deep emotional impact on many viewers of the film.⁴⁴

Karski's last mission: guardian of the memory of the Holocaust, 1979-2000

The Lanzmann interview was a milestone. In a letter he wrote in 1982 he said that he and his Warsaw-born Jewish wife, Pola Nireńska, decided that it was time to stop being silent about the Holocaust. He wanted to campaign against Holocaust denial and embarrass those Western leaders who claimed that during the war they did nothing to save the Jews because they did not know. In a speech he made at the 1981 International Liberators conference in Washington he spoke about the moment when he realised that the Holocaust was humanity's 'second Original

⁴³ In the final edit of *Shoah*, Lanzmann did not include Karski's account of his visit to Bełżec. This was omitted probably because Raul Hilberg, who advised Lanzmann, showed that Karski could not have been in Bełżec. See note 6, above.

⁴⁴ Our knowledge of the omissions is based primarily on the *Shoah* outtakes and particularly on the transcript of the interview, with markings and annotations made by the film editor, Ziva Postec. USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*. [Online]. Available at: https://collections.ushmm.org/film_findingaids/RG-60.5006_01_trs_en.pdf [Accessed 15 Sept 2020]. Recent scholarly studies of the *Shoah* outtakes at USHMM include Cazenave, J., 2019. *An Archive of the Catastrophe: The Unused Footage of Claude Lanzmann's Shoah*. Albany: SUNY Press, and McGlothlin, E., Prager, B. & Zisselsberger, M. eds., 2020. *The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah and Its Outtakes*,. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. See also Berkowitz, M., 2012. *The Holocaust on Film - Shoah*. [Online]. Available at: <http://bufvc.ac.uk/articles/the-holocaust-on-film-shoah> [Accessed 6 October 2020]. I am grateful to Professor Berkowitz for letting me read his forthcoming review of the Cazenave and McGlothlin studies of the *Shoah* outtakes.

Sin’; he remained a ‘practicing Catholic’ and yet he experienced a kind of conversion, ‘I became a Jew..., a Christian Jew’.⁴⁵

In 1982 Karski was recognised by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. In 1994 he was made an honorary citizen of Israel. He was a strong supporter of Israel. After the fall of communism 1989 he was also honoured in Poland where he condemned anti-Semitism and talked about the uniqueness of the Holocaust. In a 1991 interview he gave in Poland to the Catholic weekly magazine *Tygodnik Powszechny*, he said,

(...) we also have to realise that the Holocaust is unique [*nieporównywalny*]. We cannot forget this. Whatever I will do, whatever I do, I try to do my bit to make sure that others do not forget this.⁴⁶

Jan Karski died in Washington on July 13 2000 at the age of 86.

⁴⁵ Karski, Jan. 1981. “Speech at the International Liberators Conference.” Accessed July 18, 2017. https://www.ushmm.org/online/film/display/detail.php?file_num=3993.

⁴⁶ Korczak, J., 1991. Jan Karski: Słowa po latach milczenia. *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 30 6, Issue 26, p. 1.

2 The Karski story

2.1 *Futile mission, tragic hero*

One of the most concise summaries of the Jan Karski story was presented by Barack Obama at the Presidential Medal of Freedom ceremony in the White House on May 29, 2012. The Medal is the highest civilian distinction awarded by an American president in recognition of the recipient's 'especially meritorious contribution' to America, world peace or 'other significant public or private endeavors'.¹ Karski, who died nearly twelve years earlier (in July 2000) at the age of 86, received the Medal posthumously. The Medal citation read at the award ceremony described his contribution as follows:

As a young officer in the Polish Underground, Jan Karski was among the first to relay accounts of the Holocaust to the world. A witness to atrocity in the Warsaw Ghetto and the Nazi Izbica transit camp, he repeatedly crossed enemy line to document the face of genocide, and courageously voiced tragic truths all the way to President Roosevelt.²

It is sometimes claimed that Karski was the first 'to relay accounts of the Holocaust to the world', the citation is more circumspect: he was 'among the first'. He was an eyewitness of the horrors of the Holocaust, which means that he was not relaying somebody else's account of what Nazi Germany was doing to the Jews in occupied Poland, he described what he himself saw 'in the Warsaw Ghetto and the Nazi Izbica transit camp'. He was there. Like a war reporter who wants to see for himself, he took risks, he 'crossed enemy line to document the face of genocide'. But he did more than just relay his tragic accounts of the Holocaust to 'the world', he relayed them to its most powerful leaders, 'all the way to President Roosevelt'.

During the war, Karski saw the horror of the Holocaust unfolding in his native Poland and risked his life travelling through occupied Europe on a mission to bring the terrible news to the 'free world', where he told the West's most powerful

¹ UC Santa Barbara, 1963. Executive Order 11085 - The Presidential Medal of Freedom. [Online] Available at: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-11085-the-presidential-medal-freedom> [Accessed 16 September 2020].

² C-Span, 2012. *Presidential Medal of Freedom Ceremony*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?306291-2/medal-freedom-ceremony> [Accessed 16 September 2020].

leaders what he saw. Karski the eyewitness became a messenger who ‘courageously voiced tragic truths’ to them because he hoped that once they knew, they would do something to stop the Holocaust. The subtitle of a book on Karski, a biography which has remained the basic text on the great man for over two decades, is ‘How one man tried to stop the Holocaust’.³

The Medal of Freedom citation captures a key theme of the Karski story: first and foremost there is his deep concern about the tragic fate of the Jews in occupied Poland. In the story, Karski is the shocked eyewitness of the Holocaust, he risks his life carrying the terrible news to London, he talks to the most powerful and influential people in the West and tells them about the tragedy of the Jews. The eyewitness then becomes what Raul Hilberg called a ‘messenger’, a ‘risk-taker’ who ‘brought the dire news of annihilation to the outside world’.⁴ In Karski’s case, he brought it ‘all the way to President Roosevelt’ and it is significant that he did so during the war, while the Holocaust was still raging.

It seems clear from this that carrying the message about the Holocaust was the main purpose of Karski’s mission. Karski was a messenger who had the courage and determination to take the Jews’ desperate cry for help to the most powerful leaders of the Western Allies, with Roosevelt chief among them, his mission was heroic because he risked his life to make sure that the world knew about the tragic fate of the Jews. But it was heroic also because it took courage to ‘voice tragic truths all the way to President Roosevelt’. Here the Medal of Freedom citation gives us only the slightest hint of how the story continues. Why did it take courage to voice such ‘tragic truths’? It is at this point in the story that Karski becomes a tragic hero: the message he brought to Western leaders fell on deaf ears, it was met with indifference and disbelief, the world was not interested, or did not believe him or was just too busy with fighting the war: nothing was being done to save the Jews. And yet Karski had the courage to persist. Karski the tragic hero is well described by Eli Wiesel:

³ Wood, T. E. & Jankowski, S., 1994. *Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

⁴ Hilberg, R., 1992. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*. New York: HarperCollins. pp. 217-224.

[Karski] spoke of [the tragedy of the Jews] to everyone he was able to meet – statesmen, politicians, journalists, diplomats. Some refused to listen to him, others to believe him. From General Sikorski to Anthony Eden, from President Roosevelt to Justice Frankfurter, he recounted to each the life and death of the Warsaw Ghetto, the death trucks, the sealed freight cars going to Auschwitz, the fear and hunger, the loneliness and agony of men, women, and children whom the so-called civilized world had abandoned and forgotten. Then he stopped. He realized that his words were of no avail. People were busy with other things, leaders had other priorities. I believe that this was the most depressing time for Jan Karski. He must have felt useless.⁵

He was a messenger who risked his life carrying the terrible news to the West, he told the most powerful Western leaders about the extermination of the Jews and it is obvious that he did so because he wanted them to do something to rescue those Jews who still remained alive. Only the Western leaders could direct part of the West's military, financial and political power towards some action which might have brought rescue to the Jews and stopped the Holocaust. But as Elie Wiesel, among many others, made clear, the Western leaders did very little or nothing at all. The message carrying 'the dire news of annihilation' which Karski brought to the West made no difference, 'his words were of no avail'. Karski himself said many years later that he 'tried to stir the conscience of the world' but he failed, 'the Jews were left alone to perish'.⁶ A 1993 Polish television documentary on Karski is entitled 'Futile Mission' (*Daremna misja*).⁷

2.2 *Emissary of the Polish Underground*

The Medal of Freedom citation hints at another essential thread of the Karski story: Jan Karski was 'a young officer of the Polish Underground'. This is also stressed in the brief remarks which Barack Obama made before the official reading of the citation: 'Fluent in four languages, possessed of a photographic memory, Jan [Karski] served as a courier for the Polish resistance during the darkest days of World War II'. It was concern about the tragic fate of the Jews which guided

⁵ Elie Wiesel, 'Forward' in Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*. pp. vii-viii.

⁶ USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*. [Online]. Available at: https://collections.ushmm.org/film_findingaids/RG-60.5006_01_trs_en.pdf [Accessed 15 Sept 2020] Karski full unedited interview transcript, p. 73. Original transcript with markings and annotations made by the film editor, Ziva Postec.

⁷ *Daremna Misja: Opowieść Jana Karskiego-Kozielewskiego*. See <http://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?film=4212794>, (accessed 30/07/2016).

Karski's mission, but an important part of the story is the fact that he was Polish, he was active in the Polish resistance movement, he was a member of the clandestine army, the Home Army, which fought against the German occupation of Poland. Karski's mission was part of the Polish war effort, he was a courier and emissary carrying messages and reports between the Polish underground state operating in Poland under conditions of German terror, and the Polish government, a member of the anti-German alliance based in London in what was intended to be temporary exile. And so when Karski arrived in London with the terrible news about the fate of the Jews he was not acting alone, he was not on a solo mission, his journey as a courier was managed by an elaborate organisation which among many other things needed to maintain clandestine liaison and communication links between the military and civilian underground in occupied Poland and its government in London. And that in turn would imply that Karski's mission was in some way an official one, that it was the Polish government which through Karski brought the news of the Holocaust to its Western allies. This would apply also to the meetings which Karski had with senior Western leaders, Anthony Eden and Roosevelt chief amongst them, these were meetings organised by Polish government officials and in these meetings Karski represented the Polish state. He was not a solitary hero who risked his life travelling alone from Warsaw through Nazi-occupied Europe carrying the terrible news to the West, a man who somehow managed to reach Washington where he contacted the White House to arrange a meeting with Roosevelt so that he could tell him about the Holocaust. The Polish wartime state and its war effort may not always be in the foreground but it is an essential part of the Karski story.

The link between the Polish wartime state and Karski's concern for the tragic fate of the Jews is neatly illustrated through a statue commemorating Karski in central Warsaw. The statue was placed in 2013 just outside the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Polin, which opened in 2014⁸. Karski is shown sitting on a bench looking at the Museum:

⁸ The Warsaw sculpture is one of a series of six Karski 'benches' made by the Kraków-based sculptor Karol Badya. The others are on the Georgetown University campus in Washington DC, Kielce, Manhattan, Łódź and Tel Aviv. See <http://badya.pl> (accessed July 26, 2016).



Figure 1 - Karski bench statue, Warsaw, side view

The gesture of the hand, with forefinger lightly touching the chin, together with the slight tilt of the head suggest deep concern whose object is indicated by the direction of Karski's gaze: it is a gaze turned towards the Museum, it is a concern about the Jews. To emphasise this concern, Karski's bench is placed slightly out of line with its plinth, it is turned towards a museum dedicated to presenting a Jewish world which had existed in Poland for nearly a millennium, a world destroyed by the Holocaust. The inscription on the side of the bench tells us that Karski had tried to stop this destruction. His concern about the Jews and the inscription are more clearly discernible when we look at the statue from the front:



Figure 2 - Karski bench statue, Warsaw, front view

There is a book on the right armrest: it is Karski's *Story of a Secret State*, his 1944 American bestseller which included harrowing descriptions of the Warsaw ghetto and a death camp. We may reasonably assume that the sculptor intended this to represent the message which Karski carried to the West. Before listing other distinctions, the inscription clearly establishes Karski's link with the Polish wartime state:

*Jan Karski (Koziński)
 1914-2000
 Emissary of the leadership of the
 Polish Underground State,
 Professor of Georgetown
 University in Washington,
 "Righteous
 Among the Nations".
 Awarded
 The Order of the White Eagle,
 Nominated
 For the Nobel Peace Prize,*

*A man who wanted to stop
The Holocaust.
Warsaw 2012.⁹*

Karski was ‘a man who wanted to stop the Holocaust’ as the ‘Emissary of the leadership of the Polish Underground State’.

This link between Karski and the Polish wartime state looks obvious but it greatly complicates the Karski story. Karski’s mission and his concern for the fate of the Jews now seems to represent the official concern of the Polish state for its Jewish citizens, his mission to the West in 1942 can be construed as the Polish state’s attempt to convey news of the Jewish catastrophe to the Western allies so that they might bring some rescue to the Jews. This has a deep moral significance, it suggests that the Polish state did not abandon its Jewish citizens, it tried to do what it could. In Karski’s case there may of course have been a combination of the official and the private but if the mission was official – Karski was an emissary of the Polish Underground State – and if its primary purpose was to convey the ‘dire news of the annihilation’ to the free world then the concern which guided this mission – a concern about the tragic fate of the Jews in occupied Poland – was also an official one, it was the Polish underground state doing all it could to rescue its Jewish citizens. And given the wartime constraints and German terror all it could do was to make sure that news about the extermination of the Jews taking place in Poland was conveyed to the West where it could be presented as credible and confirmed. There were others but it was primarily Karski who is offered here as an illustration of what the Polish wartime state did to bring rescue to its Jewish citizens.

⁹ ‘Jan Karski (Kozielewski)/1914-2000/Emisariusz Władz/Polskiego Państwa Podziemnego,/Profesor Uniwersytetu/Georgetown w Waszyngtonie./”Sprawiedliwy/Wśród Narodów Świata”,/Odznaczony Orderem Orła Białego,/Nominowany/Do Pokojowej Nagrody Noble,/Człowiek,/ Który Chciał Powstrzymać/ Holokaust./Warszawa 2012 R.’. Note that the inscription (in English) on a similar statue on Georgetown University’s campus in Washington reads: ‘Jan Karski (n. Jan Kozielewski) (1914-2000) /Messenger of the Polish People to Their Government in Exile /Messenger of the Jewish People to the World /The Man Who Told of the Annihilation of the Jewish People /While There Was Still Time to Stop It. //Named By the State of Israel, /”A Righteous of the Nations of the World” /A Hero of the Polish People /Professor, Georgetown University (1952-1992) / A Noble Man Walked Amongst Us and Made Us Better By His Presence /A Just Man’. See <https://images.app.goo.gl/9vzhCcdRCTXfU8iW8> , accessed 15 September 2020.

2.3 *The questions that complicate the story*

It is at this point that historical scrutiny enters the stage and raises difficult questions about the Karski story, questions which will be sketched briefly here, to be pursued in more depth in later chapters. Some historians have argued that regardless of what the Polish state might have done under wartime conditions, it did not in fact display much concern about the Jewish tragedy; it may not have been able to do much to help rescue its three million Jewish citizens but it could have done something and it did little or nothing at all. Historians such as David Engel and many others have argued that during the war the relationship between the Polish government-in-exile and Jewish organisations was frequently difficult and very strained, that the Polish government consistently failed to acknowledge the fundamental difference between the wartime suffering of the Poles and that of the Jews, that it seemed to suppress much of the dire news about the suffering of the Jews fearing that this might ‘overshadow’ news about the suffering of the Poles. Engel and others argue that by late August 1942 the Polish government in exile had credible information about one of the major chapters of the Holocaust, the Warsaw ghetto deportations, but concealed this for three months before it made an official announcement.¹⁰ In occupied Poland the main parties making up the political wing of the underground state (the PKP) did not include Jewish parties; with the notable exception of *Żegota*, a social welfare agency incorporated into its structures late in 1942, the civilian wing of the state (the *Delegatura*) had no departments or sections which were specifically concerned with the Jewish tragedy. The military wing, ZWZ-AK, was deeply suspicious of the Jewish resistance movement which it thought had communist sympathies. The toxin of the judeobolshevik myth about ‘Jewish treachery’ following the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland on September 17, 1939, was widespread and it strengthened the belief in the ethnocentric nature of the Polish state, a state which should belong exclusively to ethnic Poles. Much of the mainstream underground press, when it considered the ‘Jewish question’ in the darkest periods of the war, continued a pre-war debate about mass Jewish emigration

¹⁰ The clearest presentation of this view of the Polish Government-in-exile is in David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews 1939-1942*, The University of North Carolina Press, 1987. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

with added *realpolitik* speculations about what the extermination of Polish Jewry by Nazi Germany would mean for Poland and Polish society after the war.¹¹

The claim that the Polish government-in-exile had credible information about the Warsaw ghetto deportations as early as late August but concealed it for nearly three months until the end of November 1942 goes directly against a central part of the Karski story. In the story, Karski, the emissary of the Polish underground state, leaves Warsaw in September 1942 on a clandestine mission to bring the ‘dire news of annihilation’ to the Polish government in London. This clearly implies that the government was not previously aware of such news or at least did not regard it as credible until the arrival of Karski’s reports in mid-November 1942. Once it received this news however, it made an official announcement which, combined with news arriving from other sources, initiated a diplomatic and press campaign leading up to the December 17 Allied Declaration condemning Nazi Germany for its ‘bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination’ of the Jews, the only official declaration about the Jewish tragedy made by the Allies during the war. But if in fact the Polish government had this information in late August it could have made an official announcement much earlier. As an allied state and an exiled government of an occupied country where the extermination of its Jewish citizens was taking place, such an announcement would have added critically significant weight to the accumulating evidence needed for the launch of this campaign, months before the end of November. If this claim is valid then the information which Karski brought to the West sometime after the middle of November was not ‘new’ to the Polish government in London. David Engel, who provides what is probably the most thoroughly-researched argument for this claim, makes a pithy remark here about Karski: ‘he added only minor details to what was already known’.¹²

¹¹ For an overview see Polonsky, A., 2012. *The Jews in Poland and Russia 1914-2008*. Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization. Part II.. On the underground press see Libionka, D., 2006. ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec exterminacji Żydów polskich. In: *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939-1945, Studia i materiały*. Warszawa: IPN, pp. 15-207, also Puławski, A., 2008. Wykluczenie czy samowykluczenie? Trzy aspekty obecności Żydów w wojennym społeczeństwie polskim na przykładzie 1942 roku. *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, pp. 127-158. The most prominent example of the *realpolitik* speculations is Roman Knoll’s 1943 report. For a discussion, see Michlic, J., 2006. *Poland’s Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, p. 183.

¹² Engel, Readings and Misreadings, p. 370.

The Polish wartime state depicted in this account does not seem to be deeply concerned about the tragic fate of its Jewish citizens. This view has been challenged by other historians. They accept that many of the criticisms of the Polish state listed by the other historians are valid. However, they maintain that the fundamental point holds firm: as the horrific news was being conveyed from Poland to London, the Polish government in London, even if there were delays over which it may or may not have had much control, did all it could to alert its Western allies about the systematic mass murder of Jews being carried out in Poland by Nazi Germany. It did this through the campaigns launched in June/July 1942 after the arrival of the Bund Report and it did this again towards the end of 1942 with a diplomatic effort leading to the December 17 Allied declaration which condemned Nazi Germany for its ‘bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination’ of the Jews. According to this account, the Polish underground state, acting under conditions of German terror in occupied Poland, and its exiled government in London, under the watchful eye of its British hosts, did all it could to inform the alliance about the extermination of the Jews and tried to persuade them to stop it.

An early version of this view was presented by Władysław Bartoszewski¹³ in 1967: from late 1941 onwards, he argued, the Polish government in exile issued statements and declarations, published pamphlets and newsletters, organised press conferences and rallies, made appeals and passed resolutions, all of which, in one way or another, informed the allies and Western public opinion about the Jewish tragedy. The culmination of all these efforts, wrote Bartoszewski, was the Allied declaration of December 17, 1942 with its solemn promise that the criminals will be punished once Nazi Germany is defeated. To Bartoszewski, this had little effect, but, as he says: ‘Unfortunately, the Polish government could not achieve any more than this’.¹⁴ His use of the word ‘unfortunately’, (‘*niestety*’), clearly suggests that if

¹³ A towering figure of Polish resistance, both anti-German and anti-communist, Bartoszewski (1922-2015), was also a member of *Zegota*, the clandestine Council to Aid Jews, a Polish resistance agency providing social welfare to the Jews during the war. Imprisoned during the Stalinist period, Bartoszewski was a prolific historian of the resistance and Polish-Jewish relations during the war. Recognised as ‘Righteous among the nations’ by Yad Vashem in 1963, he was active in the anti-communist opposition movement and was appointed foreign minister in post-communist Poland in 1999-2000.

¹⁴ ‘*Nic więcej, niestety, rząd polski osiągnąć nie zdołał*’ Bartoszewski, W. & Lewinówna, Z., 2007. *Ten Jest z Ojczyzny Mojej*. Warszawa: Świat Książki, ‘Introduction’, pp. 20-25. This is the third,

the Polish state had the military and political means to do something to stop Nazi Germany from exterminating the Jews in Poland, the majority of them Polish citizens, it would have done so. It clearly did not have such means, it was an occupied country with an exiled government based in London and its only option was to alert the major allied powers, Britain and America, and try to persuade them to bring rescue to the Jews. They were the only ones who had the capability to do so.

We can see how Karski is an essential piece of this argument. But the fact that Karski's mission was carried out on behalf of the Polish wartime state complicates the Karski story because it raises valid questions about the claim that the mission's primary purpose was to alert the Western allied powers about the Holocaust. Engel and other historians have claimed that the Polish government's treatment of the news about the Jewish catastrophe unfolding in Poland was at best instrumental, its importance measured by the benefits it brought to the Polish state and by what it revealed about the likely intentions Nazi Germany had towards the non-Jewish majority of Polish society. Karski's role in this account seems to be relatively minor. By contrast, historians such as Bartoszewski may agree with the use of the term 'instrumental' but only in a limited sense: yes, the Polish government was engaged in allied politics, but politics is what governments do; it attempted to persuade its Western allies to launch some retaliatory action against Germany which might cause it to stop the killing of the Jews. It had failed to do this, the end result of its efforts, *niestety*, was a mere declaration with a solemn promise that the criminals will be punished after the war. Karski's 'futile mission' is an important part of the argument.

Historical scrutiny complicates the Karski story because it seems to present us with evidence which in some parts supports but in others weakens or even contradicts the story. The central theme of the story is Karski's deep concern for the tragic fate of the Jews and his heroic attempt to do something 'to stop the

expanded edition of a 1967 anthology of testimonies on Poles helping Jews during the war. Bartoszewski was regarded as an anti-communist by the regime which refrained from persecuting him because it saw the publication of his book as useful, especially during the widespread international criticism of Poland after the 1968 anti-Semitic campaign. Cf. Andrzej Friszke, 'Na długi dystans. Życie i świadectwa Władysława Bartoszewskiego' [For the long distance. The Life and testimony of Władysław Bartoszewski], *Więź*, Summer 2015, 660: 43-52.

Holocaust'. Some historians have argued that this is entirely mistaken. Writing in 1990, in what may be taken as still the most scholarly historical study of Karski's mission, David Engel concludes:

Karski's story has figured prominently in several works aimed at demonstrating that the Polish political leadership in underground and in exile was committed to a policy of doing all in its power to sound the alarm to the Western world on behalf of a Jewry threatened with extinction. In reality, however, Karski's own contemporary confidential reports on his activities reveal that Jewish matters occupied a relatively small portion of his attention, both in Britain and in the United States.¹⁵

Engel focuses on the link between Karski and the Polish wartime state, on an essential part of the Karski story, and refers to evidence which he claims significantly undermines the story. As opposed to the story, the evidence found in 'Karski's own contemporary confidential reports' tells us that 'in reality' relaying 'accounts of the Holocaust to the world', as the Medal of Freedom citation puts it, was not the central purpose of Karski's wartime mission. The Jewish tragedy was not completely ignored, Karski did convey the messages he was given by the Jewish underground leaders in Warsaw, it just 'occupied a relatively small portion of his attention'. There were other problems, the key one being expressed through the question 'what is going to happen to Poland?'. Engel argues that 'contemporary reports' provide the evidence for this and by studying them we gain access to a knowledge of historical 'reality' which can override the Karski story. Elsewhere in his study, Engel concludes that 'Karski's own secret reports, composed during various stages of his mission, show that Jewish concerns were not central to his activities'.¹⁶

2.4 *Holocaust rescue and the Polish wartime state: the moral reproach*

The failure of Karski's mission and the unwillingness of the Western leaders to listen to him is another important part of the story; as Wiesel put it, Karski's attempt to tell the West about the suffering Jews, condemned to death, 'abandoned and forgotten' by the 'so-called civilized world', was a complete failure; 'his words

¹⁵ Engel, D., 1990. 'Jan Karski's Mission to the West, 1942-1944. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 5(4), pp. 363-380, p. 364.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 363.

were of no avail'.¹⁷ Karski's mission was meant to convince Western leaders to broaden the scope of the Allied war effort so that stopping the Holocaust would become a military objective. He failed to achieve this, the Allies did little or nothing to save the Jews and this is in part what establishes Karski's role as a tragic hero in the story. Clearly, the assumption is that the Western allies could have done something, broadening the scope of the war effort was a viable option. The account of Karski's failed mission thus carries a heavy moral reproach directed, in this case, against the governments of the major Western powers and its leaders: they could have done something to stop the mass murder of Jews but they chose to do nothing or very little. As Karski put it in 1978: 'the Jews were left alone to perish'.

In this view, when Karski risked his life carrying 'dire news of annihilation' to Roosevelt and to other Western leaders, attempting to persuade them to do something to stop the annihilation, then his mission acquired an important moral dimension which needs to be highlighted. If some rescue action was possible then the obligation to do something to help the suffering Jews was a moral one and a failure to act under such an obligation can be the basis of a moral reproach directed at some person or state which stood by and did nothing or very little. The weight of that moral reproach is greatly increased when it is linked with the notion of abandonment. We have an obligation to bring help and rescue to suffering humanity when it is possible for us to do so, when the circumstances allow it and when we dispose of some means to act within an acceptable degree of risk. If the possibility of doing something exists but we fail to act, if we fail to do anything to bring some form of rescue, then we have abandoned suffering humanity to its fate. Abandonment then becomes the target of a moral reproach levelled at those who had the obligation and the means to bring rescue but failed to do so. The obligation to bring rescue is in some logical sense prior to the act of rescue itself, it is the reason why the rescue is attempted or why those who need it have a right to expect it. But the obligation itself can be qualified, it can be a humanitarian, civic, family, religious or some other kind of obligation. What sort of obligation is prior to the rescue effort due to or expected by the suffering Jews of Poland?

¹⁷ See note 5, above.

The vast majority of the Jews murdered by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland were Polish citizens, they were citizens of a state at war with Germany, the Polish wartime state. Polish resistance against German occupation was centred around its clandestine military and civilian structures in Poland – the Polish underground state – and its exiled government in London. It is obvious that operating under conditions of German terror in occupied Poland the Polish wartime state was severely constrained in what it could do to help its citizens, especially its Jewish citizens who were facing mass murder and genocide. But it was not completely prevented from doing something to help them.

Within its leadership there were those who regarded the Polish citizenship of their Jewish compatriots as highly inconvenient and drew up plans for a post-war Poland with a legal system and a ‘formula’ which would place Jews outside the boundary of what Helen Fein called a ‘universe of obligation’,¹⁸ which in this case would only include ethnic Poles. However, during the war no such clearly-defined boundary was established and through their citizenship Polish Jews remained connected, at least formally, with the Polish wartime state. This meant that they were entitled to expect some help from their state and also that the state had a duty to provide its Jewish citizens with any possible help it was capable to offer. Fein’s notion of ‘universe of obligation’ can be used here at two levels: the Jews were not (yet?) ‘written out’ of the Polish state, they remained its citizens and were not placed outside the boundaries of the state’s legal obligations towards them. At the same time, it seems - at least from the numerous writings of the ‘dominant elite’ of the Polish wartime state - that the Jews were frequently perceived to be outside the state’s ‘universe of obligation’ and if this was not yet codified in a legal system because of wartime constraints, there seemed to be keen interest in a ‘formula’ which would establish such a system in the planned post-war Polish regime.¹⁹

¹⁸ Fein, H., 1979. *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization During the Holocaust*. Chicago: Free Press, p. 15.

¹⁹ For a lucid overview in English of the attitudes of the ‘dominant elites’ of the Polish wartime state towards Polish-Jewish relations and , see Polonsky, A., 1997. *Beyond Condemnation, Apologetics and Apologies*. In: J. Frankel, ed. *The Fate of the European Jews, 1939-1945; Studies in Contemporary Jewry, Annual XIII*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 190-224., also his *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, Volume III, chapter 11, pp. 413-475,. Dariusz Libionka’s important article ‘ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu’, takes the relationship of the Polish underground state to the extermination of Poland’s Jewish citizens as ‘one of the key problems of Polish-Jewish relations’. In

On the ‘formal’ level, their Polish citizenship meant that the Jews had a right to expect help from the Polish state and that the state had a duty to provide it when it was feasible. We can try to illustrate this by looking at the Bund Report, written in May 1942 and delivered from Warsaw via Stockholm to the Polish government in London in the first week of June. It is a masterpiece of conciseness and brevity that manages to convey in two pages the immense scale of the horrors already suffered by the Jews of Poland and a sense of the catastrophe still to come. In its conclusion, after describing the unfolding tragedy, its authors appeal to their government as Polish citizens:

(...) Millions of Polish citizens who are Jewish are threatened with immediate extermination. We turn therefore to the Polish Government, as the guardian and representative of all the people who live in Poland, and ask that it immediately take the necessary steps needed to prevent the extermination of Polish Jewry.²⁰

Notice that this is not merely an appeal for humanitarian help, it is also one made by people who assume that as citizens, their state, ‘the guardian and representative of all the people who live in Poland’, including the Jews, has an obligation to protect them in any way it can. Not to do so would count as a failure to honour that obligation and a state which fails in its duty to come to the aid of its citizens becomes an object of a moral reproach that is centred around the notion of ‘abandonment’. It is a moral reproach against a state which has failed to help its Jewish citizens at a time when they needed it more than at any other in their history, it is based on the accusation that the state had abandoned its Jewish citizens. Note that Fein’s notion of ‘universe of obligation’ is applicable here in a somewhat different way: the Jews were not (yet?) beyond the boundaries of the universe of an obligation understood as the duty which a state has towards its Jewish citizens. They have not been ‘written out’ of the state. It is because, as citizens, they are within that universe that Polish Jews could expect the state to do something which counts as help or rescue, and when nothing is done there are reasons for making a moral

another important study, Adam Puławski, apart from providing a short but useful bibliography of what is a widely-discussed topic, examines the different Polish perceptions of the Jews’ Polish citizenship within the Polish underground press during the war, see Adam Puławski, ‘Wykluczenie czy samowykluczenie?’.

²⁰ Bund Report. HIA Mikołajczyk Papers, Box 152, Folder 25. An English translation (alongside the Polish original) was published in Bauer, Y., 1968. *When Did They Know?* *Midstream*, 14(4), pp. 51-58; English translation also available in Bartoszewski and Lewin, *Righteous Among Nations*, pp. 216-218. Polish original in Appendix.

reproach against it. In this case, it is a profoundly serious moral reproach against a state which has abandoned its Jewish citizens who are facing mortal peril.

We can try to clarify what is meant here by the term ‘abandonment’, as used in the phrase ‘abandonment of the Jews’, by briefly noting the different way it has been used to refer to the United States. Yehuda Bauer criticises the phrase as it was used by Raphael Medoff with reference to the US and the major Allies in general,

The term “abandonment”, borrowed, of course from Wyman’s book *The Abandonment of the Jews*, implies that the Jews had been dear to the Allies’ heart, but then they abandoned them and left them in the lurch. I strongly doubt that this is an accurate description.²¹

Bauer argues that in fact the Jews ‘had not been dear to the Allies’ heart’, there was no prior obligation or connection which was severed or abandoned later, leaving the Jews ‘in the lurch’. The only connection was a general humanitarian obligation towards suffering humanity, but this did not seem to be enough at a time of war and in any event, as Bauer argues, in the US at least, it was an obligation eroded by the reluctance of the anti-Semites. We can contrast this with the Polish case where we could be even more emphatic in saying that while Jews were not ‘dear to the hearts’ of many of the people inside the Polish wartime state that state had some obligation towards its Jewish citizens. If it failed in its duty to do whatever it could to protect them then it abandoned them. If there are grounds for it then the term ‘abandonment’ would thus seem more applicable to the Polish state than to the major Allies. Other than the general humanitarian one, the Allies had no equivalent prior obligation to Polish Jews whom they would often regard as ‘foreign nationals’. The Polish state, on the other hand, had such a prior obligation: the Jews were Polish citizens and the state had a duty to protect them as best it could within the extreme constraints of war. Failure to act under such an obligation, if there was such a failure in the Polish case, and do whatever was possible despite the constraints, can be counted as ‘abandonment’ not only of suffering humanity but of one’s own citizens.

²¹ Bauer, Y., 2012. How to Misinterpret History: on 'The Holocaust, America and American Jewry', Revisited. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affriars*, 6(3), pp. 130-150, p. 138.

Let us now look at Karski in the context of this argument. It seems evident that, in part at least, the Karski story is intended to be a robust defence against this moral reproach. To quote Bartoszewski again, unfortunately – *niestety* - all that the Polish wartime state could do was alert its powerful allies about the extermination of the Jews and try to persuade them to launch military reprisals against Nazi Germany as a way of stopping it. Karski's mission to the West is simply the most prominent example of a wide-ranging effort which, to Bartoszewski and many others, ended in an almost complete failure: on December 17, 1942 the Allies produced a 282-word 'solemn' declaration which had few practical consequences in promising to punish the criminals after the war. However, despite wartime constraints and many indications to the contrary, the Polish state did not abandon its Jewish citizens, it did all it could. Through Karski, it delivered irrefutable evidence which ensured that its powerful Allies knew about the Jewish tragedy, it then tried to persuade them to make some military response. The meeting with Roosevelt on July 28, 1943, which will be examined in detail in Chapter 14, is frequently offered as a clear illustration of this. Representing the Polish government, with the Polish ambassador Ciechanowski sitting next to him, Karski told Roosevelt that the Polish underground state, operating in Poland under conditions of German terror, did not have the military capability needed to stop Nazi Germany from exterminating the Jews. It had done all that it could do: it had set up an official clandestine aid agency which provided help to Jews hiding outside ghettos in the form of the Council to Aid the Jews, '*Żegota*', created in late 1942. Karski emphasised however that the rescue which this agency could deliver was very limited, and we can borrow Yehuda Bauer's neat phrase to describe the point Karski is making to Roosevelt: the Polish underground state, working in occupied Poland through this agency, can save thousands but it cannot save the millions.²² The message which Karski was conveying directly to the American president was quite clear: a systematic mass murder of the Jews by Nazi Germany was taking place in occupied Poland and there was a desperate need for an Allied response. The help which the Polish underground state and its military forces could provide to the Jews is very limited.

²² Bauer, *How to Misinterpret History*, p.140.

All it could do is inform its powerful allies about the Jewish catastrophe and urge them to act; unless the Allies do something the Jewish population of Poland, with few exceptions, will cease to exist.

Bringing the 'dire news of the annihilation', as Hilberg put it, to the powerful Western allies is thus presented as evidence that the Polish wartime state, with all its inevitable faults, is beyond reproach: it had not abandoned its Jewish citizens at a time of their greatest calamity, it did all it could, it made every effort to make sure that its powerful allies knew about the Jewish tragedy and it tried to persuade them to do something about it. Karski is the best example of this and his statue outside the Polin Museum in Warsaw is intended to convey the view that Karski, 'a man who tried to stop the Holocaust', did so as 'an emissary of the leadership of the Polish Underground State'. The concern which the sculpture portrays through Karski's face and gestures, directed towards the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, represents the concern of the Polish Underground State which did not abandon its Jewish citizens.

An entirely different view of the Polish wartime state's relationship to its Jewish citizens was presented some years ago by the Israeli historians Y. Gutman and S. Krakowski:

The leaders of the Polish Underground focused on the methods they would use in the event that the Germans decided to exterminate the Polish population through means already used on the Jews. (...) Until the end of 1942 the Polish government representative in occupied Poland (the Delegatura) did nothing except send reports to London with details about the course of the extermination. (...) The Delegatura as well as the Home Army thought of itself as representing only ethnic Poles. No initiative to help Poland's Jewish citizens was considered at least until late autumn 1942. That is why the Delegate and the commander of the Home Army for a long time refrained from issuing any official reaction to the extermination. To this we need to add the fact that the majority of the political groups which belonged to that section of the Polish underground which reported to the government in exile, continued to call for a mass emigration of Jews from Poland even when the extermination reached its peak.²³

Gutman and Krakowski's conclusion has been broadly accepted by some of the recent Polish historians studying the Holocaust. Adam Puławski, in a detailed examination of the way the Polish resistance movement perceived the Holocaust,

²³ Gutman, Y. & Krakowski, S., 1986. *Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews During World War II*. New York: Holocaust Publications, p. 70.

cites this passage in the concluding part of his book and comments that ‘this strong statement has to a large part been confirmed in my book’.²⁴ Note however, that Gutman and Krakowski’s ‘strong statement’ acknowledges that the Polish underground authorities did send reports about the extermination of the Jews to the government in London, and that this was a significant attempt to bring rescue to the Jews by making sure that the powerful Western allies had the credible information which would be the basis on which they could be persuaded to do something to stop the mass murder of Jews in Poland. Jan Karski is at the centre of this story.

2.5 *The importance of the Karski story*

Highlighting the moral dimension of the Karski story shows why the questions it raises are important. First of all, it is a story of failure: Karski presented the ‘free world’ with credible reports and eyewitness accounts of Nazi Germany’s extermination of the Jews in occupied Poland, he conveyed the desperate calls for help from the Jewish resistance leaders to western leaders. But, according to the story, the free world and its leaders failed to believe him or remained indifferent; nothing was done to save the Jews. There is a powerful moral reproach here which is based on the notion of ‘abandonment’: the Allies were fully aware of the tragic fate of the Jews, in part because Karski told them, and they had a moral obligation to bring rescue to the Jews in whatever way was feasible within wartime constraints. But they did nothing or very little and too late, Karski’s mission was a failure, he a tragic hero.

How does this apply to the Polish state? There is a long-standing debate among historians who generally agree that there was very little that the Polish wartime state could do for its Jewish citizens in occupied Poland but disagree on exactly how much, if anything, it could do. A brief sketch should be sufficient to identify the central issues of this debate which is essentially about whether a moral reproach levelled against the Polish wartime state is justified, about whether it abandoned its Jewish citizens. One main area of disagreement, which we will not discuss in this study, concerns the actions which the wartime state, particularly its

²⁴ Adam Puławski, *W obliczu Zagłady. Rząd RP na uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, ZWZ-AK wobec deportacji Żydów do obozów zagłady (1941–1942)*, Lublin: IPN, 2009, p. 596.

clandestine civilian and military wings operating in occupied Poland, could have initiated on behalf of the Jews in occupied Poland. It will suffice to note some of the key questions which arise here. Could the Polish underground state have done more for the Jewish resistance movement? Could it have been far more robust in stamping out the blackmailers? Why did it not offer more protection for the Jews seeking shelter? The Council to Aid the Jews, *Żegota*, was a social welfare agency and an important part of the underground state's institutional structure. But why was its scope so limited and its resources so desperately inadequate given the scale of the Jewish tragedy? Why was it established so late? There are many more such questions which in very general terms acknowledge the obvious fact that in occupied Poland, the Polish Underground state did not have the military capability needed to stop or disrupt the German extermination program and so could do very little to help or rescue Polish citizens who were Jewish. Having acknowledged this fact, there is a clear division between those who argue that the little that was done was all that could have been done given wartime constraints, German terror and limited capability, and those who argue that more could have been done even within such constraints.

This debate broadens considerably when we look at the question of what the Polish wartime state did for the Jews as a member of the United Nations alliance fighting Nazi Germany, a state with an underground structure in occupied Poland and an exiled government in London. It is a question that is an important part of the background to this study of Karski. Here the argument is quite different to the one about actions within occupied Poland although it starts, once again, with an acceptance of the fact that the Polish underground state could do little to stop Nazi Germany from carrying out its plan to murder all the Jews in occupied Poland. Its only effective and available course of action was to persuade its powerful Western allies to launch military reprisals against Germany. What is once again acknowledged here is the obvious fact that it is only the powerful Western allies, Britain and America, who at that time had the military and political capability needed to launch such reprisals. Any reprisal action intended to punish Nazi Germany for exterminating the Jews, one which might possibly stop the massacres from continuing and so rescue those Jews who remained alive, had to be initiated by the Western allies who alone had the power to do so. However, in order to initiate

such action, Western leaders had first to be informed about the true scale of the mass murder being carried out against the Jews by Nazi Germany and be convinced that this information was not propaganda, that it was credible. Once they knew, they then had to be persuaded to make some immediate military response which would punish Germany and stop the massacres. The reprisals had to become a part of the immediate war effort and it was the Western allies who could decide what was and what was not a part of that effort.

It is then argued that the circumstances and the capabilities of the Polish wartime state meant that it could do much to help bring about such an Allied response. In 1942 especially the mass murder of the Jews was centred on Polish territory. Communication links between the underground state operating in Poland and the exiled government in London were a critically important asset of the Polish wartime state, despite disruptions they were available and were constantly being improved. Because Poland was an allied state it could interact with other Allies through official channels. This meant that the information which it conveyed to its allies could have the diplomatic status of communication between states, it thus carried an additional measure of credibility, it could not be easily ignored. It also meant that the offices of the London-based Polish government provided inter-state channels with far easier access to the leaders of the major Western powers. The broad argument is that if the most effective way in which the Polish wartime state could bring rescue to its Jewish citizens was by informing its powerful Western allies about the scale of the German extermination campaign and by trying to persuade them to launch military reprisals, then the historical record seems to strongly suggest that they did so. In 1942, and especially in the latter part of that year, the communication channels between the Polish underground state in occupied Poland and the government in Poland were used to carry information about the extermination of the Jews to the West. In mid-November, after it received this information, the Polish government, working together with Jewish organisations, launched a diplomatic campaign which presented what it knew to the Allies and added credibility to the information which had been arriving in the West for many months. This campaign led to the December 17 Allied declaration condemning Nazi Germany for its 'bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination' of the Jews. In

parallel with this campaign, the Polish government also tried to persuade the Western allies to make a military response, make reprisals a part of the war effort. Here it failed to persuade the allies, there was no military response, reprisals did not become a part of the war effort, what was achieved was words not actions: a promise that the criminals responsible for these crimes were to be punished after the war.²⁵

We can easily see how the Karski story fits into this argument. It firmly rejects the accusation that the Polish wartime state abandoned its Jewish citizens at a time of their greatest need. It is argued that on the contrary, it did all it could to bring about an effective response to the mass murder and Karski is a shining example of how it did this: in late September 1942 Karski was sent by the Polish underground state on a clandestine mission through occupied Europe to London. He risked his life doing so. Among the materials he carried were reports about the extermination of the Jews, especially about the Warsaw ghetto deportations; he also had his own harrowing eyewitness accounts. The materials were delivered to the Polish government in London, where Karski arrived on November 25, 1942. Based on the information contained in these reports, the Polish government issued an official statement condemning Nazi Germany and then, working with Jewish groups, launched a press and a diplomatic campaign which led to the December 17 Allied declaration. There were other couriers and other channels of communication through which the ‘dire news of annihilation’, to use Raul Hilberg’s phrase, arrived in the West, but Karski stands out as someone whose importance and credibility as an eyewitness was enhanced partly because of his official status. He was a representative of an allied state which used the materials he brought from Poland in an official campaign which aimed to inform the Western allies about the Jewish tragedy and tried hard to persuade them to launch military reprisals which might put an end to it.

We are back in the Karski story of a heroic Polish underground courier who risked his life carrying the terrible news to the West where he conveyed it to Western

²⁵ The ‘historical record’, examined in chapters 3 and 4, focuses on the Polish government’s release of the Report of November 24 1942 (‘the Karski Report’) and on its links to the subsequent campaign which led to the December 17 Allied Declaration.

leaders who showed little interest. But the emphasis now is on Karski the courageous representative of the Polish wartime state, someone who was instructed by and acted on behalf of the Polish underground forces in Poland and represented the exiled Polish government in London. There appears to be no basis here for a moral reproach in which the Polish wartime state could be accused of abandoning its Jewish citizens. In the story, Karski is meant to illustrate that the Polish state made an effort to do what would be the most effective means of stopping the Holocaust: by making sure that the powerful Western allies knew about it and by trying to persuade them to launch military reprisals which would stop it. This attempt to persuade failed. If there is to be a moral reproach and an accusation of abandonment then it cannot be levelled against the Polish wartime state.

At first sight, there seems to be historical evidence which supports this argument. The Polish government made an official announcement on November 24, 1942 about the mass murder of Jews and in the weeks that followed there was a major press and diplomatic campaign in which it played a major role. On December 10 it issued a diplomatic note to all Allied governments at war with Nazi Germany officially informing them about the systematic, state-controlled murder of Jews taking place in occupied Poland. On December 17 the allies issued a declaration condemning Germany, Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, referred to the Polish note when he read the declaration in the House of Commons on that day. The information contained in these announcements, press articles and diplomatic notes was based on reports, we are told, which Karski carried from Poland and which arrived in London just recently, a week or so before the November 24 announcement.

There is, however, other historical evidence which seriously undermines this argument. It implicitly acknowledges the importance of the Polish government's efforts to inform the anti-Nazi alliance about the mass murder of Jews in occupied Poland. It acknowledges also that the December 17 declaration may be seen as a proof of the effectiveness of those efforts. The Polish efforts were important in getting the Allies to declare officially that they knew about the German program of mass murder and this knowledge was a precondition of any action which might aim to stop it. However, the documentary record strongly suggests that the Polish

government had detailed information about the extermination of the Jews, and in particular about the Warsaw ghetto deportations, at the end of August 1942. It presented this information in late November and so it remained silent about what it knew for three months. In late August it concealed information which was the basis of the effective campaign which produced the December 17 declaration. If this view is based on sound historical evidence then much of the argument about Karski's and the Polish government's concern for the fate of the Jews would need to be fundamentally changed.²⁶

We can try to resolve the complexities of the Karski story through a historical examination of the evidence on which it is based. We can begin by looking at a document which has been called the 'Karski report'.

²⁶ The circumstances surrounding the timing of the Polish government's November 24 announcement are examined in Chapters 4 and 5.

3 The 'Karski Report'

3.1 *The 'Karski Report' and the Polish government*

One of the many difficult questions raised by the Karski story concerns the 'report' which he is said to have brought with him when he arrived in London on November 25, 1942. What is often described as the 'Karski report', however, can be identified as a typewritten, two-page English language text released by the Polish government in London on November 24, 1942, one day before Karski's arrival. The report, reproduced in the following pages, presents information about the extermination of Jews in Poland, and especially about the deportations from the Warsaw ghetto. It was a report that could not have been written by Karski and so a more plausible explanation, which originates from E. Thomas Wood and Stanisław M. Jankowski's biography, is that the information contained in the 'Karski report' was a summary based on Polish Underground materials which had recently arrived in London and that it was Karski who had carried these from Poland through occupied Europe. According to this account, the 'post' which Karski carried consisted of documents which were photographed on a roll of microfilm hidden inside the stem of a house key which he was given in Warsaw. Karski handed the key to Polish agents in France where it was put on a separate courier route and reached London nearly two weeks before he did. As Wood and Jankowski explain, 'The microfilm in the key had reached London by November 17, and Polish officials had condensed its information on the Jews' persecution into a two-page report in English'.¹ In other words, it was a summary of information which the Polish government had received prior to Karski's arrival. An original version of the report is stored in the Foreign Office collection of the British National Archives. Although it is often referred to as the 'Karski Report' this is confusing and we will refer to it as the 'Report of 24 November'.

If this Report is an English summary of Polish underground documents which had arrived in London before November 24 then it is important to identify

¹ Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 143.

these documents, examine their text and establish exactly when they arrived. This is not an easy task, one Polish government document containing a list of materials brought to London by couriers in late 1942 has been produced as evidence but, as we will see, this document could not apply to Karski because it lists items dispatched from Poland after his departure and delivered to London after his arrival. It is also quite possible that the Report, which was not written by Karski, was based on materials which may have been taken from Warsaw by a courier or couriers other than Karski, or they were carried by Karski as well as another courier: the Polish Underground frequently duplicated its materials in order to improve the chances that they reach their destination in London.²

The date of the Report is significant and we know exactly when it was published: November 24, 1942, this allows us to place it within a sequence of events of a campaign leading up to the milestone which was the December 17, 1942 Allied Declaration condemning Nazi Germany for ‘carrying into effect Hitler’s oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe’. As some historians have pointed out, the Declaration marks the point where knowledge about Nazi Germany’s extermination of the Jews becomes official, doubt and disbelief became private.³ To borrow a phrase used in a recent Polish government exhibition on Karski, on December 17, 1942, ‘the world knew’.⁴

The December 17 Allied Declaration is a milestone because from that point onward the Allies were faced with the problem of how to respond to the Holocaust now that they could be certain that it was happening. If there was no longer any lingering doubt about the fate of the Jews in occupied Europe then the key question was now about the action which the Allies could or could not take to rescue them. Prior to the Declaration, such action could not be officially considered; knowledge about the extermination of the Jews had to come first.

An important link between the Declaration and the Report is the diplomatic note issued by the Polish foreign minister, Edward Raczynski, on December 10. In

² On the risks and logistics of the Polish wartime state’s courier movements, see Adam Puławski, *W obliczu Zagłady*.

³ See especially Laqueur’s 1980 classic *The Terrible Secret: The Suppression of the Final Truth about Hitler’s “Final Solution”*. New York: Henry Holt.

⁴ The phrase was used in a travelling Karski exhibition organised by Polish Ministry of Foreign affairs in 2014.

his December 17 House of Commons speech introducing the Declaration, the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, made an explicit reference to Raczyński's note. The note refers to 'authenticated information' which the Polish government had *recently* received in London. It seems reasonable to suppose that this is the same information which was summarised in the Report and that the note as well as the Report are based on the materials which Karski took with him when he set off in Warsaw on his mission to London. We thus have a suggestion which fits into the key theme of the Karski story: the December 17 Declaration was issued by the Allies because one courageous man, Jan Karski, risked his life travelling across occupied Europe on a mission whose purpose was to present the free world with evidence which removed any doubt about Germany's mass murder of the Jews. Others were, of course, involved but it was primarily because of Karski that 'the world knew' and he thus seems to have played a key role in the campaign which led to the Allied Declaration.

Like all stories about solitary heroes fighting overwhelming odds, this one is very attractive. But it ignores something which is obvious even in this summary: it was the Polish government which issued the Report on November 24 and it was the Polish foreign minister who issued the diplomatic note on December 10. Karski's role needs to be seen in the context of what the Polish Government was doing in the latter part of 1942.

3.2 New information?

As we shall see, the Polish government launched its press and diplomatic campaign on November 24, 1942 when it announced that new information about the German mass murder of the Jews and especially about the mass deportations from the Warsaw ghetto had just arrived in London. There is the obvious implication here that this information was new to the Polish government as well, that even with its many channels of communication between London and occupied Poland it had not been fully aware of the vast scale of the mass murder of Jews taking place in the country. According to this line of argument, the arrival of new materials sometime in the middle of November was a turning point: fully credible information was finally delivered to the Polish government in London and it included evidence about

the mass murder of Jews in occupied Poland and especially about the Warsaw ghetto deportations about which the Polish government had not previously known. When this information reached London the Polish government acted immediately to publish it and make the world, and the Allied governments especially, aware of the terrible fate of the Jews in Poland.

We can see the important role which Karski plays here once we assume that these recently arrived materials are the ones which Karski took with him from Warsaw. The arrival of these materials in London, about two weeks prior to Karski's arrival, finally gave the Polish government a full picture of the systematic, state-sponsored mass murder of Jews being carried out by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland. Having received this terrible news, the Polish government proceeded to translate and edit an official announcement, the Report, which it then issued to all Allied governments and to the western press a few days later, on November 24. With the assistance of Jewish organisations, it then launched a full-scale diplomatic campaign and released an official diplomatic note on December 10 which led to the December 17 Declaration. Karski seems to be a central figure in this story.

There is however another line of argument which moves in an entirely opposite direction. We have already mentioned it in outline, it will now be described in detail. It is based on the view, forcefully argued by historians such as David Engel and Adam Puławski who claim that it is fully supported by documentary evidence, that the Polish government knew about the scale of the mass murder of the Jews in Poland by late August 1942 when it received credible information about the Warsaw ghetto deportations. If this view is correct then an essential part of the Karski story needs to be discarded or told very differently, Karski did not bring to London something about which the Polish government did not know already; as Engel puts it, 'in fact he added only minor details to what was already known'.⁵ The Report which the Polish government issued on November 24 was merely the point at which the government decided to officially announce information which it had previously 'concealed' (*utajnił*), as Puławski puts it, for

⁵ David Engel, *Readings and Misreadings*, p. 370.

nearly three months.⁶ Why it did so is not entirely clear and we will look at some of the suggestions which these historians have proposed to explain what I will call here ‘the concealment hypothesis’: the claim that the Polish government knew about the enormous scale and systematic nature of the extermination of the Jews taking place in Poland, and it knew especially about the Warsaw ghetto deportations by August 28 at the latest, but failed to make an official announcement until nearly three months later.

3.3 *Karski and the ‘Karski Report’*

Let us first try to establish the precise identity of the document recent historians have referred to as the ‘Karski report’, in this thesis it will be referred to as ‘the Report of November 24’, a short typewritten report in English which the Polish government officially released on November 24, 1942. It is only two pages long and will be reproduced here so that we can trace its links with subsequent newspaper reports, with the Polish diplomatic note on December 10 and the December 17 Allied Declaration. Can we identify the original Polish-language documents which the Report is based on? What documentary evidence is there to tell us about the specific materials that arrived at that time? What basis is there for the claim that these documents were taken from Warsaw by Karski?

These questions take us to the problem of the apparent – or mysterious - silence of the Polish government about the Warsaw ghetto deportations. The deportations ended on September 21, the government’s official announcement was on November 24. This raises the question of whether the government had credible information about the deportations for nearly three months and for some reason decided to conceal what it knew or whether this was only provided by new materials that arrived in mid-November;. We can approach this problem by asking about the reasons why the government issued the announcement on November 24, 1942. Did it do so because it had very recently received new and terrible news about the scale of the German extermination of the Jews in occupied Poland, especially news about

⁶ Adam Puławski, *Nie ujawniać czynnikom nieoficjalnym: Depesze AK o Zagładzie*, „Więź” 2007, nr 7, pp. 69–80, p. 76.

the Warsaw ghetto deportations? Or did it decide that a politically opportune moment had arrived when it should, or could or had to officially announce information which it had known about for nearly three months?

It will be argued here that around the middle of November 1942 the Polish Government in London did indeed receive materials containing new and horrific information about the Jewish catastrophe taking place in occupied Poland. When we examine these materials there are grounds for arguing that the leadership of the Polish government finally grasped the true extent of the mass murder of Polish Jews taking place there. There was no prior concealment and despite suspicions to the contrary, the official announcement on November 24 was not a reaction to or an attempt to pre-empt a similar announcement which was expected to be made elsewhere. According to the Karski story, it was Karski who carried these materials from Warsaw and it may be that he did so. But at this stage we have to allow the possibility that they were carried by some other courier.

We will look at documents which give us some important insights about Karski's activities in the weeks immediately after his arrival in London. The most significant document was a report he wrote to the Polish government within days of his arrival. In his own words and almost immediately after his arrival in London, Karski clearly sets out the aim of his mission, the mandate he has been granted by the Polish wartime state, the people he needed to talk to and the topics he was authorised to raise with them. According to the Karski story, the aim of his mission was to inform the world about the Jewish tragedy unfolding in occupied Poland. We will examine Karski's report and other documents to see if they confirm the story. We will begin with a document which records some key details about Karski's arrival in London.

3.4 November 25, 1942: the British MI19 welcomes Karski in London

It may seem ironic that after travelling through occupied Europe and landing safely in Britain, Karski was immediately detained and interrogated for over two days by the MI19 section of British Intelligence at the Royal Victoria Patriotic School (RVPS) in Wandsworth, in south-west London. The MI19 interrogation was a routine procedure applied to any foreign national landing in wartime Britain; in

Karski's case however the detention caused a minor diplomatic row between the Polish government and the British Foreign Office which then led to an inter-departmental exchange of letters between the Foreign Office and MI19. Since this row was played out to a large extent through official letters and inter-departmental memos, we have the benefit of an archived paper trail which gives details about Karski's detention and provides key evidence on the exact date when Karski arrived in London, on the date and length of his detention and also on the exact time when he was released by MI19. Significantly, we also have a report on the RVPS interrogation written by MI19 which gives an indication not only of what Karski said but also of his relative importance to British Intelligence.⁷ It is clear that any information which Karski personally brought to London would have been conveyed initially either during the interrogation on the 27 of November or after his release by MI19 from his detention at RVPS in Wandsworth. As we will see shortly, establishing a precise timeline is an important part of our understanding of the 'Karski report'.

Let us first determine the time of Karski's arrival. In a December 22, 1942 letter from Major K. G. Younger (an officer of MI5) to J.G. Ward of the Foreign Office, we read that Karski landed in the U.K. on November 25 and 'arrived at the R.V.P.S. on 26.11.42'. Younger then explains that 'When Karski was first seen he refused to answer questions; thereupon arrangements were made for him to be interviewed in the presence of representatives of the Polish Ministry of Interior and Security Service'.⁸ It must have taken a day to make these arrangements because the interrogation, now with members of the Polish government present, took place the next day, on November 27, when he was 'interrogated once only for about 3½ hours'. Even after the interrogation was completed MI19 still refused to release Karski and requested that the Polish government produces a declaration vouching for his *bona fides*. This delayed Karski's release for another day while the Poles

⁷ The British reports and correspondence on this 'diplomatic row' about Karski's detention is in FO 371/32231. The MI19 report is in WO 208/3692, 'Interrogation of Polish lawyer, Jan Romuald Karski'. Both are referenced by Wood&Jankowski and Fleming, M., 2015. *Auschwitz, the Allies and Censorship of the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. However, writing in 1994 Wood and Jankowski state that the MI19 report will not be released 'until 2018'. In fact, Michael Fleming gained access to it when working on his 2014 book. I would like to thank Michael Fleming for letting me see a copy of this important document.

⁸ NA FO371/32231.

prepared the declaration paperwork and ‘On the strength of this declaration he [Karski] was released at 3.0 p.m. on the 28 of November’.⁹ This confirms what Karski told Wood and Jankowski over forty-five years later in 1987-1993:¹⁰ Karski was on a military flight from Gibraltar which probably landed in Whitchurch airfield, about five miles south of Bristol, late on Wednesday, November 25, 1942.¹¹ He was then transported to RVPS in Wandsworth where we can assume he was ‘booked in’ early on Thursday. His refusal to answer questions delayed his interrogation for a day and even after the interrogation was completed on Friday it took another day before MI19 received a declaration from the Polish government which allowed Karski to be released at 3pm on Saturday afternoon, November 28, nearly three days after he arrived in Britain.

We now need to establish the critically important fact that Karski was not carrying any papers, microfilms or materials when he landed in Britain on November 25, 1942. This is confirmed by the available Foreign Office and MI19 documents where there is no reference to any such materials which Karski might have shown or handed over to the British. We can thus be fairly certain that when Karski arrived in London and was detained by MI19, he did not have any materials in his possession and that at the time of his interrogation at the RVPS, any information which he needed to convey was carried in his memory. In other words, before his release on the 28th the only person to whom he could convey it was the MI19 interrogator, with members of the Polish government present, in a cell at the RVPS in Wandsworth, south-west London.

Despite the unusual presence of the Polish officials, the interrogation seemed to follow standard MI19 procedure and sometime afterwards the interrogating officer filed a three-page typewritten report on the information gained from the detainee. It is a twenty-seven point summary with a grading which gave the officer’s assessment about the relative importance of the ‘informant’. As one might expect, in keeping with the ‘MI’ which identifies the agency, military intelligence would have been the

⁹ NA FO371/32231. K. G. Younger letter to Ward, *ibid.*: ‘On 27.11.42 KARSKI was interviewed at considerable length. He told a very lengthy story of his underground work in Europe’.

¹⁰ Wood & Jankowski, p. 142-143.

¹¹ Fleming, *Auschwitz*, p.151 and n. 109, suggests that Karski’s flight landed in Whitchurch which at the time was used for flights from Gibraltar to London via Lisbon.

main interest and focus of the interrogation and this is in fact confirmed in the interrogation report and in the circulation list.¹² To MI19, Karski's value as an informant was quite limited, he had 'no military information' to offer other than the name of the street in Warsaw where the Gestapo had their headquarters (Aleja Szucha). All of the remaining 26 items of the report appear less important from the military intelligence perspective of MI19. They summarise the information obtained from Karski about the social and economic conditions in occupied Poland (e.g. '15. All cattle and pig herds have been greatly reduced owing to German requisitions'). For us, however, the final two items of the report, 25 and 26, are particularly significant. The MI19 officer summarised what Karski told him about the 'Persecution of the Jews':

25. In the early months of 1941, the number of Jews in the Ghetto in Warsaw was estimated at about 450,000. In October 1942, only about 45,000 rations were being delivered daily to the Ghetto and the total number of Jews in the Ghetto was put at about 100,000. The balance had meanwhile died or been killed.¹³

This summary item fails to mention the Warsaw ghetto deportations of July-September but it includes information about rations which is intended to provide a factual basis for news about the vast scale of the mass murder of Jews taking place in Poland. It is not clear whether Karski told the MI19 officer about the number of ration *coupons* printed for October rather than about the number or 'rations being delivered daily to the Ghetto' in October. What is significant here is the reference to ration numbers as an indicator of the scale of the mass murder which had taken place in Warsaw and the fact that, as we will see below, a very similar piece of information was included in reports which arrived in London before Karski.

Item no 26 of the MI19 report is also very similar to some of the harrowing accounts of brutality and murder contained in those earlier reports on the Warsaw ghetto deportations:

26. The penalty for leaving the Ghetto without permission was death. Informant himself witnessed the two following instances.
(a) About March 1942 a boy of 7 or 8 was begging for food. A German in civilian clothes stopped him, called him a "Jewish swine" and shot him. The body was left lying on the street.

¹² On this point, see Fleming, Fleming, *Auschwitz*, p. 152.

¹³ NA WO 208/3692, p. 2.

(b) August 1942. A woman who had permission to leave the Ghetto did so carrying her small baby. Her permit was checked by a Gendarme, but it did not include the child and the Gendarme shot the child while still in the Mother's arms.¹⁴

As we will see, information in a report which arrived in London before Karski contains accounts which are almost identical to item 26.

3.5 *Identifying the 'Karski Report'*

As already mentioned, on November 24, one day before Karski arrived in England and four days before he was released from MI19 detention, the Polish government issued a report about the 'liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw'. A copy of this report is in the Foreign Office archives.¹⁵ It is a document that is well-known to historians: Martin Gilbert mentioned it in 1981 and he is probably the first historian to refer to it as 'Karski's report':

On November 25 (...) yet another report had reached the Jewish leadership in London. This new report described 'the liquidation' of the Warsaw ghetto, and the gassings at Belzec. It had been brought from Poland to the Polish Government-in-Exile in London by an eye-witness, Jan Karski, a non-Jew. (...) On the evening of November 25, the Polish Government-in-Exile handed Karski's report to A. L. Easterman, the Political Secretary of the British Section of the World Jewish Congress. Easterman at once telephoned the Foreign Office.¹⁶

David Engel, following Gilbert, also refers to it as 'Karski's report'¹⁷, and so does Richard Breitman.¹⁸ Dariusz Stola writes about the 'written reports' brought to London by Karski whose content was 'disclosed' on November 24 and about a 'copy of the report' which was passed on to Ignacy Schwarzbart the next day.¹⁹ There is a report, also shown in the following pages, which was produced by Schwarzbart's office on November 25 and handed that evening to the secretary of the British

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ NA, FO 371/30923, 'News is reaching the Polish Government in London about the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw'. The typewritten document, referred to here as the 'Karski Report' is shown in the following pages.

¹⁶ Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, London: Michael Joseph, 1981, p. 93.

¹⁷ Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*. p. 198.

¹⁸ Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis planned, what the British and Americans knew*, Alan Lane, 1998, p. 145.

¹⁹ Dariusz Stola, *Early News of the Holocaust from Poland*, „Holocaust and Genocide Studies”, Spring 1997, V. 11, nr 1, p. 16. Also Wood&Jankowski, p. 142. A key source is the November 25th entry in Schwarzbart's diary, Yad Vashem Archive, M2/751. Schwarzbart was a Jewish member of the National Council representing Poland's main Zionist parties.

Section of the World Jewish Congress (WJC), Alex Easterman. Paradoxically, sometime that very evening a Dakota plane from Gibraltar carrying Karski was landing in Whitchurch airfield just outside of Bristol. The next morning, on November 26, Easterman and the Labour MP Sidney Silverman (who was also the chairman of the British Section of the WJC) had a meeting at the Foreign Office with Robert Law, an undersecretary of State and a deputy for the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden. They suggested that, on the basis of the information presented above all in this report, the British government and other allied powers should, at the very least, issue an official declaration condemning Nazi Germany. Easterman lent the report to Law at the Foreign Office who returned it on November 30 to Easterman after a copy was typed up. It is this copy which has been referred to by historians as the 'Karski Report', it is a key item in the FO 371/30923 collection of archived British documents which tell us much about the internal debates within the Foreign Office as it moved towards the December 17, 1942 Allied declaration condemning Nazi Germany for its 'bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination' of the Jews.

The campaign which led up to the December 17 Allied Declaration has been studied in great detail by many historians who tend to emphasise both its importance as the first and only official statement about the extermination of the Jews issued by the Allies during the war, and also its ineffectiveness as mere words promising that 'those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution' after an Allied victory²⁰. We will look more closely at the Declaration later but at this point it is important to note that the Report of 24 November was not delivered by Karski himself.

To return to the Foreign Office: after the meeting with Silverman and Easterman, Robert Law wrote an internal report about the November 26th meeting:

Mr Silverman and Mr Easterman called on me this morning about the extermination of the Jews in Europe. Mr Easterman left with me the attached document, which was handed to him last night by a member of the Polish Government. It is his only copy and I promised to have it returned to him.²¹

²⁰ A partial list will include Laqueur, Gilbert, Breitman, Engel, Stola. Quotation from Anthony Eden's statement, Hansard, December 17, 1942.

²¹ NA, FO 371/30923.

The 'attached document' must have been a report typed up by Schwarzbart's office, Schwarzbart was not only 'a member of the Polish Government' but also, like Silverman and Easterman, a member of the World Jewish Congress. This formatted report, with a heading and dated November 25, 1942, is shown below. It is available in the Board of Deputies archive of the Metropolitan Museum in London.

PRESS AND INFORMATION BUREAU
AT THE OFFICE OF DR. I. SCHWARZBART
MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF POLAND.

45, Queens Court,
Queensway, 7.2.
Tel. FAYswater 0855

COMMUNIQUE No. 4.

London, Nov. 25th 42.

THE SITUATION OF JEWS IN POLAND.
LATEST REPORTS FROM WARSAW.

News is reaching the Polish Government in London about the liquidation of the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw.

The persecution of the Jews in Poland, which has been in progress from the very first day of the German occupation, has taken on extremely acute forms since March 1942, when Himmler ordered the extermination of 50% of the Jewish population in the Government General, to be carried out by the end of 1942.

Though the German assassins had started this work with extraordinary gusto, the results apparently did not satisfy Himmler, for during his visit to the General Government in July 1942 he ordered new decrees personally, aiming at the total destruction of Polish Jewry.

1. First roundings up.

The persecutions in Warsaw started on July 21st 1942, when German police cars, suddenly drove into the Ghettos. The soldiers immediately started rushing into houses, shooting the inhabitants at sight without any explanation. The first victims belonged mostly to the educated classes. On that day almost all the members of the Jewish Municipal Council were arrested and held as hostages.

2. Deportations.

On July 22nd, 1942 the Jewish Council was ordered to proclaim the decree of the German authorities dealing with the re-settlement of all the Warsaw Jews, regardless of sex or age, in the Eastern part of Poland with the sole exception of persons working in German factories or members of the Jewish militia. The daily quota of people to be resettled was fixed at 6,000 and members of the Jewish Municipal Council were ordered to carry out the order under pain of death.

By the next day, however, on July 23rd, the German police again appeared in the Jewish Municipal Council and demanded to see the chairman Mr. Czerniakow. After the police had left, Czerniakow committed suicide. From a note he left for his wife, it became clear that he had received an order to deliver 10,000 people the next day and 7000 daily on the following days, in spite of the fact that the quota had been fixed originally at 6,000. The victims to be delivered to the Germans are either dragged out of their homes or seized in the streets. As the zeal of the Jewish police to perform those duties against their own people was slight and did not give a guarantee of efficiency, the Germans have mobilised temporary security battalions for the manhunts, consisting of Ukrainians, Latvians and Lithuanians. These battalions, under the command of SS men, are characterised by their utter ruthlessness, cruelty and inhumanity.

3. In death-trains.

The Jews when caught are driven to a square, old people and cripples are then singled out, taken to the cemetery and there shot. The remaining people are loaded on goods trucks, at the rate of 150 people to a truck with space for forty. The floor of the truck is covered with a thick layer of lime and chlorine sprinkled with water. The doors of the trucks are locked. Sometimes the train starts immediately on being loaded, sometimes it remains on a siding for a day, two days or even longer. The people are packed so tightly that those who die of suffocation remain in the crowd side by side with the still living and with those slowly dying from the fumes of lime and chlorine, from lack of air, water and food. Wherever the trains arrive half the people arrive dead. Those surviving are sent to the special camps at Troblinka, Belzec and Sobibor.

Figure 3 - Schwarzbart's version of the 'Karski Report' - Page 1. London Metropolitan Museum ACC/3121/C/11/007/012/087

Once there the so called settlers are mass murdered.

4. The Mass Murder.

Only young and relatively strong people are left alive, for they are valuable slave labour for the Germans. However, the percentage of those is extremely small, for out of a total of about 250,000 re-settlers only about 4,000 have been sent to auxiliary work in the battlefronts.

Neither children nor babies are spared. The orphans from asylums and day nurseries are evacuated as well. The director of the biggest Jewish orphanage in Warsaw and well known writer Janusz Korczak, whom the Germans have given permission to remain in the Ghetto preferred to follow his charges to death.

Thus under the guise of re-settlement in the East, a mass murder of Jewish population is taking place. Started on July 22nd 1942, it has been in progress ever since. By the end of September 1942 250,000 Jews have been eliminated. The extent of this action is best characterised by a few figures.

In the Warsaw Ghetto there lived according to official German statistics of March 1942 about 433,000 people. In spite of the extremely high mortality caused by bad hygienic conditions, epidemics, starvation, executions etc., the number of Jews in the Ghetto remained more or less stable for to replace the dead, Jews from other parts of Europe, Germany, Austria, Holland were sent to Warsaw. According to information leaking from the Arbeitsamt only 40,000 people are to remain in the Warsaw Ghetto, only highly skilled workers to be employed in German war industry. The most convincing proof of the dwindling numbers in the Ghetto lies in the fact that for September 1942 120,000 ration cards were printed, for October the number issued was only 40,000.

Simultaneously with the extermination of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, Ghettos of the provinces at Falenica, Rombertów, Nowy Dwór, Kałuszyn and Minsk Mazowiecki are being liquidated. In the district of Wilno only one Jewish community has remained, in the city itself numbering only 12,000 people. According to news which reached London some time ago the Germans have murdered 60,000 Jews in Wilno, 14,000 in Równo and 50% of the Jewish population in Lwów. Similar news reaches us from cities in South Eastern Poland, such as Stanisławów, Tarnopol, Stryj.

5. Methods of extermination applied by the Germans.

The methods applied in this mass extermination are, apart from executions firing squads, electrocution and lethal gas-chambers. An electrocution station is installed at Belzec Camp. Transports of settlers arrive at a siding, on the spot where the execution is to take place. The camp is policed by Ukrainians. The victims are ordered to strip naked, to have a bath ostensibly and are then led to a barrack with a metal plate for floor. The door is then locked, electric current passes through the victims and their death is almost instantaneous. The bodies are loaded on to waggons and taken to a mass grave some distance from the camp. A large digging machine has been installed recently at Treblinka. It works ceaselessly digging ditches - mass graves for Jews who are to meet their death there. The Ukrainian guards, witnesses of the mass murders are allowed to keep the money and jewellery robbed from the victims. These bestial murders sometimes take place in the presence of the local non-Jewish Polish population, who are helpless and overcome with horror with the sight of such inhuman violence. What the Poles' reactions to these unspeakable crimes are best proved by a pamphlet by the "Front for the Liberation of Poland", containing a strongly worded protest against the terrible extermination of Jews. According to the pamphlet the total number of Jews murdered in Poland since September 1939 exceeds one million.

Figure 4 - Schwarzbart's version of the 'Karski Report' - Page 2. London Metropolitan Museum ACC/3121/C/11/007/012/087

Schwarzbart's report was copied at the FO and returned to Easterman on November 30. Unlike Schwarzbart's original, it lacks the original formatting and it is this document which historians referred to as the 'Karski report':

News is reaching the Polish Government in London about the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw.

The persecution of the Jews in Poland, which has been in progress from the very first day of the German occupation, has taken on extremely acute forms since March 1942, when Himmler ordered the extermination of 50% of the Jewish population in the Government General, to be carried out by the end of 1942.

Though the German assassins had started this work with extraordinary gusto, the results apparently did not satisfy Himmler for during his visit to the General Gouvernement in July 1942 he ordered new decrees personally, aiming at the total destruction of Polish Jewry.

The persecutions in Warsaw started on 21st July 1942, when German police cars suddenly drove into the ghettos. The soldiers immediately started rushing into houses, shooting the inhabitants at sight, without any explanation. The first victims belonged mostly to the educated classes. On that day almost all the members of the Jewish Municipal Council were arrested and held as hostages.

On 22nd July 1942 the Jewish Council was ordered to proclaim the decree of the German authorities dealing with the re-settlement of all the Warsaw Jews, regardless of sex or age, in the Eastern part of Poland, with the sole exception of persons working in German factories or members of the Jewish militia. The daily quota of people to be re-settled was fixed at 6,000 and members of the Jewish Municipal Council were ordered to carry out the order under pain of death.

By the next day, however, on 23rd July, the German police again appeared in the Jewish Municipal Council and demanded to see the chairman, Mr. Czerniakow. After the police had left, Czerniakow committed suicide. From a note he left for his wife, it became clear that he had received an order to deliver 10,000 people the next day and 7000 daily on the following days, in spite of the fact that the quota had been fixed originally at 6,000. The victims to be delivered to the Germans are either dragged out of their homes or seized in the streets. As the zeal of the Jewish police to perform these duties against their own people was slight and did not give a guarantee of efficiency, the Germans have mobilised temporary security battalions for the man-hunts, consisting of Ukrainians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. These battalions, under the command of SS men, are characterised by their utter ruthlessness, cruelty and inhumanity.

The Jews, when caught, are driven to a square. Old people and cripples are then singled out, taken to the cemetery and there shot. The remaining people are loaded into goods trucks, at the rate of 150 people to a truck with space for 40. The floor of the truck is covered with a thick layer of lime and chlorine sprinkled with water. The doors of the trucks are locked. Sometimes the train starts immediately on being loaded, sometimes it remains on a siding for a day, two days or even longer. The people are packed so tightly that those who die of suffocation remain in the crowd side by side with the still living and with those slowly dying from the fumes of lime and chlorine, from lack of air, water and food. Wherever the trains arrive half the people arrive dead. Those surviving are sent to special camps at Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor. Once there, the so-called "settlers" are mass murdered.

Only young and relatively strong people are left alive, for they are valuable slave labour for the Germans. However, the percentage of these is extremely small, for out of a total of about 250,000 "re-settled" only about 4000 have been sent to auxiliary work on the battlefronts.

Neither/

Figure 5 - 'Karski Report', page 1. National Archives, FO371/3092

Neither children nor babies are spared. The orphans from asylums and day-nurseries are evacuated as well. The director of the biggest Jewish orphanage in Warsaw and well known writer, Janusz Korczak, whom the Germans had given permission to remain in the ghetto, preferred to follow his charges to death.

Thus under the guise of re-settlement in the east, a mass murder of the Jewish population is taking place. Started on 22nd July 1942, it has been progress ever since. By the end of September 1942 250,000 Jews had been eliminated. The extent of this action is best characterised by a few figures: In the Warsaw ghetto there lived, according to official German statistics of March 1942, about 433,000 People. In spite of the extremely high mortality caused by bad hygienic conditions, epidemics, starvation, executions etc., the number of Jews in the ghetto remained more or less stable, for to replace the dead, Jews from other parts of Europe, Germany Austria, Holland, were sent to Warsaw. According to information leaking from the Arbeitsamt, only 40,000 people are to remain in the Warsaw ghetto, only highly skilled workers, to be employed in German war industry. The most convincing proof of the dwindling numbers in the ghetto lies in the fact that for September 1942 120,000 ration cards were printed. For October the number issued was only 40,000. Simultaneously with the extermination of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, ghettos in the provinces, at Falencia, Rembertow, Nowy Dwor, Kaluszyn and Minsk Mazowiecki are being liquidated. In the district of Wilno only one Jewish community has remained, in the city itself, numbering only 12,000 people. According to news which reached London some time ago the Germans have murdered 60,000 Jews in Wilno, 14000 in Rowne and 50% of the Jewish population of Lwow; similar news reaches us from cities in S. Eastern Poland, such as Stanislawow, Tarnopol, Stryj.

The methods applied in this mass extermination are, apart from executions by firing squads, electrocution and lethal gas-chambers. An electrocuting station is installed at Belzec camp. Transports of "settlers" arrive at a siding, on the spot where the execution is to take place. The camp is policed by Ukrainians. The victims are ordered to strip naked, - to have a bath, ostensibly - and are then led to a barrack with a metal plate for floor. The door is then locked, electric current passes through the victims and their death is almost instantaneous. The bodies are loaded on to waggons and taken to a mass grave some distance from the camp. A large digging machine has been installed recently at Treblinka. It works ceaselessly digging ditches - mass graves for Jews who are to meet their death there. The Ukrainian guards, witnesses of the mass murders, are allowed to keep the money and jewellery robbed from the victims. These bestial murders sometimes take place in the presence of the local non-Jewish Polish population, who are helpless and overcome with horror at the sight of such inhuman violence. What the Poles' reactions to these unspeakable crimes are, is best proved by a pamphlet by the "Front for the Liberation of Poland", containing a strongly worded protest against the terrible extermination of the Jews. According to the pamphlet, the total number of Jews murdered in Poland since September 1939 exceeds one million.

Figure 6 - The 'Karski Report', page 2. National Archives, FO371/3092

The report was not brought to London by Karski nor was it an English translation of a Polish original which he might have delivered upon arrival. Its connection with him is based on the claim that its content is a summary of materials which Karski took from Warsaw and which arrived in London before he did, but the evidence for this claim still needs to be examined. We need to note also that the

report is almost entirely about the Warsaw ghetto deportations, it begins with the statement that ‘News is reaching the Polish government in London about the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw’. Another important point, not directly linked to Karski, is that this report deals exclusively with the Jewish tragedy, it is not a report in which the extermination of the Jews is merely one of many topics about the situation in occupied Poland.

We now need to examine the claim that the Polish government had recently received new information about the Warsaw ghetto deportations and that this explains the timing of the November 24 announcement.

4 The 'Karski Report' and the timing of the Polish government announcement

4.1 The 'latest news'

The Polish Government's official announcement on November 24 marked the start of what soon turned out to be a campaign which eventually led to the December 17 Allied declaration. What is significant for us, however, is that at a number of key moments of this campaign there is reference made to materials which recently arrived from Poland. On November 27, a day after the meeting which Easterman and Silverman had with Roger Law at the Foreign Office, the Polish National Council, an institution acting as a proxy parliament within the exiled Polish state, passed a resolution which condemned 'the recent mass murders perpetrated against the Jews in Poland'.¹ The wording of the resolution was drafted by Ignacy Schwarzbart whose diary entry for the day refers to the documents which he had seen recently:

What I read about goes beyond the most horrible ordeal, the most dreadful human depravity. This information tells us that to the end of this September, two million Jews have disappeared in Poland.²

Schwarzbart then describes how he spent most of the day discussing the exact wording of the resolution with other members of the National Council and with the deputy prime minister of Poland, Mikołajczyk, and how he needed to take account of the right-wing *Endek* members of the Council in order to include the Declaration as an emergency item on the agenda. The final version begins with a reference to a recent announcement by the Polish government:

The Government of the Polish Republic had informed the allied governments and public opinion about the latest news of the mass murder of the Jewish population in Poland, perpetrated and systematically continued by the German occupiers. The number of Jews murdered by the Germans in Poland since September 1939 is over 1 million.³

¹ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum Archive (PISM) A5.2/47a.

² Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), M2/751. Schwarzbart's diary entry for November 27, 1942. Polish original in Appendix..

³ PISM, A5.2/47a. Polish original in Appendix.

What is of interest here is the reference to the ‘latest news’ (*‘ostatnie wiadomości’*) and also to the statement that the Polish government ‘had informed the allied governments and public opinion’. It seems reasonable to assume that ‘latest news’ is information which arrived very recently, perhaps a few days or a week previously. It was new information about the mass murder of Jews taking place in occupied Poland which the Polish government immediately passed to the allied governments and the press. It also seems reasonable to suppose that this ‘latest news’ refers to the materials Karski brought out of Poland, that it was part of the recently-arrived ‘Witold’s post’ and that the Polish government ‘informed the allied governments and public opinion’ through the English language Report of November 24 we have just examined. We can try to test some key aspects of this supposition by looking at a press article in the *New York Times* which reported the Polish government’s announcement. This will help us to deal with questions about the timing of the Polish government’s announcement and about the date when the Report was released.

4.2 *New York Times, November 25, 1942 edition, Page 10*

The Report which Schwarzbart gave to Easterman and Silverman on the evening of November 25 was clearly ready a day earlier, on November 24, because it was distributed or read to journalists by officials of the Polish government. One of the journalists who reported the Polish announcement was James MacDonald, a correspondent of the *New York Times* in London, who sent the text of his article to New York on November 24 ‘by special cable’.⁴ The article described ‘a report issued today by the Polish Government in London’.⁵ It can be easily established that this is the same report which Schwarzbart gave to Easterman on the evening of the

⁴ James MacDonald (1896-1962), the NYT correspondent, should not be confused with James G. McDonald (1886-1964), US diplomat, Chairman of FDR’s ‘Consultative committee for political refugees’ in 1938-1945 and the first American ambassador to Israel. See NYT June 20, 1962 obituary for James MacDonald and September 27, 1964 NYT obituary for James G. McDonald. On James G. McDonald see also Breitman, R., McDonald Stewart, B. & Hochberg, S. eds., 2009. *Refugees and Rescue: The Diaries and Papers of James G. McDonald 1935-1945*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

⁵ James MacDonald, *Himmler Program Kills Polish Jews*, *New York Times*, November 25, 1942, p. 10. ‘Special Cable to the New York Times’, London, Nov. 24.

25, which Easterman, together with the MP Sidney Silverman, then took to the Foreign Office next morning. The *New York Times* article contains statements which are almost identical to those in that report.⁶ For example, on page two of the Report, we read:

In the Warsaw ghetto there lived, according to official German statistics of March 1942, about 433,000 people. [...] The most convincing proof of the dwindling numbers in the ghetto lies in the fact that for September 1942 120,000 ration cards were printed. For October the number issued was only 40,000.

In the *New York Times* article, we read:

The Polish officials said only 40,000 October ration cards had been printed for the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, where the population last March was 433,000. This had been a reduction from 130,000 ration cards in September for the Warsaw Jews.

Other parts of the *New York Times* article contain statements which also seem to be exact quotes from the report. For example, on page 1 of the Report, we read:

Wherever the trains arrive half the people arrive dead. Those surviving are sent to special camps at Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor. Once there, the so-called „settlers” are mass murdered.

The wording in the *New York Times* is nearly identical:

Wherever the trains arrive half the people are dead. Those surviving are sent to special camps at Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor (in southeastern Poland). Once there the so-called settlers are mass-murdered.

These and other statements in the *New York Times* article seem to provide fairly clear evidence that the Report which the Polish Government issued on November 24 is the report taken to the Foreign Office.

On page 10 of that edition of the *New York Times* we have two other articles which are extremely significant because they also contain news about the extermination of the Jews. There is an article with news that arrived from Jerusalem, also on November 24:

⁶ All quotations referring to New York Times are from the above article. Source of quotations from the Karski Report can be found in the document reproduced in the previous pages.

Information received here of methods by which the Germans in Poland are carrying out the slaughter of Jews includes accounts of trainloads of adults and children taken to great crematoriums at Oswiecim (*sic.*), near Cracow.⁷

We know that this information came from Jewish refugees who were Palestinian citizens who arrived in Palestine on November 16 in an exchange agreement involving interned German citizens.⁸

The third article on page 10 of the *New York Times* is also about the Jewish tragedy and it may have been the most significant one to an American reader of this newspaper. It reports that Stephen Wise, the chairman of the World Jewish Congress (WJC), was given documents by the State Department which confirmed the news that has been accumulating for some months. We know from a number of historical studies that Wise wanted to make this news public at the beginning of September when he received the Gerhart Riegner telegram from the WJC bureau in Switzerland. As is well known, the Riegner telegram, originally sent on August 10, 1942, reported that ‘in the Fuehrer’s Headquarters, a plan was being discussed and is under consideration, according to which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany numbering 3½ to 4 millions...be at one blow exterminated’.⁹ In September, Stephen Wise was persuaded by the undersecretary of state, Sumner Welles, that he should wait with his public announcement until the news is confirmed by the State Department. This confirmation arrived in November in the form of credible documents sent from the American consulate in Bern. On November 24 Sumner Welles invited Stephen Wise to a meeting in Washington and according to Wise’s later testimony, when he gave him copies of these documents, Welles said, ‘I regret to tell you Dr Wise, that these confirm and justify our deepest fears’.¹⁰ The Riegner telegram talked about a ‘plan’ that was being ‘discussed’ and ‘under consideration’ in early August. Three and a half months later the State

⁷ *Details Reaching Palestine*, „New York Times”, 25 XI 1942, p. 10. ‘By radio to The New York Times’, Jerusalem, November 24.

⁸ On the arrival of the exchangees cf. Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*, p. 152, 198; Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, p. 190; Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, p. 88; Dina Porat, *The Blue and Yellow Star of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 214; Fleming, *Auschwitz, the Allies and Censorship*, p. 157–160.

⁹ NA, FO371/30917. This is the text of the telegram received in the Foreign Office.

¹⁰ David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941–1945*, New York: New Press, 2007, p. 51. Also Breitman, *Official Secret*, p. 145.

Department could confirm to Wise that the plan was not only being ‘discussed’, it was now being fully implemented. As reported on page 10 of the *New York Times* next day, at the press conference which he arranged in the evening of November 24, Stephen Wise stated that ‘he had learned through sources confirmed by the State Department that about half the estimated 4,000,000 Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe had been slain in an “extermination campaign”’.¹¹

Page ten of the November 25, 1942 edition of the *New York Times* is arguably a typical example of the attitude of the mainstream American press to information about the Holocaust arriving at this time to the United States. Some historians have claimed that the American press remained indifferent to this news which was even then entirely credible.¹² Without wanting to engage with this question, it is nevertheless worth noting certain basic facts about the November 25 edition of the *New York Times*. Placing the three reports about the extermination of the Jews on page ten may be interpreted as an editorial judgement which regarded such news as less important than the reports placed on the front page.¹³ This may have been based on the editor’s view that information about the Holocaust was not yet accepted as fully credible, possibly because of the sources on which the news was based. This difference between page one and page ten becomes evident when we observe that on page ten we have attribution while on page one we have facts. On page ten, the *New York Times* tells its readers that a report had been issued by the Polish government in London, that in Jerusalem the refugees have brought ‘information’ and that in Washington Stephen Wise stated that the State Department has assured him that the documents which he had been given is credible. The reports on page ten tell us about what someone said, those on the front page tell us about

¹¹ *Wise Gets Confirmations*, *New York Times*, 25 XI 1942, p. 10. Washington, Nov. 24 (AP).

¹² Cf. Fleming, *Auschwitz*, p. 157–160. On the NYT attitude towards the Holocaust during the war, cf. Laurel Leff, *Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; *idem*, *When the Facts Didn’t Speak for Themselves: The Holocaust in the New York Times, 1939–1945*, „The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics”, Spring 2000, vol. 5, nr 2, pp. 52-72. See also Lipstadt, D. E., 1986. *Beyond Belief: American press and the coming of the Holocaust*. New York: New York Press.

¹³ This view may be debatable. In a discussion of this thesis, Professor Michael Berkowitz argued that in 1942 a typical American reader of the NYT would read the newspaper from cover to cover; starting perhaps with the front page, he or she would also read page ten. This tends to weaken the argument that information about the Holocaust on page ten was ‘buried’ under the important news printed on the front page.

what is happening. On the front page we have factual reports with information about battles in North Africa and on the Pacific: intense battles in Tunisia; German forces are moving in the direction of El Agheili in Libya; US Navy victory on the Pacific near the Solomon Islands. The most important reports tell us about the successes of the Red Army at Stalingrad: 15,000 Germans killed on the previous day and 12,000 taken prisoner; the German army is retreating from exposed positions leaving behind its weaker allies, the Romanians, who are ‘surrendering in masses’.¹⁴

The information placed on page 10, according to the judgement made by the *New York Times* editor in November 1942, may have been regarded as less important than the one on the front page but it reveals something extremely significant. Three credible reports about the Holocaust had been released on the same date. In London, on November 24 the Polish government issued an English-language summary of the ‘latest news’ from Poland about the tragedy of Polish Jews. On the same day, at the State Department in Washington Sumner Welles handed over to Stephen Wise (who has been kept waiting for this for nearly three months) documents from Switzerland which confirmed news far worse than what Riegner described in his August telegram. Information about the refugees arriving in Palestine was sent from Jerusalem on the 24th. This is news originating on the same day from what looks like three independent sources. Its placement on the same page – even if it was page ten - of the *New York Times* seems to emphasise what seems like a mysterious coincidence which raises some important questions.

4.3 *A mysterious coincidence*

Were these sources independent of each other? Did Sumner Welles and the Department of State decide to give Stephen Wise copies of documents from Switzerland because they already knew about the testimonies of the returning Palestinian refugees? Did the Polish government decide to issue a special report about the on-going extermination of Polish Jews and about the tragedy of the

¹⁴ As is well-known, on November 23, 1942 the Red Army, after defeating the Romanian army, closed the circle around the German forces fighting at Stalingrad. The encirclement steadily tightened until General Paulus agreed a German surrender on February 2, 1943 marking a Soviet victory in one of the most decisive battles of WWII.

Warsaw ghetto because it wanted to pre-empt the Department of State or the publication of the news about the refugees? Was the release of the documents from Switzerland or the publication of the special report based on some kind of political or other calculation?

We can ask these questions within the broader context of the hypothesis that throughout most of the second half of 1942 information about the Holocaust was hidden, concealed or kept secret by the inner or 'official circles' of the Polish government. It is a hypothesis which in its most moderate formulation argues that there is at least the possibility that at the latest by the middle of November 1942, the British government, the US Department of State and the Polish government had enough credible information about the Holocaust and about the situation in the Warsaw ghetto. The key politicians and high officials of the Allied states knew but kept silent about this 'terrible secret', claiming that the information on which it is based was not yet confirmed. They kept silent until the moment when the volume and quality of information coming from different sources, together with pressure from Jewish groups, reached such a level that it would have been an embarrassment and a public disgrace to remain silent. According to this hypothesis, making an announcement which would at the same time be an official declaration of knowledge about the Holocaust, was most likely the result of some political calculation about the opportune moment for making it. We can be fairly certain that in the case of the Jewish Agency, which first published the testimonies of the Palestinian exchangees, there was no such calculation. We are also not concerned here with the question of whether the State Department concealed its knowledge until some point in late November when it decided to make it public. Our focus is on the Report issued by the Polish government on November 24. Was it published because the Polish government had just recently received news about the Jewish tragedy unfolding in Poland? Was it the Polish government's attempt to alert the free world of what it had just learned about the scale of the mass murder of Polish Jews being perpetrated by Germany? Or was it the case that the government had known about the true extent of the Jewish tragedy and of the Warsaw deportations for months and kept an official silence? Did the Polish government seek to gain some political advantage by waiting for an opportune moment to publish the report? Or did it perhaps calculate

that with the mounting level of credible evidence about Jewish suffering in Poland the continuation of an official silence on the matter would seriously undermine its authority and cause it to be perceived as a government that is not fully aware of what is going on in the occupied country?

We will address these questions in detail in the next chapter but in order to understand their importance we first need to examine what some historians have argued is the ‘official silence’ of the Polish government about the Jewish tragedy, especially about the Warsaw ghetto deportations, a ‘silence’ that lasted from sometime in August until it was broken with the release of an official announcement and the publication of the Report of November 24, 1942.

4.4 *The December 17 1942 Allied Declaration and the Poles*

There exists a considerable historical literature devoted to the question of whether the world remained silent as the Holocaust was unfolding in 1941-42.¹⁵ The silence meant here is a culpable one, it is the silence of a world that knows about Jewish suffering but chooses to do nothing. This use of the term ‘silence’ thus carries a certain moral reproach: we can only choose to remain silent about something that we know about. It is claimed that America and Great Britain were silent and so were many of the major Jewish organisations in the free world; here we are concerned with arguments about the silence of the Poles, of the Polish government, and more specifically, with the circumstances when this apparent silence ended: on November 24, 1942 when the Polish government made an official announcement which began with a Report which opened with the statement that ‘News is reaching the Polish Government in London about the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw’..

¹⁵ A much-reduced list would include: Yehuda Bauer, *When Did They Know?*; Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*; Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*; Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*; Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: American press and the coming of the Holocaust*, New York: New Press, 1986; Monty Noam Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free world diplomacy and the Holocaust*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983; Dariusz Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada. Ignacy Schwarzbart – żydowski przedstawiciel w Radzie Narodowej RP (1940–1945)*, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 1995; Libionka, *ZWZ-AK i Delegatury Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów*; Adam Puławski, *W obliczu Zagłady.*; Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*; Bolchover, R., 2003. *British Jewry and the Holocaust, With a New Introduction*, London: Littman.

It is important to stress the date of this statement: November 24, 1942. We now know that within the overall timeline of the Holocaust this is quite late, the pace of mass murder was accelerating throughout 1942 and by November its deadly harvest widened as the year was coming to a close. The importance of the timeline may be illustrated by Christopher Browning's telling description of what the 11-month period between mid-March 1942 and mid-February 1943 meant in the wider context of the history of the Holocaust. It was the deadliest period of the Holocaust: 'In mid-March 1942 some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, while 20-25 percent had perished. A mere 11 months later, in mid-February 1943, the percentages were exactly the reverse'.¹⁶ We know that on November 24, 1942 the Belżec death camp would be closed down in a few weeks' time: over 400,000 Jews had already been murdered there since the first transport arrived on March 17, 1942. In Treblinka at that time the number must have been very close to the 713,555 reported by an SS radiogram at the end of the year.¹⁷ The Treblinka number would include the vast majority of the Jews deported from the Warsaw ghetto two to three months earlier; the *Grossaktion Warschau* began on July 22 and ended on September 21 when over 270,000 inhabitants of the ghetto were murdered.¹⁸ But Belżec and Treblinka (not to mention Chełmno, Majdanek, Sobibór and Auschwitz) were the "highlights" of an extermination programme which used gas, bullets and hunger to kill Jews in towns and villages from what used to be Western Poland to Belarus in the East.

When we look at this 1942 timeline of the Holocaust it is clear that as far as rescue was concerned, it was a year in which every day counted. 'Rescue', in this context, refers to some possible action taken by the Allies in 1942 which would halt or at least slow down the pace of mass murder. But any such action would clearly need to be preceded by Allied knowledge that Nazi Germany was carrying out a historically unprecedented program of mass murder of all Jews in the countries it occupied. Knowledge that something is taking place precedes any action which

¹⁶ Browning, C. R., 2001. *Ordinary Men, Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. London: Penguin Books, p. xiii.

¹⁷ Number based on Peter Witte and Stephen Tyas, 'A New Document on the Deportation and Murder of Jews during "Einsatz Reinhardt" 1942', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, V15 N3, Winter 2001, pp 468-486

¹⁸ See Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands*, p. 272-3 for a recent account on the number of victims.

seeks to prevent it from occurring; Richard Breitman makes this basic point in his account of the December 17, 1942 Allied Declaration, which was ‘a necessary precondition to any official consideration of what Western governments might do to mitigate the slaughter’.¹⁹ A ‘necessary precondition’ for such action was the knowledge which was clearly expressed through the Declaration. Its comparatively brief text, 279 words in English, was read by Anthony Eden at the House of Commons on December 17 1942:

The attention of the Governments of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Yugoslavia, and of the French National Committee has been drawn to numerous reports from Europe that the German authorities, not content with denying to persons of Jewish race in all the territories over which their barbarous rule has been extended the most elementary human rights, are now carrying into effect Hitler’s oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe. From all the occupied countries Jews are being transported, in conditions of appalling horror and brutality, to Eastern Europe. In Poland, which has been made the principal Nazi slaughterhouse, the ghettos established by the German invaders are being systematically emptied of all Jews except a few highly skilled workers required for war industries. None of those taken away are ever heard of again. The able-bodied are slowly worked to death in labour camps. The infirm are left to die of exposure and starvation or are deliberately massacred in mass executions. The number of victims of these bloody cruelties is reckoned in many hundreds of thousands of entirely innocent men, women and children.

The above mentioned Governments and the French National Committee condemn in the strongest possible terms this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination. They declare that such events can only strengthen the resolve of all freedom loving peoples to overthrow the barbarous Hitlerite tyranny. They re-affirm their solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution, and to press on with the necessary practical measures to this end.²⁰

It can be generally accepted that the December 17, 1942 Allied Declaration was the result of a press and diplomatic campaign in which the Polish government, along with Jewish organisations, played a key role: in introducing the Declaration in his House of Commons statement, Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, mentioned ‘in particular... a note from the Polish Government’.²¹ This was a

¹⁹ Breitman, *Official Secrets*, p. 153.

²⁰ Hansard, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1942/dec/17/united-nations-declaration> (accessed August 15, 2019).

²¹ Hansard, *ibid.* ‘I regret to have to inform the House that reliable reports have recently reached His Majesty’s Government regarding the barbarous and inhuman treatment to which Jews are being subjected in German-occupied Europe. They have in particular received a note from the Polish

diplomatic note issued by the Polish ministry of foreign affairs and signed by the foreign minister, Count Edward Raczynski. It was 'addressed to the Governments of the United Nations on December 10th, 1942'. The note, along with 'other documents' was included in a pamphlet published ten days later under the title 'The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland'.²² Let us look at this note more closely.

Raczynski's diplomatic note very clearly refers to information which had recently been received in London by the Polish government:

3. Most recent reports present a horrifying picture of the position to which the Jews in Poland have been reduced. The new methods of mass slaughter applied during the last few months confirm the fact that the German authorities aim with systematic deliberation at the total extermination of the Jewish population of Poland and of the many thousands of Jews whom the German authorities have deported to Poland from Western and Central European countries and from the German Reich itself.²³

The placement of this text in what has been called here the 1942 timeline of the Holocaust is important: Raczynski's diplomatic note was presented to the Allied governments on December 10. It refers to the 'most recent reports' about 'mass slaughter applied during the last few months'. Having received these 'recent reports',

The Polish Government consider it their duty to bring to the knowledge of the Governments of all civilised countries the following fully authenticated information received from Poland during recent weeks, which indicates all too plainly the new methods of extermination adopted by the German authorities.²⁴

This statement clearly suggests that the Polish Government is passing on to its wartime allies (and indeed to the free world) information which was previously regarded as unconfirmed not only by the 'Governments of all civilised countries' but also by the Polish Government itself. In other words, it is suggested that before the

Government, which was also communicated to other United Nations and which has received wide publicity in the Press.'

²² The pamphlet was published by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 20th, 1942: '*The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland. Note Addressed to the Governments of the United Nations on December 10th, 1942, and other documents.*'. A scan of a copy held in the New York Polish consulate library is available online on : https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/33/The_Mass_Extermination_of_Jews_in_German_Occupied.pdf , accessed December 19, 2019.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

middle of November, just like the others, the Polish Government also did not know about the true extent of the Jewish tragedy unfolding in Poland. Prior to the arrival of ‘fully authenticated information’ it also could not accept news about the systematic, state-controlled extermination of Jews by Nazi Germany as certain: it was news that needed further confirmation, the numbers seemed exaggerated, it was tainted by a possibly credible accusation of ‘wartime propaganda’ and so on. But once this information arrived, and it is implied that it was sometime in mid-November, the uncertainty was removed, the Polish Government now knew about the scale of the mass murder of Jews being perpetrated in occupied Poland and once it had this knowledge it made an official announcement on November 24 and issued an official diplomatic note on December 10 which sought to make the allied governments aware of and ‘bring to the knowledge of all civilised countries’, the horrific facts of the Jewish tragedy. The reference to ‘duty’ suggests that if the Polish Government had such information before the middle of November, it would have brought it to the knowledge of the free world earlier. It would not have concealed it.

We can see that this interpretation of the circumstances leading up to the Allied Declaration of December 17 assumes that the tipping point in the accumulating volume of news about the extermination of the Jews in Poland was the arrival of the ‘fully authenticated information from Poland’ mentioned in Raczyński’s diplomatic note. The note suggests that this information arrived in London sometime around the middle of November and this seems to fit in with the claim that the materials which Karski carried from Warsaw arrived in London around the same time. This in turn takes us to the very obvious question of whether the Polish government received ‘fully authenticated information’, which it claimed dispelled any doubt it might have had about the Jewish tragedy, with the arrival in London of Karski’s materials. We can see how this would fit in with the Karski story: the ‘fully authenticated information’ was contained in the materials he took from Warsaw and then carried through German-occupied Europe. These materials arrived in London sometime around the middle of November and it was thanks to them that the Polish government became fully aware of the scale of the Jewish catastrophe taking place in Poland. Once it became aware of it, it issued the Report

of 24 November; and on December 10, in the diplomatic campaign which followed, the Polish foreign minister sent a diplomatic note to the anti-German coalition in which the facts of this catastrophe were ‘brought to the knowledge’ of the allied governments.

4.5 *The December 10 diplomatic note on the extermination of the Jews*

Raczyński’s December 10 diplomatic note marked a significant stage in the campaign leading up to the December 17 Allied Declaration. As Michael Fleming argues, the Polish government, along with Jewish representatives ‘lobbied the Western Allies for a formal declaration to be made’. He adds that,

It was the Polish government, rather than, as is commonly assumed, the British government, which initiated the process that resulted in the UN declaration of 17 December 1942. FO official Frank Roberts reminded his colleagues that ‘the origin of the declaration was Polish rather than British but it is true that we had to do most of the work connected with it’.²⁵

The note will be examined in detail in Chapter 11 where we will look at the source documents it was based on, here our interest is on the time when these source documents, which carried ‘fully authenticated information received from Poland during recent weeks’, left Warsaw and arrived in London. The note contains the information about ration cards:

According to the most recent reports, 120,000 ration cards were distributed in the Warsaw ghetto for the month of September, 1942, while the report also mentions that only 40,000 such cards were to be distributed for the month of October, 1942. The latter figure is corroborated by information emanating from the German Employment Office (Arbeitsamt).²⁶

We have already seen this item of information about ration cards in the Report of November 24, in the news article on page 10 of the November 25 edition of the *New York Times* and in the transcript of Karski’s interrogation on November 27. We can assume that the ration card distributions in the Warsaw ghetto were done in monthly cycles, each applicable to the next month. What is significant about the wording of this item in Raczyński’s diplomatic note is the use of dates and past tenses and what they tell us about the approximate date when the reports were

²⁵ Fleming, *Auschwitz*. pp 110-111.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

written and when they arrived in London. The note was issued on December 10 and it seems reasonable to assume that by using the phrases ‘most recent reports’ and ‘fully authenticated information received from Poland during recent weeks’ Raczynski meant that the reports arrived in London within the past few weeks, around mid-November. The note also states that these ‘recent reports’ tell us that 120,000 ration cards ‘were distributed in the Warsaw ghetto for the month of September’, the passive voice of the simple past tense can be taken to mean that the September distribution had occurred before the reports were written. But the note also states that ‘only 40,000 such cards were to be distributed for the month of October, 1942’ which strongly suggests that when the reports were produced the number of the October distribution was still in the planning stage. The reference to the ‘German Employment Office (Arbeitsamt)’, where such planning would take place, reinforces the suggestion that the ‘recent reports’ mentioned in Raczynski’s note were written at a time when the September rations had been distributed and when the number of October rations was still being planned by the German occupying powers in Warsaw. We can reasonably assume therefore that the reports were written sometime between late August and mid-September 1942. If that is so then the ‘most recent reports’ which Raczynski refers to in his note of December 10, (which in turn is the note mentioned by Anthony Eden in his December 17 House of Commons announcement of the Allied Declaration) probably arrived in London sometime in mid-November and contained information about the Warsaw ghetto deportations from sometime around the middle of September. As we will see shortly, this assumption is confirmed by some key original documents, especially the courier movement radiograms sent between Warsaw and London in September.

If that is true then the Allied Declaration of December 17 was in part at least a response to news about the horrific events that had occurred in Warsaw three months earlier. In particular, it was a response to news which made up the major part of Raczynski December 10 diplomatic note: news about the final stages of the Warsaw ghetto deportations as witnessed sometime around the beginning of September. Raczynski’s note clearly suggests that the Polish Government was not aware of the full scale and horror of the deportations before mid-November. What is more, when Raczynski stated that the ‘Polish Government consider it their duty’ to

make its allies aware of what is happening to the Jews, the implication is that this duty to bring the facts ‘to the knowledge of the Governments of all civilised countries’ was discharged as soon as the ‘fully authenticated information’ became available, in this case sometime around the middle of November. In other words, the Polish Government is asserting that it could not have made its official announcement of November 24 or have written its diplomatic note of December 10 any earlier.

There is a clear rejection here of any notion that the government concealed its knowledge of the full extent of the mass murder of its Jewish citizens in Poland during the crucial months in late 1942. It is a rejection of the notion that Raczynski’s diplomatic note, which was such an important factor in the campaign which led to the December 17 Allied Declaration, could have been issued earlier because the Polish Government in London knew about the Jewish tragedy as early as late August. If, as Breitman put it, the Declaration was a ‘necessary precondition to any official consideration’ of Allied rescue action then its date marks the earliest point at which any such ‘official consideration’ might begin and thus the earliest point at which any Allied rescue action could have been taken or at least considered. We can put aside here the fact that no such action was taken and that the only concrete result of the Declaration was an Allied re-affirmation of ‘their solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution, and to press on with the necessary practical measures to this end’.²⁷ The ‘retribution’ would come after victory and the ‘necessary practical measures’ would consist primarily of the military effort made to achieve it.²⁸ What is important for us here however is not the question of whether after December 17 the Allies did or did not – to use Breitman’s phrase - ‘do something to mitigate the slaughter’, it is rather the question of whether the ‘necessary precondition’ for doing something could have occurred earlier. We need to consider here the sequence of events leading up to the Allied Declaration and note its importance in the context of what was said above

27 Hansard, *ibid*.

28 At the end of 1942 these ‘practical measures’ would also include those taken to develop the new concept in international law of a ‘crime against humanity’. For an account of the link between this development and the December 17 Allied Declaration, see Fox, J. P., 1977. *The Jewish Factor in British War Crimes Policy in 1942. The English Historical Review*, 92(362), pp. 82-106.

about the Holocaust timeline in 1942. If the Allied Declaration followed on – to a large part – from Raczynski’s diplomatic note and if that note referred to ‘recent reports’ which were received by the Polish government sometime in mid-November, and if, finally, these reports described the horrific events of the Warsaw ghetto deportations which took place nearly three months earlier, then the time gap between the production of these reports in Warsaw, sometime in the beginning of September, and their delivery in London, sometime around the middle of November, is extremely significant. If the Polish government knew the facts about the Warsaw ghetto deportations before mid-November then the evidence contained in the December 10 diplomatic note could have been presented earlier. The ‘necessary precondition’ for any official consideration of Allied rescue action might have been reached earlier.

Raczynski’s diplomatic note asserts that the Polish Government had a ‘duty’ – it seems fairly clear that he meant it as a *moral* duty – to inform its allies about the Jewish tragedy as soon as it acquired credible evidence. To claim that the government had in fact concealed its knowledge of this tragedy and in particular its knowledge of the Warsaw ghetto deportations, is to argue that it failed to discharge this moral duty.

4.6 *When did the Polish Government know?*

This moral reproach is justified if it can be shown that senior officials of the Polish government knew about the Warsaw ghetto deportations at some significant time before mid-November. Some historians have presented strong arguments aiming to demonstrate that such information was available as early as late August 1942 but was concealed by the Polish government until late November. If that is the case then the claim that the ‘fully authenticated information’ was not available until mid-November is grossly inaccurate. The claim that it was contained in materials which Karski took from Warsaw and that it was their arrival in London in mid-November which made all the difference, a key element of the Karski story, would need to be discarded. Let us then try to review these historians’ arguments and consider the documented evidence for the availability or absence of such information prior to mid-November, 1942.

As we can clearly see in the text reproduced above, a key focus of the Report of 24 November is the recent tragedy of the Warsaw ghetto, its ‘liquidation’ in an operation which the German occupying forces called *Grossaktion Warschau*. The deportations, mostly to the Treblinka death camp about 100 km north-east of Warsaw, began on July 22 and ended on September 21, 1942 or, as already mentioned, about two months before the release of the Report of 24 November. The Polish Government, however, received the first radio message about the *Grossaktion* a few days after it started in late July and it received subsequent ones in August. As Dariusz Stola writes: ‘news about the beginning of the extermination of the Warsaw ghetto reached [the Polish Government in] London at the end of July, but it became the subject of a propaganda and a diplomatic campaign only at the end of November and in December 1942’.²⁹ The release of the Report of November 24 marked the start of that campaign and here Stola’s comment neatly sums up the problem: ‘Many people have pondered the mystery of why the free world’s reaction to the extermination of the Jews was delayed for so many months. Some suspected – and continue to suspect – that the Polish authorities had much to do with this.’³⁰ The free world’s reaction was delayed and the campaign could have started earlier because the Polish Government knew about the Warsaw ghetto deportations ‘many months’ before November 24.

The hypothesis that the Polish Government had concealed its knowledge about the extermination of the Jews – and especially about the Warsaw deportations – has been put forward by a number of prominent historians. In a study published in 1987 David Engel argued that the Polish Government knew about the Warsaw ghetto deportations on August 27, 1942 at the latest, when it received and decrypted a radio message from the commander-in-chief of the Home Army in Warsaw, General Stefan Rowecki, almost three months before the November 24 announcement of the Report of 24 November.³¹ The message was sent from Warsaw on August 19 and was decrypted and read in London on August 25. Translated into English, the text of the message reads as follows:

²⁹ Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada*, p. 179.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 178.

³¹ Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz...*, p. 175–199.

Since July 22nd the liquidation of the ghetto in Warsaw (400,000 inhabitants) is continuing with great brutality carried out by the German police and its Latvian auxiliaries. So far 5-6 [thousand] have been deported, currently up to 15 thousand daily. The majority is apparently murdered in Bełżec and Treblinka, some we think are taken to work near the front. Acts of mass murder and robbery during the deportations. Only qualified tradesmen and their families are to remain – a few tens of thousands. 150 thousand have been deported so far.³²

It seems reasonable to conclude that on reading this message, the Polish government in London had the essential and fairly accurate information about the Warsaw ghetto deportations supplied by a despatch from the commander-in-chief of the Polish underground forces.

Dariusz Stola comments that ‘for unknown reasons’ this Rowecki message ‘did not play any role in history’.³³ Adam Puławski examined the original radiogram document and studied the details of how such messages were handled internally by Department Six of the Polish general staff, responsible among other things for military radio communication with Polish underground forces. Puławski argues that this extremely important radio message was concealed (‘*utajniona*’)³⁴ by the head of Department Six:

On the original of radiogram nr 743 with the decrypted message there is also a handwritten marginal note by the chief of Department Six, sub-lieutenant Michał Protasewicz, dated on August 26: ‘Mr Minister [of Internal Affairs], I am forwarding you a message from the homeland which clearly originates from a credible source [...] For the time being, please do not reveal this message to unofficial circles’.³⁵

Puławski follows on from Stola with an explanation of why this message was ignored by history: ‘We know the immediate reasons why this message played no role in history. It is because it was ... concealed’. He describes a few other examples when Department Six changed or ‘edited’ the text of messages between

³² SPP, A.3.1.1.2. My (WR) translation into English of the original Polish text, included in Appendix. Dariusz Stola quotes the text of this message in Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada*, p. 165-166.

³³ Stola, *ibid.*, p. 166. Note that Stola cites the collection of documents *Armia Krajowa w Dokumentach*, vol. 2, p. 298 as the source of the text of the message. However, this collection does not reproduce the handwritten notes which were added to the message by officials later.

³⁴ ‘Adam Puławski, *Nie ujawniać czynnikom nieoficjalnym: Depesze AK of Zagładzie [Do not reveal to unofficial circles: AK (Home Army) messages about the Holocaust]*, *Więź* 2007, nr 7, p. 76. He adds more detail in his most recent work, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, (Puławski, 2018), p. 510-528.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79. In the original Polish, the last sentence reads ‘*Wiadomość tę proszę na razie nie ujawniać czynnikom nieoficjalnym*’. Puławski cites ‘Radiogram nr. 743’ in SPP, A.3.1.1.2.

London and Poland. Other cases of such apparent manipulation of messages by Protasewicz and Department Six are given by Dariusz Libionka.³⁶

This handwritten note by Protasewicz, as described by Puławski, is presented as evidence which supports Engel's thesis that after receiving and reading the Rowecki message the Polish government knew about the Warsaw ghetto deportations by August 25 at the latest. Note that in his marginal note, Protasewicz emphasises the credibility of the source of the message: since it comes from the commander of the Home Army in Poland it 'clearly originates from a credible source', there is no need to confirm it. At the same time, Protasewicz, on forwarding this information to 'the minister of Internal Affairs' (Mikołajczyk), *advises* the minister not to reveal it for the time being to 'unofficial circles' (*'czynniki nieoficjalne'*), which we can reasonably assume would include people like the Jewish member of the National Council, Ignacy Schwarzbart, because he, like many others involved in Polish politics in London but not part of the government, could be counted as belonging to an 'unofficial circle'. But note that this is just advice issued by Protasewicz to his ministerial superior who could have decided to do otherwise. The important point here is that after receiving radiogram nr 743 from Department Six, the minister of Internal Affairs (and also the deputy Prime Minister), Stanisław Mikołajczyk, read the text of the message and the handwritten note by Protasewicz. Protasewicz's advice to him was to limit its distribution. However, there is no question that as a result he was aware of the Warsaw deportations and of the enormous scale of mass murder which accompanied them.

Is it correct that Mikołajczyk, at the time the deputy prime minister and minister for internal affairs, knew the horrible truth but concealed it? He was, after all, the recipient of the Rowecki message and the Protasewicz annotation, and so the assumption must be that he read the message and followed Protasewicz's advice to conceal what he knew from 'unofficial circles', but not from the 'official' ones. The problem is that there are documents dated after the Rowecki message which seem to show that Mikołajczyk did not know about the Warsaw deportations, that his

³⁶ Libionka, *ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów...*, p. 89.

knowledge of the extermination of Jews taking place in Poland was more limited. His messages to Poland on October 15 and on November 9 illustrate this: in the October 15 message he requested ‘current information about the persecution of the Jews in Poland’ and wanted it sent as soon as possible, while the November 9 message forwards a request from Zygielbojm about the fate of his Bundist colleagues in Warsaw and asks whether the ghetto deportations are still continuing.³⁷ These messages strongly suggest that Mikołajczyk’s knowledge about the Warsaw deportations was limited and that he perhaps had not read or read but not understood Rowecki’s August 25 message. Alternatively can one claim that Mikołajczyk was guilty of cynicism or duplicity, that he followed Protasewicz’s advice and concealed his knowledge from ‘unofficial circles’? Could it be that these messages show how Mikołajczyk concealed what he knew, how the ‘inner’ or ‘official’ circles in which he played a key role followed Protasewicz’s advice to remain silent before the ‘unofficial’ circles?

4.7 Mikołajczyk’s October 16, 1942 report to Sikorski

There is at least one important document which seems to contradict the concealment hypothesis. It is a report from Mikołajczyk, the deputy prime minister and minister of internal affairs to General Sikorski, the prime minister and commander-in-chief, dated October 16, 1942 and so it comes from the very centre of the Polish Government’s inner or ‘official’ circle’.³⁸ Mikołajczyk is replying to a request he received from Sikorski on October 1 for information about the persecution of Jews in Poland. His reply is clearly meant to be the most authoritative and credible account of the facts about Jewish persecution available to the Polish

³⁷ Cited by: Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagład*, p. 169. Also in Dariusz Stola, ‘Early News of the Holocaust from Poland’, p. 14. As Stola points out, these requests for information were in reaction to foreign ministry reports stating that in early October ‘Jewish activists in Istanbul received completely reliable news that the Germans have begun the speeded physical liquidation of the ghetto[s] in Warsaw and other cities in Poland’. Ibid. p. 13. The Polish Government’s need to confirm this information at the beginning of October is another proof that it either did not know or pretended not to know.

³⁸ HIA Mikołajczyk Papers, Box 51, Folder 23. Mikołajczyk’s letter to Sikorski, October 16, 1942. Digitised version of this 2-page report is available on line: <http://www.szukajwarchiwach.pl/800/22/0//51/str/1/10/100#tabSkany>, files 993.jpg and 992.jpg. All subsequent quotes from this report are taken from the digitised version.

Government at the time, it is a report on the number of victims of German aggression against Poland with an itemised list showing how many Polish civilians were murdered (400,000), deported (1,500,000) or conscripted into the German army (170,000), and how many Polish soldiers had been taken as POWs (200,000), killed or lost in action in 1939 (150,000). The list excludes Poles deported by the Soviets from Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland. The total number of Polish citizens ‘removed from Polish soil’ therefore, Jews and non-Jews, thus comes to 2,420,000. What is significant is that the 400,000 murder victims are made up equally of Poles and Jews: ‘The number of Poles executed, murdered and worked to death is today greater than 200,000. According to confirmed reports, the number of Jews murdered is also over 200,000’.

Mikołajczyk’s main aim is to provide Sikorski with the number of Jewish victims as officially confirmed by the Polish Government: ‘Official reports from the Government Delegate³⁹ speak very clearly and after repeated requests, that the number of Jews murdered in Poland is not greater than 200,000’. There was a political motive behind Mikołajczyk’s report: the numbers he presented to Sikorski clearly suggest that while the suffering of the Jews was great, that of the Poles was at least the same if not greater:

These numbers show that the persecution is directed against the Polish as well as the Jewish nation. But it is not the [Polish] Government’s fault that the Jews would like to present German persecution in Poland as directed exclusively at the Jews.⁴⁰

It should be stressed that this report is dated October 16, 1942 and that it is a response to a request made by Sikorski on October 1. It is striking that there is nothing in it about the Warsaw ghetto deportations which began nearly three months earlier and ended about four weeks before the report was written. As we have seen, the Rowecki despatch, sent on August 19, clearly stated that in the Warsaw ghetto (‘400,000 inhabitants’) ‘150,000 have been deported so far’, the deportations are now proceeding at a rate of ‘15,000 per day’, ‘the majority is apparently murdered in Bełżec and Treblinka’. But on October 16 Mikołajczyk officially informed

³⁹ The Government Delegate was the clandestine representative in Poland of the London-based Polish government. The office was meant to ensure political control over the military wing, the Home Army and the underground state inside occupied Poland.

⁴⁰ Mikołajczyk to Sikorski. HIA, *ibid.* p. 2.

Sikorski that the number of Jews murdered by the Germans in Poland is 200,000 and that this number is credible and has been confirmed by reports from Poland. It seems highly unlikely that Mikołajczyk had read the Rowecki despatch and then decided to conceal its content from Sikorski so as to shield the prime minister and commander-in-chief from the dire news of the Warsaw ghetto deportations. What is far more likely is that for whatever reason he simply never read the earlier despatch and did not know about the true scale of the Warsaw ghetto deportations. His information, such as it was, was months out of date: his report to Sikorski refers to controversies about the credibility of news which arrived from Poland over four months earlier. The Bund report, which had been received by the Polish government at the very beginning of June, included a dramatic statement about the number of Jews murdered in Poland by Nazi Germany: 'According to an estimate, the Germans have so far murdered 700,000 Polish Jews'.⁴¹ In the October report to Sikorski, Mikołajczyk complains that the figure of '700,000' was then 'thrown (*rzucone*) to the English press' by Zygielbojm and this became the number used at the July 6 press conference attended by the British Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken and his Polish ministerial counterpart, Stanisław Stroński. 'Starting the conference, Minister Bracken threw the number of 700,000 Jews, and at the conclusion Minister Stroński stated that indeed 700,000 Jews perished'.⁴² Since for Mikołajczyk, writing in mid-October 1942, the correct number was 200,000, the widespread use of '700,000', especially by Jewish circles ('The Jews, for their part, continue to use the number 700,000') meant that the spread of such 'contradictory information' undermined the credibility of Polish government sources reporting on persecutions in Poland. His recommendation is that Sikorski should issue an instruction that all statements about conditions in occupied Poland released by Polish government departments must first be cleared through Mikołajczyk's Ministry of Internal Affairs. Otherwise the 'confusion' (*zamieszanie*) about victim numbers will continue to be

⁴¹ HIA Mikołajczyk Papers, Box 152, Folder 25. Bund Report, *Raport Bundu w sprawie prześladowań Żydów*. Two-page, typewritten report received by the Polish Government in London in late May 1942. Accessible online <http://szukajwarchiwach.pl/800/22/0/-/152/str/1/76/#tab2> (accessed February 22, 2016). An English translation (alongside the Polish original) was published in 1968 by Yehuda Bauer, 'When Did They Know?'. An English translation also available in Bartoszewski and Lewin, *Righteous Among Nations*, pp. 216-218. I will use my own translation of this report.

⁴² Mikołajczyk to Sikorski. HIA, op. cit. p. 2

spread by individuals whom it was difficult to control, beginning with the two Jewish members of the Polish National Council: 'It is the Jews who are to blame for this confusion, in the first instance Mr. Zygielbojm and then Mr Schwarzbart who in his periodical *'Przyszłość'* ('Future') has now raised the number of Jews murdered in Poland to one million'.⁴³

There are a number of significant threads running through Mikołajczyk's report. There is clearly a 'turf war' taking place between his Ministry of the Interior and other ministries, especially Stroński's Ministry of Information; Mikołajczyk wants his ministry to decide what counts as credible information from Poland. We can reasonably assume that Mikołajczyk's report is in part a response to the increasing flow of news reports about German atrocities committed against Jews in Poland and a recognition that the credibility of the Polish Government will be dependent on its ability to confirm such reports. The report also raises very clearly the issue of competitive suffering and the apparent concern on the part of the Polish Government that the suffering of the Jews does not overshadow that of the Poles. This is a hypothesis suggested by David Engel to explain why the Polish Government remained silent until November 24. We will discuss this hypothesis in some detail in the next chapter. What is important however is the one thread which runs through all the others: we are dealing with an internal Polish Government report written on October 16, 1942 by Mikołajczyk, the Polish minister of the interior and deputy minister, to General Sikorski, the Polish prime minister and commander-in-chief, which unequivocally states that the figure for the number of Jewish victims murdered by Nazi Germany in Poland which the Polish Government can confirm is 200,000. There is no mention of the Warsaw Ghetto deportations even though Rowecki's message arrived on August 25 giving specific and accurate details as of August 19. The view that Mikołajczyk had read the message but concealed it before Sikorski on advice by Protasewicz does not seem credible. We can only conclude that on October 16 Mikołajczyk, together with the inner circle of the Polish Government, simply did not know about the July 22 – September 21

⁴³ Mikołajczyk to Sikorski. HIA, Box 51, Folder 23.

Warsaw Ghetto deportations in which 300,000 Jews were transported to die in the Treblinka death camp.

5 The Polish government 'breaks its official silence'

In spite of Mikołajczyk's apparent ignorance of the scale of the deportations from the Warsaw ghetto, it remains difficult to accept the view that the Polish Government did not make any official announcement about the Warsaw Ghetto deportations until November 24, over two months after the last transport left the *Umschlagplatz* for Treblinka, because it simply did not know about them or could not confirm them. The direct communication channels between London and Warsaw, despite serious disruptions and recent Gestapo arrests,¹ were functioning reasonably well, the Rowecki message is one example showing that the news did get through. The absence of any statement, remains, in Dariusz Stola's words 'a mystery'. Could it be the case that despite the Rowecki message and many other such messages which were received from Poland, the Polish Government, like so many other governments, was unable to grasp the enormity of the crime being perpetrated against Polish Jews? The credibility of the Rowecki message was never in doubt, what it reported was correctly understood and taken as fact. But when we examine the internal reports and messages produced in the months that followed we find no reference to it. Mikołajczyk's October 16 report to Sikorski is a clear example of this and we may be tempted to see it as an illustration of what Walter Laqueur, in his 1981 classic *Terrible Secret*, called the 'riddle of disbelief', the 'psychological rejection of information which for one reason or another is not acceptable'.² The problem of disbelief and the puzzling rejection of news which is also taken as true is discussed in Chapter 13 in connection with Karski's July 1943 meeting with the US Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter. It is a problem which seems to be well summed up by a cryptic remark made by Raymond Aron, at the time active as a member of

¹ The encryption keys used by the Polish communication networks were compromised and intercepted by the Germans. Some key Swedish members of the 'Swedish connection' used to carry materials between Warsaw and Stockholm – among them the Bund Report in May 1942 – were arrested by the Gestapo in August. See Lewandowski, J., 2001. A fish breaks through the net: Sven Norrman and the Holocaust. *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, Volume 14, pp. 295-305.

² Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, p. 3.

De Gaulle's Free French in London, 'I knew but I did not believe. And because I did not believe I did not know'.³

Dariusz Stola attempted to explain the 'mystery' of the Poles' silence by suggesting that the information contained in the Rowecki telegram was too brief, it flashed past among many different telegrams and failed to capture the attention of the officials who read it. Stola regards himself as being among those historians who are somewhat doubtful (*'powątpiewających'*) about the 'hypothesis of a Polish conspiracy of silence which sought to conceal the news of the Jewish tragedy'. Like Stola, such historians try to explain the silence by seeing it as the result of an inability to accept news that the mass extermination of the Jews is actually something that is happening, as well as an 'inability to grasp the terrible truth from isolated fragments of information'.⁴ But the most recent study of the Rowecki telegram suggests something very different. It was, in fact, given full attention, its importance was fully recognised, it was read by the staff at Department VI dealing with message handling, it was circulated among senior officials of two ministries (interior and foreign affairs) and there is good evidence that it was read by the commander-in-chief's staff.⁵ This just deepens the mystery of the Poles' silence until the November 24 announcement: why did they remain silent? Why conceal? What motivation, be it political, ideological, nationalist or otherwise, caused the Polish Government to conceal what it knew about the Warsaw Ghetto deportations?

In broad terms, it will be argued here that despite the Rowecki telegram the Polish government did not fully understand the enormity of the mass murder perpetrated during the Warsaw ghetto deportations until after the arrival of key reports on November 13. Until that time, news from other sources was regarded as unconfirmed, requests sent to Warsaw asking for the latest information were sincere

³ During the war Raymond Aron was the editor of 'France Libre' in London. Many years later he tried to explain what he knew about the Holocaust during the war: '*J'ai su mais je ne l'ai pas cru. Puisque je ne l'ai pas cru, je ne l'ai pas su*'. Claude Lanzmann quotes Aron in the introduction to his 2010 film *Le Rapport Kariski*. It must be added however, that Protasewicz's annotation to the Rowecki telegram emphasises the fact that it clearly originates from a most credible source, i.e. from Rowecki, and so the information in it must be believed to be true. The problem of 'believing the unbelievable' will be discussed in Chapter 13..

⁴ Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada.*, p. 179: '*Historycy ci... szukają wyjaśnienia w niewierze w informacje o masowej eksterminacji Żydów i niemożności odczytania strasznej prawdy z fragmentarycznych informacji*'.

⁵ Adam Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, p. 513-518.

in the sense that they were not sent by people who already knew the facts. Although it is difficult to accept, the source material, the October 16 report especially, strongly suggests that the Polish government simply did not have a full picture of what was happening in the Warsaw ghetto during the time of the deportations.

To make this case, we need to closely examine the view that the ‘official silence’ of the Polish government was the result of a policy of concealment.

5.1 *The Engel hypothesis*

David Engel suggests that on the basis of what he takes as at least ten documented facts about the Polish Government’s attitude towards the Jews in 1941-42, we can make ‘inferences’ which provide a ‘highly credible’ explanation for what he calls the Polish Government’s ‘official silence’.⁶ Engel suggests that the Polish Government acted in accordance with its belief that information about the suffering of the Jews should not overshadow information about the suffering of Poles, that a concern about a ‘competition in suffering’ explains the silence of the Polish Government between August 25 and November 24. This principle, he argues, guided the government’s information policy whose aim was to direct the attention of Poland’s Western allies towards the brutal reality of the German occupation in Poland in which both the Jews and the Poles suffered. However, he argues, the government’s priority, was the suffering Poles and not the Jews, so it needed to find ways in which information about suffering Polish Jews could be presented as one about suffering Poland:

With regard to information about the Jewish situation, it [the Polish Government] was guided to a significant extent by the notion that the Western Allies might be more sensitive to the Jewish than to the Polish plight. On one hand, this situation could be exploited by the Polish Government in order to attract the attention of the Allied public and governments to information about the brutal nature of the Nazi occupation regime in Poland, which affected not only Jews but Poles as well. On the other hand, the supposed greater Allied sensitivity to Jewish suffering presented

⁶ David Engel, *Readings and Misreadings*, p. 366-369. In this article, Engel elaborates the arguments he presented in his book, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*. The article is a response to Dariusz Stola’s criticism of Engel’s book.

the danger that news about it would overshadow the peril facing the larger Polish population.⁷

The Poles wanted to make use of this perceived ‘greater Allied sensitivity’ by ensuring that information about the Jewish situation was placed in an appropriate Polish context, ‘publications that focused *exclusively* upon Jews or that encouraged the consideration of the Jewish situation *in isolation* from the plight of all inhabitants of Poland were to be discouraged’. The key principle to be followed was that ‘the benefit of the majority Polish population required that Allied awareness of its suffering not be overshadowed by the plight of the Jews’.⁸

Engel emphasises that this principle is not necessarily ‘anti-Jewish’, it is rather ‘pro-Polish’; an information policy which is concerned with what is in the Poles’ interest is not necessarily ‘anti-Jewish’ even when, objectively, it works against the interest of Polish Jews.⁹ The silence of the Polish Government, Engel argues, was thus the result of an information policy which treated news about the tragic fate of Polish Jews as a means for focusing the attention of its Western Allies on the fate of occupied Poland. However, when such news was *exclusively* about Polish Jews this policy prescribed silence, and when it was already released by other sources, it prescribed a limited release of minor news items.¹⁰

The messages about the Warsaw ghetto deportations which began arriving from the end of July 1942 contained just such news; the information about *Grossaktion Warschau* and mass murder was exclusively about Jews. The Polish Government was concerned that the attention of its Western Allies would be diverted away from Polish issues and in accordance to its information policy, it remained silent. According to Engel, this silence lasted almost three months: ‘Over four months after the deportations from Warsaw had begun and over eleven weeks after they had come to an end, the Polish government finally broke its official silence’.¹¹

⁷ Ibid p. 368-369.

⁸ Ibid., p. 369.

⁹ Ibid. p. 371.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 369.

¹¹ Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*, p. 198.

The ‘official silence’ is understood here as the Polish government’s concealment of the knowledge it had about the Warsaw ghetto deportations. Engel’s hypothesis about the government’s information management policy is intended to explain why it remained silent until November 24. But it is also a hypothesis which aims to explain why it ‘broke its official silence’ on that day. Why did the Polish government decide to reveal on November 24 what it knew about since August 25 at the latest? Engel’s proposed explanation brings us back to Karski:

...the news that the government had possessed at least since 25 August about the extent of the deportations from Warsaw and the fate of the deportees appears to have been released only following Karski’s arrival in London most probably not so much because Karski brought significant new information (in fact he added only minor details to what was already known) (...) but mainly because Karski had been charged with delivering his information to circles over which the Polish Government had no control.¹²

The Polish government’s ability to control information about Poland is a key element of Engel’s hypothesis. He argues that when it was the main source of news about what is happening in Poland, it could highlight some pieces of news and tone down or say nothing about others, it could decide whether, when and how the news was to be released. However, when such news was released by other, non-Polish sources its ability to control it was greatly reduced. Engel’s explanation of why the Polish government decided to break its ‘official silence’ on November 24 sees Karski’s arrival in London as a confirmation of this hypothesis. According to Engel, he did not bring any information about which the government had not previously known; the official statements and press releases made on that day about the Warsaw ghetto deportations only *appeared* to announce news which had very recently been received from Poland. In fact, the government had known the facts nearly three months earlier: the information Karski brought ‘added only minor details to what was already known’. However, his arrival brought about the end of the ‘official silence’ because it was known that he had a mandate to talk to the Jewish representatives of the Polish National Council, specifically to Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart, who belonged to ‘circles over which the Polish Government had no control’. The assumption is that Karski could not be stopped from talking to them

¹² Engel, *Readings and Misreadings*, p. 370.

because he was carrying out a Polish underground state instruction which could not be interfered with. Once he had talked to Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart they in turn could not be prevented from passing on the dire and now fully authenticated news to Jewish organisations such as the World Jewish Congress (where Schwarzbart was an active member), the Bund (where Zygielbojm played a senior role) and the many other contacts they had in Western press and politics. Engel's hypothesis is that when on November 24 the Polish Government decided to release news about the tragedy of Jews in occupied Poland, it did so as a reaction to such news being released by somebody else and because it wanted to pre-empt others by releasing the news in a certain way.

5.2 November 24, 1942

Let us now return to the moment when the Polish government, as Engel put it, 'broke its official silence', when it released the Report of November 24, 1942. The date is important because it allows us to test Engel's hypothesis. By making the Report public, was the Polish government reacting to information already released by others? Did it perhaps want to pre-empt others because it expected that the information contained in this report would soon be released from other sources?

Engel is right in saying that as part of his mission, Karski was obliged to convey a report passed on to him by the Jewish resistance leaders in Warsaw to their representatives in London, Schwarzbart and Zygielbojm, and that the Polish government did not have any control over the information contained in that report from the moment when they in turn passed it on to Jewish organisations.¹³ In an important internal report written by Karski a few days after his arrival in London Karski states: 'I received a mandate from the following organisations in Poland (*'ośrodków w Kraju'*)' and here he lists, among others, 'the Bund (in the name of all Jewry)'; he notes also that he has been 'instructed to speak officially with the following persons', and here he gives a numbered list of names of people he has

¹³ Engel, *Readings and Misreadings*, p. 368: „Karski's mission required him to report not only to the Polish Government but also to Schwarzbart, Zygielbojm, and Jewish leaders in Great Britain” and the already cited p. 370: „Karski had been charged with delivering his information to circles over which the Polish Government had no control”.

been mandated to speak to, the list includes ‘9. Zygielbojm, 10. Dr Schwarzbart’, the two Jewish members of the National Council. The problem is that this document, which will be examined in detail in the next chapter, was written by Karski two days after his release from British detention on November 28 where, as we saw, he was placed immediately upon his arrival in England. Thus he did not have an opportunity to ‘speak officially’ with anyone before November 28, his interrogation with an MI19 agent was clearly not such an opportunity and in fact, as we saw in the subsequent MI19 report, he refused to say anything to his interrogator until members of the Polish government were present on November 27. The Polish government, however, released its Report one day before his arrival in London, on November 24, and it seems highly improbable that its decision to release the Report was in any way dependent on Karski’s arrival in London next day or on what Karski was to write in his note nearly a week later. It is especially significant here that no courier had ever brought a report directly from the Jewish resistance in Warsaw to its representatives in London.¹⁴

It is therefore unlikely that Karski’s arrival in London could have been the trigger for the release of the Report by the Polish government on November 24. However, an important set of materials identified as ‘Witold’s post’, *poczta Witolda*, and thus associated with Karski, arrived in London on November 13 and as we will see, it contained the key reports on the extermination of the Jews. We can safely assume that whatever the content, in the days after November 13 when ‘Witold’s post’ was received and read in London by the Polish government, the information contained in these materials remained under its control. The government could have refrained from making this information public if it so wished, it could have continued to remain silent and conceal it as Engel and others argue it had been doing since at least August 25. At this stage however, we want to test the hypothesis that the Polish government ‘broke its official silence’ on November 24 because of external pressure or because of circumstances over which it had no control. Where did this external pressure come from? What circumstances led the government to break its silence just then? Karski’s arrival and the meetings he had with Zygielbojm

¹⁴ I am grateful to Dariusz Libionka for suggesting this important point.

and Schwarzbart¹⁵, with whom he spoke in an ‘official’ capacity, might be construed as such circumstances but they occurred on December 2, over a week after the release of the Report of 24 November.

Let us return to page 10 of the November 25 edition of the *New York Times* and its three separate reports about the extermination of the Jews.¹⁶ As we noted in Chapter 4, each appears to originate from sources which seem independent of each other: there is news about a report issued the day before by the Polish government in London, an announcement by Stephen Wise in Washington that was also made the day before, and information from Jerusalem about testimonies made by refugees returning to Palestine. Did the Polish government issue the Report of 24 November because it knew something about the meeting between Stephen Wise and the US undersecretary of state Sumner Welles, or about the news from Jerusalem?

According to Michael Fleming, the press conference which Stephen Wise called in Washington in the evening of November 24 just after his meeting with Welles ‘signalled to the Polish government that the information it possessed about German actions against Jews now had the possibility of being received by its allies’.¹⁷ Fleming argues that the explanation for the ‘official silence’ of the Polish government about the Jewish tragedy was its ‘subscription to the Allied propaganda and censorship policy rather than any specifically Polish policy of concealing information’. In other words, the Poles knew but remained silent not because, as Engel suggests, they wanted to conceal news of Jewish suffering which might overshadow Polish suffering, but rather because they followed the Allied policy on news management and censorship. Fleming argues that when Stephen Wise held his Washington press conference the Poles received a signal that the policy had changed:

On 24 November Wise was able to publicly reveal that Sumner Welles had authenticated the information received by Riegner. The authority of the State Department was thereby attached to the claims made in the Riegner telegram and subsequent reports. This altered the discursive landscape in which news of the extermination of Europe’s Jews was situated.¹⁸

¹⁵ Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada*, p. 172. Stola cites Schwarzbart’s diary entry for December 2, 1942.

¹⁶ See above, Chapter 4, Section 4.2.

¹⁷ Fleming, *Auschwitz*, p. 110.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

There is a serious problem with this explanation. Stephen Wise's meeting with Sumner Welles was on November 24 and his press conference took place that evening. The Polish government released the Report of 24 November on the same day. This means that the press conference called by Wise in Washington in the evening of the 24th occurred after the release of the Report in London on the same day, and if we allow for the five hour time difference between London and Washington it seems reasonable to assume that when Wise's press conference concluded sometime in Washington on the evening of the 24 it was already November 25 in London. In other words, the release of the Report of 24 November could not have been in some way dependent on Wise's press conference. Fleming is right to argue that the increased activity of the Polish government in the campaign leading up to the December 17, 1942 Allied declaration was influenced in some part by the State Department's confirmation of the Riegner telegram. It was certainly much influenced by the pressure from Jewish organisations. However, the start of this activity on November 24, the day when the Polish government 'broke its official silence' does not seem to be a reaction to a 'signal' sent via Wise's press conference. By London time, that 'signal' was most likely sent on the next day, November 25.

Let us now look at the third article on page 10 of the November 25 edition of the *New York Times*. In 'Details Reaching Palestine' we read about information received in Jerusalem on the 'methods by which the Germans in Poland are carrying out the slaughter of Jews' and that the slaughter is part of 'planned action that Gestapo Chief Heinrich Himmler had prepared and ordered to be carried out when he visited Warsaw at the end of June'. The article later refers to this as 'the Himmler program'.¹⁹ Could this information be the reason why Sumner Welles decided to confirm the authenticity of the Riegner telegram to Stephen Wise? Could it explain why the Polish government decided to 'break its official silence'? We know that this information came primarily from Jews who were part of an exchange which involved Germans detained in Palestine and who arrived there on November 16. Their testimonies were recorded on the 18-19 November by officials of the Jewish Agency who presented a report to the Agency on November 20 (the Dobkin report). The Jewish Agency released an official announcement on November 23 in which it

¹⁹ *New York Times*, November 25, 1942, p. 10, 'Details Reaching Palestine'.

stated that it ‘has received, from authoritative and reliable sources, detailed reports on murders and massacres carried out against Polish Jews and against Jews from Central and Western Europe who had been deported to Poland’. It continues with a reference to what the *New York Times* article called ‘the Himmler program’:

According to these reports, the Nazi authorities in Poland, after a visit by the head of the Gestapo, Himmler, in June 1942, embarked on the systematic annihilation of the Jewish people in the cities and towns of Poland.²⁰

The announcement also stated that ‘the Jewish Agency Executive discussed these reports in its meeting yesterday’: it agreed the text on November 22 and released the announcement a day before Stephen Wise met Sumner Welles. Is this a coincidence? After an examination of original documents filed in the Department of State archives, David Wyman concluded that the meeting in Washington was the result of a steady accumulation of reports and information sent from the American consulate in Bern, Switzerland. On November 23 the State Department received a telegram from the Leland Harrison, its consul in Bern, who sent yet another confirmation of the Riegner telegram, this time from a senior director of the International Red Cross. As Wyman puts it, the number of accumulated further confirmations and additional evidence was now sufficient: Welles sent a telegram to Wise and the meeting took place the next day.²¹ If Wyman’s analysis of these source documents is correct, the arrival in Washington of information brought to Jerusalem by the Palestinian exchangees was not the reason why the meeting took place. The Department of State confirmed the Riegner telegram to Wise on the basis of information it had received from Switzerland, not from Jerusalem

²⁰ On the Palestinian exchangees, see also, Fleming, *Auschwitz*, p. 158–160. The text of the Jewish Agency announcement is at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Haaretz112342.html> (accessed 1 March 2016). More about the exchangees in a context relevant to this study: Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, p. 190–194; Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, p. 88–92; David Engel, *Facing a Holocaust*, especially notes 8 i 20 (p. 196 i 198).

²¹ Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, p. 78.

5.3 *November 14 to 24, 1942*

Did the information about the Palestinian exchangees influence the Polish government's decision to release the Report on November 24? David Engel suggests that it did and he writes that on the day when the Jewish Agency released its statement (November 23), the government could no longer remain silent:

[the] group of Jewish exchangees from Poland had arrived in Palestine and offered their eyewitness testimony concerning what the Germans were doing to Jews on Polish soil. The essence of their tale was released to the press by the Jewish Agency on 23 November [...]. Once this news was published, the [Polish] government could no longer continue to draw the curtain over its own knowledge.²²

Let us look more closely at some additional details surrounding the release of the Polish government Report of 24 November. As already mentioned, we are assuming that the report was based on some as yet unidentified documents from Poland which arrived in London some time before Karski. Although it is theoretically possible, it seems unlikely that immediately after learning about the Jewish Agency's November 23 announcement the Polish government rushed to prepare a summary in English of these documents and called a press conference the next day. Even if we ignore for a moment the volume of documents which had arrived, we can assume that processing them must have taken some time, they needed to be decrypted if they were not in clear text, their content had to be allocated a security clearance level, some of the content had to be censored or redacted to protect the identity of members of the Polish underground, etc.

The arrival date of the materials which the Report was based on is important here and there are sources which provide some clues on the impact these materials had inside the Polish government. Particularly important are the records of encrypted telegrams or dispatches which were exchanged in the middle of November between the Polish ministry of foreign affairs (MSZ, *Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych*) and the Polish consul in Tel Aviv, Henryk Rosmarin. We also have a very important entry in Schwarzbart's diary for November 16. These documents suggest that in the middle of November the Polish government received a large set of materials containing reports which opened its eyes on the Jewish tragedy taking

²² Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*, p. 198.

place in Poland. When these materials arrived in London, officials assumed that this was ‘Witold’s post’, ‘*poczta Witolda*’, the set which Karski (pseudonym ‘Witold’) took from Warsaw sometime in late September.

The Rosmarin telegram to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ) and the reply sent by the Polish foreign minister, Edward Raczyński, are regarded by some historians as yet another example of how the Polish government concealed information about the Warsaw ghetto deportations.²³ On November 10 Rosmarin sent an encrypted radio dispatch (nr. 74) from Tel Aviv to the Foreign Minister, Raczyński, in which he asked, ‘Is it true that the Germans have deported all the Jews from the Warsaw ghetto so that only 100,000 are left. If so please provide details.’. He was passing on ‘an urgent request from the Representation of Polish Jewry’.²⁴ Rosmarin waited for 11 days and because he did not receive a reply to what was clearly an urgent query he sent a follow-up telegram (75a), in which he asked the minister to hurry up with an answer.²⁵ This telegram reached the MSZ in London on November 23. But it crossed with a telegram containing Raczyński’s reply to the question in telegram 74: ‘So far, this news is not yet confirmed. We are making efforts to obtain credible information. Raczyński’.²⁶ Engel seems to suggest that this telegram contained Raczyński’s reply on November 23 to a question asked by Rosmarin two weeks earlier, on November 10, the assumption being that if

²³ Wood and Jankowski (endnote on p. 288 to p. 146 of the main text), somewhat hesitantly, summarise and accept Engel’s argument: ‘The Poles’ decision to release Karski’s information may not have been entirely independent of events in Palestine. On November 23, Foreign Minister Raczyński had responded to an urgent query from the Representation of Polish Jewry in Palestine by cabling that the government could not confirm the evacuation of the Warsaw Ghetto (Engel, *ibid.* p. 197). It is most unlikely that Raczyński was unaware of the information Karski had sent. Possibly he was stalling for time in the hope of obtaining more details from Karski when he arrived. Whatever the Poles’ motives were for withholding the information, they may have been forced to release it by the publicity given to the Palestinian exchangeers’ reports beginning on November 23.’

²⁴ HIA, MSZ collection, Box 611, Folder 21. Available online: <http://www.szukajwarchiwach.pl/800/42/0/-/611>, scan 539.jpg. Direct access to scan: <http://www.szukajwarchiwach.pl/800/42/0/-/611/skan/full/roQAJ2KO5I-uZuIRTNboIq> (accessed March 4, 2016). The telegram is addressed directly to the minister, the Polish text reads: ‘*Na usilną prośbę Reprezentacji Żydostwa Polskiego proszę o telegraficzną odpowiedź, czy prawdziwą jest wiadomość prasowa, że Niemcy wysiedlili wszystkich żydów (sic) z Ghetta warszawskiego, tak, że zostało tylko 100.000. Jeżeli tak, proszę o szczegóły. Rosmarin*’.

²⁵ HIA, *ibid.* scan 520.jpg. ‘*Proszę o telegraficzną odpowiedź na telegram szyfrowy Nr. 74, proszę przyspieszyć odpowiedź. Rosmarin*’.

²⁶ HIA, *ibid.*, scan 540.jpg. ‘*Receptus 74*’ (reply to telegram no. 74): ‘*Wiadomość dotąd niepotwierdzona. Czynimy starania dla uzyskania wiarygodnych informacji. Raczyński*’.

Rosmarin had asked that question in Raczyński's office in London on November 23 he would have received the answer contained in that telegram.

When we look closely at the radiogram of Raczyński's reply, i.e. at the original document which was submitted by the Foreign Ministry for encryption and dispatch to the Polish consulate in Tel Aviv, we can see that it bears a number of dates and that it also has a handwritten annotation. It was received by the Polish consulate in Tel Aviv on November 23 and this is why it is identified as 'Raczyński's telegram of November 23', but it was dispatched from London five days earlier on November 18. What is significant however is the handwritten annotation which makes it evident that Raczyński's reply was discussed with Mikołajczyk's Ministry of Internal Affairs who advised him that they have sent a telegram to Poland asking the Polish underground organisation to confirm the news about the Warsaw ghetto. The annotation, which has an (illegible) initial and is dated November 14, reads: 'In consultation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs who telegraphed a request to the organisation in the Homeland to check this information'.²⁷ The text of the telegram needs to be read together with the annotation. In his reply, Raczyński says that news about the deportations cannot be confirmed and that efforts are being made to obtain credible information from Poland; this is the text that is intended for Rosmarin. The annotation is an internal memo which explains that it is the Ministry of Interior which is making these efforts. The annotation is dated November 14 which must also be the date of Raczyński's response to Rosmarin. In examining this, we must also take into account the procedures which Raczyński's Foreign Affairs department, like the other departments, had to follow when it sent telegrams: it had to send the text of the telegram on a completed radiogram form to the Encryption Section (*Wydział szyfrów*) of Department VI where the text was encrypted and then sent on to be dispatched in accordance with some order of priority.²⁸ It seems reasonable to

²⁷ With the abbreviations expanded the Polish text of the annotation on the Raczyński reply radiogram reads, '*W porozumieniu z Ministerstwem Spraw Wewnętrznych, które poleciło telegraficznie organizacji krajowej sprawdzenie informacji*'.

²⁸ On the Encryption Group see Siemaszko, Z. S., 2011. *Łączność i Polityka*. 2nd ed. Lublin: Norbertinum.

assume that the date of the annotation, November 14, is also the date of Raczyński's reply to Rosmarin's November 10 telegram.

If that is so then the annotation together with the text of the reply tells us something very significant: when deciding on the reply to Rosmarin's query, the Polish government's foreign minister, Edward Raczyński, did not have current information about the Warsaw ghetto deportations, or at least he did not yet have information which he regarded as credible. He therefore passed the query to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, headed by Mikołajczyk, who in turn, according to the handwritten annotation, telegraphed the query to the underground agencies in Poland with a request to confirm the information Rosmarin had received in Tel Aviv. This would suggest that in the middle of November 1942, nearly two months after the Warsaw ghetto deportations came to an end, Mikołajczyk's ministry of internal affairs was still not yet fully aware that nearly 300,000 Jewish citizens of the Polish republic had been murdered in Warsaw by Nazi Germany in a massacre which lasted two months.

A handwritten annotation on a very similar telegram sent on November 12 by the Polish consul in Stockholm, Tadeusz Pilch, may be taken as another indication that the Polish government simply did not know about the Warsaw deportations. The telegram was received in London on November 13 and like the one by Rosmarin, it requests the Foreign Affairs ministry to confirm news received from Jewish organisations: 'Jewish circles in Sweden have received information about the complete removal of the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto. Please confirm this information. Pilch'. Once again there is a handwritten annotation, added on November 14, which suggests that the Foreign Affairs Ministry is unable to confirm this news but perhaps the Internal Affairs ministry can: 'Does the Ministry of Internal Affairs have any information about this matter?'.²⁹

²⁹ HIA, MSZ collection, Box 611, Folder 21. Pilch to MSZ, Sent 12/11/1942, Received 13/11/1942. Available online: <http://www.szukajwarchiwach.pl/800/42/0/-/611>, scan 538.jpg. (accessed March 5, 2016). The Polish text reads: 'Szwedzkie koła żydowskie otrzymały wiadomość o całkowitym usunięciu ludności z Ghetta warszawskiego. Proszę o potwierdzenie tej wiadomości. Polmission. Pilch'. The handwritten annotation reads: 'Czy M[inisterstwo] S[praw] Wewn[ętrznych] ma wiadomości jakieś w tej sprawie?'. David Engel refers to this telegram but not to the handwritten annotation (*In the Shadow of Auschwitz*, p. 197).

We return to the basic question which was raised earlier: by mid-November, did the Polish government know about this tragedy but concealed this knowledge? Or did it simply not know about the deportation or refused to accept that it had occurred? Recall Protasewicz's handwritten annotation on the Rowecki August 25 telegram: 'do not reveal to unofficial circles'. In other words, it should not be revealed to people outside the ministries or at least to officials below a certain senior level. In the case of Raczyński's telegram from mid-November we are not dealing with 'unofficial circles'. The annotation on it is intended for the 'official circles' within the Foreign Ministry, and it in turn makes a reference to their colleagues in the Ministry of Internal Affairs who promised to pass on the query to their counterparts in the resistance agencies of occupied Poland. The annotation refers to an internal communication which must have taken place at a senior level between two ministries. It included the foreign minister, Raczyński, and the request which was subsequently sent to Poland must have carried some ministerial authority. These are internal communications at a senior level between different ministries within the Polish government; such communication would have no sense if the information about the Warsaw ghetto had also been concealed from the most senior officials of these key ministries.

Treating Raczyński's reply to Rosmarin in a Foreign Ministry telegram received at the Polish consulate in Tel Aviv on November 23 as the answer given by Raczyński on that very day, David Engel suggests that this answer was insincere and duplicitous: Raczyński's reply to Rosmarin was a denial that the Polish government knew about the Warsaw ghetto deportations. Engel rejects this: 'The denial was disingenuous. Although the government may not have received any precise estimate of the numbers remaining in the ghetto, it certainly had sufficient information to permit it to respond affirmatively'.³⁰ We would need to accept that this denial was insincere if Raczyński claimed on November 23, one day before the announcement of the Report of 24 November, that the news about the numbers remaining in the Warsaw ghetto is 'so far unconfirmed' (*'jak dotąd niepotwierdzone'*); in fact we would be justified in asking questions not only about his sincerity but also about his

³⁰ Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*, p. 197.

cynicism and dishonesty. This would also be the case with Mikołajczyk and his ministry of internal affairs: on November 9 Mikołajczyk sent a telegram to Poland with a query which came from Zygielbojm. As a representative of the Bund on the National Council in London, Zygielbojm was concerned about the fate of his colleagues in Warsaw. The text of the telegram uses a pseudonym, ‘Josek’s father’, to refer to Zygielbojm: ‘Josek’s father is asking the Bund for new reports. He asks how many of the active Bund members have suffered, and if seven thousand are still being deported daily?’.³¹ Referring to this telegram, Dariusz Stola comments that when we read it, we have to assume that ‘Mikołajczyk would not send to Poland queries to which he knew the answers’. Mikołajczyk’s November 9 telegram as well as the one sent by Raczyński on November 14 (which arrived in Tel Aviv on the 23rd) seem to confirm, as Stola puts it, the assumption that even as late as mid-November officials of the Polish government in London knew ‘astonishingly little’ about the fate of the Warsaw ghetto.³² It is an ‘astonishing’ assumption because it seems increasingly difficult to accept as the evidence for it accumulates. Stola puts the question succinctly: could it really be the case that in mid-November the knowledge which the Polish government had about the fate of the Warsaw ghetto ‘was limited to nine sentences sent from Warsaw three months earlier?’.³³

5.4 *The Schwarzbart Diary, November 16, 1942*

These internal Polish government telegrams and their annotations strongly suggest, as Dariusz Stola put it, that as late as November 14, 1942 both the Foreign and the Internal Affairs ministries of the Polish government were genuinely not able to confirm news originating from ‘Jewish sources’ about the tragedy of the Warsaw ghetto. Two days later however, on November 16, there occurred what seems like a dramatic transformation which we can observe in part through an entry for that day in the Ignacy Schwarzbart diary. This important diary entry has been interpreted by

³¹ Quoted in Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada*, p. 169. Polish text: ‘Ojciec Joska [Zygielbojm] prosi Bund o nowe sprawozdania. Zapytuje, kto z czynnych działaczy Bundu ucierpiał, czy w dalszym ciągu deportuje się siedem tysięcy dziennie?’.

³² Stola, *ibid.*: ‘Depesza Mikołajczyka z 9 listopada 1942 r. potwierdza przypuszczenia, że w polskim Londynie wiedza o losie getta była zaskakująco niewielka’.

³³ Stola, *ibid.*: ‘można dojść do wniosku, że cała ich wiedza o losie getta ograniczała się do dziewięciu zdań, wysłanych z Warszawy przed trzema miesiącami’.

historians in different ways, depending on how they view the concealment hypothesis. For some it shows that the Polish government knew but remained silent about the Warsaw ghetto deportations for months, others read it as evidence that it was on or just before November 16 that the government finally grasped the enormity of the crime being perpetrated by Nazi Germany against the Jews in occupied Poland.³⁴

Let us begin with a brief summary of Schwarzbart's November 16 diary entry.³⁵ He begins by explaining that two days earlier he had received news about the situation in Poland from the Jewish Agency and he wanted to confirm this with officials in the Polish government's ministry of interior.³⁶ Once again we have news originating from Jewish sources except that this time the 'urgent request' for a confirmation is directed not to 'official circles' within the Polish government but to a Jewish member of the Polish National Council. We can describe Schwarzbart as attached to Polish government 'circles' (because he was a member of the Council), but not to the 'official circle' (because he was not a senior member of the government). It can be assumed, however, that as a member of the National Council he had direct access to people within the government and he could request meetings with the minister, in this case Mikołajczyk, the minister of internal affairs and deputy prime minister. He was a prominent politician in Poland and a member of the Polish parliament before the war and knew many people in the exiled government. On November 16 he wanted to confirm the Jewish Agency reports with Paweł Siudak, a senior official of the internal affairs ministry responsible for direct contacts with

³⁴ David Engel views Schwarzbart's diary entry as further evidence that the Polish government concealed what it knew about the Jewish tragedy unfolding in Poland. See especially Engel, *Readings and Misreadings*, pp. 368-369. Among other prominent historians who share Engel's interpretation of the diary entry are Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, see their *Unequal Victims*, pp. 70-71. By contrast, Dariusz Stola argues that the entry shows that, astonishing as it may seem, the Polish government was genuinely not fully informed about the scale of the Jewish tragedy, and especially about the Warsaw ghetto deportations, see Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada*, p. 171.

³⁵ Schwarzbart diary, November 16, 1942. Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), M2/751.

³⁶ According to Stola, (Cf Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada*, footnote on p. 170.) Schwarzbart received the Jewish Agency report on November 14th following a request made to the Agency by dr. Abraham Silberschein, a Zionist politician active in Poland in the 1930s whom Schwarzbart, a member of the Polish parliament at the time, must have known. During the war Silberschein was based in Geneva where he was a chairman of an organisation attempting to rescue Jews – Relief Committee for the War-Stricken Jewish Population (RELICO). He was also a representative of Joint in Europe. <http://www.spungenfoundation.org/archive/documents/frame09/f09.p05.pdf> (accessed March 10, 2016). See Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada*, footnote on p. 170.

occupied Poland.³⁷ From his diary entry we can see that Schwarzbart had many contacts within the ministry with whom he had informal talks before meeting Siudak and it was in these informal conversations that he was told about important news which had just arrived from Poland:

Szerer [the Bundist politician Emanuel Szerer] informed me that Director Nagórski told him about horrific news which arrived from Poland about mass murders in the Warsaw ghetto. He let me know that according to this information, at the moment confidential, only 140,000 Jews are left in the Warsaw ghetto, the rest have been deported and murdered. Ration cards are being distributed just to 100,000.³⁸

Note that Schwarzbart learned about the arrival of this ‘horrific news’ seemingly by chance. He contacted the Polish government in order to confirm news ‘sent to me by the Jewish Agency’³⁹ and it was because of his personal contacts that he happened to learn about stories circulating around the corridors of Stratton House, on Piccadilly Street in Central London, where the Polish government, along with many other exiled governments, had many of its offices. Schwarzbart wrote in his diary that after talking to Szerer he wanted to find out more about this ‘horrific news’. We can see that he is quite familiar with the hierarchy inside the ministry:

I rang immediately to Nagórski who confirmed this information. He did not want to give me the source claiming that to do that he would first need to get an authorisation. That being the case, I went to Siudak.⁴⁰

The fact that Nagórski needed an authorisation before he could reveal the sources for this information shows that although Schwarzbart knew his way around the ministry and had contacts there he was not inside the ‘official circles’, the authorisation had to come from someone at a more senior level, in this case Siudak:

Siudak confirmed the news and guessed that I received it from Szerer. He added that it is from the beginning of September and comes from the delegates [in Poland]. At this point the materials are being decrypted and he will be able to give me the

³⁷ Paweł Siudak was a close associate of the minister, Mikołajczyk, and was a head of the social affairs department (*Wydział Społeczny*) at the Ministry of Interior. We will meet him again two weeks later, on November 28th, when he accompanies Karski after his MI19 detention and interrogation in Wandsworth, London. Siudak was Karski’s minder in the first few weeks after his arrival in London.

³⁸ Schwarzbart diary, November 16, 1942. Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), M2/75. Polish original in Appendix.

³⁹ Ibid. . Polish original in Appendix.

⁴⁰ Ibid:

relevant reports in two days. He confirmed that the reports contain accounts of a nightmare that exceeds everything that has happened before.⁴¹

After the meeting with Siudak Schwarzbart went one level up and spoke to the minister, Mikołajczyk: ‘Mikołajczyk confirmed Siudak’s information and told me that he will have the details in a few days’.⁴²

Schwarzbart’s diary entry for November 16, 1942 tells us how, almost by chance, he learned that materials containing ‘horrific news’ had very recently arrived in London. Their arrival was unofficially confirmed to him by the minister responsible for processing such newly-arrived information, Mikołajczyk. Two days earlier, on November 14, in consultation with Mikołajczyk’s ministry of internal affairs and hence, we assume, in consultation with Mikołajczyk himself, the Polish foreign minister Raczyński sent a telegram to the Polish consul in Tel Aviv, Rosmarin, stating that the information about the ghetto deportations is ‘so far unconfirmed’. Given that the annotation on that telegram was an internal memo or communication within the Polish government, and that as such it could not be part of an attempt to conceal its knowledge about the true scale of the Jewish tragedy to the outside world, we may assume that Raczyński’s November 14 telegram conveyed an astonishing but genuine lack of knowledge within the government about what was happening to the Jews in occupied Poland. On November 14 Raczyński’s foreign ministry as well as Mikołajczyk’s interior ministry could not confirm news about the extent of the Warsaw ghetto deportations. Two days later Schwarzbart records in his diary that officials in Mikołajczyk’s ministry told him about the arrival of new materials containing ‘horrific stories’ and that this was unofficially confirmed by the minister. This suggests that when Schwarzbart visited the ministry on November 16 the Polish government had just received the confirmation which it claimed not to have had two days earlier, on November 14, when Raczyński sent his telegram to Tel Aviv. Dariusz Stola’s conclusion about the exact date when these new materials arrived in London begins to look highly plausible: ‘if Raczyński’s reply is true then

⁴¹ Ibid. .

⁴² Ibid. Polish original in Appendix.

the new reports from Poland must have been read on November 14 or 15'.⁴³ In Chapter 10 we will look at evidence that the materials arrived in London on November 13.

5.5 *New information from Poland*

Was it Karski who carried the materials which had apparently just arrived in London? Were the reports containing the 'horrific news' which Schwarzbart heard about a part of 'Witold's post', the set of materials which Karski took from Warsaw? An important point here is that Karski's – or 'Witold's' – post was passed to Polish agents in France a month earlier, on October 5, and was put on a separate courier route through which, as Puławski recently established, it reached London on November 13. Puławski has also shown that Karski left Warsaw on September 27.⁴⁴ This fits in with the information which Schwarzbart received from Siudak who told him on November 16 that 'the news comes from the beginning of September' (see previous section). But it also means that the information was no longer current, it concerned events which occurred over two months earlier and this might explain why in his diary Schwarzbart writes that both Siudak and Mikołajczyk appeared to have been taken by surprise by these reports, they seemed embarrassed by their lack of knowledge about what had been happening to the Jews in Poland over the past months. Siudak told him that Mikołajczyk had sent a message to Poland requesting a full report on the current situation in the Warsaw and other ghettos. This was later confirmed by Mikołajczyk himself.

Gutman and Krakowski argue that Schwarzbart 'came to know the truth about the catastrophe not by reading some Polish document, but from a Jewish Agency report'.⁴⁵ We can assume that they were not referring to the report or communiqué which the Jewish Agency issued on November 23, which as we have

⁴³ Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada...*, p. 171 „jeśli odpowiedź Raczyńskiego była zgodna z prawdą – nowe sprawozdania z kraju musiały być odczytane 14 lub 15 listopada”.

⁴⁴ Fleming, *Auschwitz*, p. 148–152. Fleming has examined many of the courier movement messages tracing the route which Karski and the materials he carried from Warsaw took through occupied Europe in September–November 1942. Adam Puławski's 2018 book, *Wobec Niespotykanego w Dziejach Mordu* adds significant details and can be regarded as the most definitive account of Karski's route and the separate route used to deliver his materials to London. Puławski's study will be reviewed in detail in Chapter 10. Wood and Jankowski provided the basic account in their 1994 book *Karski: How one man tried to stop the Holocaust*.

⁴⁵ Gutman, Krakowski, *Unequal Victims*, p. 89.

seen was about the Palestinian exchange. In general terms, by the middle of November 1942 there were many reports about the Warsaw ghetto deportations and an accumulation of news about the mass murder and persecution of Jews by Nazi Germany.⁴⁶ What is striking about these reports however is that the destination of the deportations and the fate of the deportees was usually described as ‘unknown’. A typical example may be a report in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency’s (JTA) daily news bulletin for October 7, 1942:

GENEVA Oct. 6. (JTA) – Only about 100,000 Jews have been left by the Nazis in the Warsaw ghetto where only a few months ago 500,000 were concentrated, it was reliably reported here today on the basis of information reaching Switzerland from occupied Poland. Large-scale mass-deportations of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto have been going on during the last few months. The Jews are being deported to unknown destinations in devastated regions.⁴⁷

The need to confirm such news reports is obvious: the numbers cited suggest a vast scale of human suffering and the reference to deportations whose destination is ‘unknown’ suggests a fate worse than can be imagined. A confirmation obtained from the Polish government would be very significant not only because it came from an allied state but also because the government’s credibility was based on its extensive communication links with Poland. When he went to the offices of the Ministry of the Interior in Stratton House, Piccadilly, on November 16, 1942, Schwarzbart was exercising his right of access as a member of the Polish National Council and was seeking a confirmation of reports such as the one above from the JTA. The notion that the Polish government was concealing its knowledge about the extent of the Jewish tragedy would imply that its officials were under instructions not to reveal it to someone like Schwarzbart.

We can try to test the concealment hypothesis by looking again at Schwarzbart’s visit to the Polish ministry of interior on November 16, as described in his diary entry for that day. At first glance, it looks like the ministry officials informed Schwarzbart about the information just received from Poland and so there was no concealment, someone who was not a member of the inner circle but had a

⁴⁶ The classic work by Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, may be taken as a basic account of the many reports and testimonies which brought news of the Holocaust to the West before mid-November 1942.

⁴⁷ JTA Daily News Bulletin, Wednesday October 7, 1942. Available online on http://pdfs.jta.org/1942/1942-10-07_231.pdf, accessed March 19, 2016.

right of access to the government, was told about the ‘horrific news’ which had just arrived from Poland; it was still confidential and being processed. David Engel offers a different interpretation and notes instead that Schwarzbart’s visit is a good illustration of a general rule about how the Polish government would release news about the tragic fate of Jews in Poland: releasing such information, making it public, was a result of pressure applied by Jewish organisations or their representatives, such as Schwarzbart. In this case, argues Engel, ‘the [Polish] Government had not volunteered this information to Schwarzbart; rather a rumour of the existence of the information had been leaked unofficially to the Jewish representative, and he had confronted Siudak and Mikołajczyk with it’.⁴⁸ Here Engel is criticising an interpretation of the Schwarzbart visit proposed by Dariusz Stola who argued that ‘on 16 November the Minister of the Interior [i.e. Mikołajczyk] revealed information about the newly arrived reports of the fate of the Warsaw ghetto to the representative of the RŻP [*Rada Żydów Polskich* – Council of Polish Jews] Schwarzbart’ and ‘Schwarzbart was made privy to this information’.⁴⁹ Stola is clearly suggesting that the Polish government ‘revealed information’ to Schwarzbart without any pressure being applied, that it did so voluntarily.

A careful reading of the diary entry at first seems to support Engel’s interpretation. Schwarzbart went to the Polish ministry of the interior because he wanted to confirm a report which he received a few days earlier from the Jewish Agency. That report carried yet another important piece of news about the Warsaw ghetto deportations and about the situation of the Jews in Poland, but to Schwarzbart it still needed to be confirmed by the Polish government; that was the purpose of his visit. This changed dramatically when people in the ministry told him about ‘the horrific news which had just arrived from Poland’ and, as already mentioned, he seems to have learned about this by chance, through informal chats with officials he knew in the corridors of Stratton House. Quite unexpectedly therefore, there was an information leak and once it occurred the Polish government was forced to confirm it while expressing an interest in its source (‘Siudak confirmed this information and he guessed that I received it from Szerer’). Engel is right to claim that at this stage the

⁴⁸ Engel, *Readings and Misreadings*, p. 368–369, note. 23.

⁴⁹ Stola, D., 1994. In the Shadow of the Facts. *Polin*, Volume 8, pp. 330-344, p. 341.

new information was not released voluntarily, Schwarzbart learned about it by chance and Engel's account seems correct: 'a rumour of the existence of the information had been leaked unofficially to the Jewish representative' who then 'confronted Siudak and Mikołajczyk' who had no choice but to confirm news which they would have preferred to conceal. They had no choice for reasons explained in Engel's hypothesis: once it reached Schwarzbart it was no longer under the Polish government's control which had no means of preventing the 'Jewish representative' from passing it on. Which is exactly what Schwarzbart did on November 18, two days later, when he sent a telegram to the World Jewish Congress in New York. As quoted by Engel, the telegram stated that 'according [to] official reports... which arrived here some days ago,' 140,000 Jews had remained in the Warsaw ghetto at the beginning of September, 'with rations allowed for [one] hundred thousand only'. Schwarzbart added that this news 'was not for publication before my obtaining Government's permission'.⁵⁰ Engel's interpretation seems to confirm his concealment hypothesis: Mikołajczyk and Siudak did not intend to reveal this information to Schwarzbart, on the contrary, they wanted to conceal it from him. But when Schwarzbart, quite by chance, learned about the news all they could do was request that he holds back from making it public. He dutifully passed this request on to the World Jewish Congress where the request could be safely ignored. To Engel, Schwarzbart's 'not for publication' note 'strongly suggests deliberate government suppression of information',⁵¹ it shows that the Polish government sought to retain some control over the way this leaked information was going to be released.

There is another interpretation which may provide a more banal but likely explanation: the government did not want to reveal the information to Schwarzbart on November 16 because the new material had just arrived and was not yet made ready for release and publication.

5.6 Processing of newly-arrived materials

⁵⁰ Quoted in Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*, p. 197 and note 175. Engel adds that Laqueur dates the telegram on November 16th, 1942.

⁵¹ Ibid. note 175.

As was already noted, in his diary entry Schwarzbart records that he was told by Siudak that the materials are currently being decrypted and that he should expect to see some relevant reports in two days' time⁵² or on November 18. As Dariusz Stola notes, this fits in with a telegram sent by Mikołajczyk from the ministry of the interior in London on November 18 to the government delegate in Poland in which he writes that the materials or the 'post' from September has just arrived but the decryption is not yet complete.⁵³ If we accept that the materials arrived on November 13 and the decryption was still in progress on the 18th then it is reasonable to assume that it might have been completed on November 19 at the earliest, one day after Mikołajczyk's telegram. This would mean that the decryption task took at least five days. We know that radio telegrams had to be encrypted because they were broadcast using short wave radio frequencies and could be received by anyone with the right equipment. Messages sent in this way were relatively short and could be encrypted or decrypted quickly by teams such as those working in the Cipher Section of Department VI (*Wydział Szyfrów Oddziału VI*) of the Polish military. Our concern is with the materials which arrived in London on November 13 and we can assume that these included detailed reports and lengthy documents. Some of them must have been encrypted if the team charged with decrypting them was kept busy for five days. It is also important to note that the materials Karski took from Warsaw were microfilmed. It must have taken a few days to enlarge and type up the microfilmed reports which then needed to be put through some form of security review before any internal release.

The communication links between the exiled government and occupied Poland, the management of microfilms, encryption and the control of courier traffic is a wide and fascinating subject which is to a large extent – but not entirely –

⁵² See note 100, above

⁵³ Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada*, p. 171 and note 68. The Mikołajczyk letter, cited by Stola (AAN, 202/I-14, k. 64), is a five-paragraph ministerial note on official appointment issues and on the communication problems between the London government and the delegate's office in Poland. Mikołajczyk begins by explaining why the letter is not a response to the 'latest post': 'Dear Sir, It so happens that the last post (*ostatnia poczta*) from September arrived while this one was being prepared. I did not yet manage to decrypt it in full (*nie zdążyłem rozszyfrować całości*) and familiarise myself with the work done during the third quarter'. I am grateful to Adam Puławski for forwarding a copy of this letter.

peripheral to this study.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, on the basis of documents such as the Schwarzbart diary, the Mikołajczyk telegram to the government delegate in Poland, and from other sources, it can be assumed that the volume of materials which arrived in London on November 13 must have been relatively substantial, decryption and microfilm processing would have taken some days to complete. We do not know which materials were encrypted but we may speculate that those which concerned the ghetto did not have to be because they did not refer to the organisational structure and personnel of the Polish underground.⁵⁵ This may explain why the content of at least some of the materials dealing with the Jewish situation and the Warsaw deportations was known internally on November 16 when Schwarzbart visited the ministry. It is also worth noting that Zygielbojm – the Bundist representative on the National Council - was also told about these materials soon after Schwarzbart's visit because he informed his Bund colleagues in New York about them in a telegram he sent on November 18.⁵⁶ Once the decryption and microfilm processing phase was completed however, the materials were still not ready to be released, the decryption simply restored them to their original plain text format, they now had to be put through a censorship and security screening, then an editing and possibly a translation phase which produced reports such as that released on November 24. It is reasonable to assume here that preparing a large volume of material, from microfilm processing through decryption and then to censorship and editing, could take ten days especially if we take into account the resources available to the Polish government. And so Engel's suggestion that the Polish government did not want to disclose information about the ghetto on November 16 seems correct. But this does not necessarily mean that it intended to conceal this information, the unwillingness to disclose may simply have been due to the fact that the information was still being processed and made ready for distribution at least internally within the Polish government.

⁵⁴ A useful account of the radio telegraphy and encryption code management at Sections II and VI of the Polish General Staff is in Zbigniew Siemaszko, *Łączność i polityka 1939–1946*.

⁵⁵ I am grateful to Dariusz Libionka for suggesting this point.

⁵⁶ Cited in D. Blatman, 'On a mission against all odds: Zameł Zygielbojm in London (April 1942 – May 1943)', *Yad Vashem Studies*, 1990, no. XX. See also Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada.*, p. 171.

5.7 *Karski's materials: Witold's Post, 'Poczta Witolda' - 'over a thousand pages of print'*

On November 17 a telegram was sent by the head of Department VI of the Polish General Staff in London, Protasewicz, to Rowecki, the commander of the Polish resistance forces, ZWZ/AK, in Warsaw. Among many other duties, Protasewicz's department was responsible for managing the logistics of courier movements between Poland and London. Until recently, this telegram – which refers to Karski through his pseudonym 'Witold' - is usually cited as evidence that the materials which Karski took from Warsaw have arrived in London; it reads: 'Witold is in Lisbon. The post is in his headquarters' (*'Witold w Lizbonie; Poczta w jego Centrali'*), it is dated November 17 and was encrypted and sent the next day.⁵⁷ Officials in London confirmed to Warsaw that what they took to be Karski's materials reached their destination. It seems reasonable to assume that they arrived a few days earlier and as we will see in Chapter 12, the latest research by Adam Puławski has uncovered additional Polish government documents which provide strong evidence that the materials arrived in London on November 13.⁵⁸ Fleming and Puławski show that it is difficult to establish exactly where Karski was between November 13 and 17, we do know that he crossed the Franco-Spanish border on November 7 and boarded a plane bound for Great Britain in Gibraltar three weeks later on November 25. As far as Lisbon is concerned, Protasewicz was mistaken.⁵⁹

Our main focus however is on the materials which arrived in London from Warsaw, on what London called 'Witold's post', and here it is very unlikely that Protasewicz would have made a mistake: he confirmed in his telegram that it had

⁵⁷ SPP, A.3.8.3.1.1 (50).

⁵⁸ In his 2018 study *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordy"* Puławski has also established that the set of materials which arrived in London was a combination of two separate sets, one of which was Karski's and the other a set carried by some other, unidentified courier. This is important because it has a direct bearing on the question of whether the key reports about the Jewish tragedy were carried by Karski. Puławski has also shown that Karski was not in Lisbon at that time although his materials were sent from there. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 (Section 8.10).

⁵⁹ Fleming suggests that according to a route planned in September, Karski was to fly to London from Lisbon. when Protasewicz learned that he crossed the Franco-Spanish border on November 4th he assumed that he reached Lisbon on the 17th. But as recounted many years later, Karski's route through Spain to Gibraltar was managed by British and American intelligence. Fleming argues that Protasewicz would not have known about this, hence the reference to 'Lisbon', Fleming, *Auschwitz*, pp 150-151. Puławski provides additional details on Karski's planned as opposed to actual route through Spain.

arrived at the 'Centrala', the headquarters in London, and as the head of Department VI we can be fairly sure that he would have known about the decryption and other preparatory work which his team carried out on the contents of this 'post'. If no other such 'post' arrived in London soon before Schwarzbart's meeting with Mikołajczyk and Siudak on November 16 then the materials containing the 'horrific news which just arrived from Poland' which Schwarzbart referred to in his diary entry for that day, were included in 'Witold's Post'.

What do we know about the contents of 'Witold's Post'? We can start by trying to get some idea of the volume of materials contained in it.

In his 1944 American bestselling book, *The Story of a Secret State*, Karski wrote that he took with him rolls of Contax microfilms containing photographs of 'over a thousand pages of print' and that the microfilm rolls were hidden in the handle of a shaver.⁶⁰ It is understandable that for security reasons Karski would not want to reveal in a book published in 1944 exactly how rolls of microfilms were concealed by Polish couriers travelling across occupied Europe.⁶¹ Many years later, in the testimonies recorded by Wood and Jankowski between 1989 and 1992, Karski talked about a roll of microfilm hidden inside a house key. This is very similar to the account he gave in his earliest testimony, given to Claude Lanzmann in October 1978, where he mentions the microfilm, the key and what is significant for us at this point, the volume of the materials he took from Warsaw:

I did take mainly microfilm. The size was like American matches, some 3 matches put together. It was melted into a small key, and then melted back. My mission was to hold the key, completely unrecognisable. This I succeeded in carrying with me – I was never arrested that time. In London, when they developed that microfilm, it represented 400 typed pages. [...] Of course I had not the slightest idea of what was in that key.⁶²

⁶⁰ 'When I left for England I would carry more than one thousand pages of printed matter for the government on Contax films the size of two or three American matchsticks. This material would be concealed in the handle of a razor, so perfectly soldered that its concealment would be well-nigh undetectable'. Karski, *Story of a Secret State*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944, p. 340.

⁶¹ The most recent and best-documented research on Karski's key and microfilm has been published by Adam Puławski in Puławski, *Wobec "nieszpotykanego w dziejach mordy"*. This will be discussed in Chapter 10.

⁶² From the full, unedited transcript of the meeting between Lanzmann and Karski in Karski's apartment in Washington in October 1978, USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*. At the time, Lanzmann was assembling material for his film *Shoah* (1985). This part of the interview was not included in *Shoah* nor in *le Rapport Karski* (2010).

We thus have three similar and very general accounts by Karski himself on the volume of materials that made up ‘Witold’s post’ and on how Karski the courier carried this post from Warsaw: the ‘post’ contained a large number of documents, measured in hundreds of printed or typed pages, photographed on rolls of microfilm concealed in a personal item which a typical traveller might carry in 1942: a house key or a shaver. These details are important because they provide clues about what we might look for in archives and given the focus of this study one detail is particularly significant: it seems reasonable to assume that among the documents contained in what London called ‘Witold’s post’ there were those which contained information about the Jewish situation in Poland and the Warsaw deportations, reports used as the basis for the report of 24 November. These might also be the ones with the ‘horrific news’ which Schwarzbart heard about on November 16. We will try to identify these reports in Chapter 8.

The interviews which Karski gave to Lanzmann in 1978 or to Wood and Jankowski sometime around 1990 described events which had occurred many decades earlier. The 1944 book was written for a wide American audience at a time of war and both these factors conditioned the way it was written.⁶³ It is significant however that Karski told Lanzmann that he ‘had not the slightest idea of what was in that key’, with the many hundreds of microfilmed photographs of Polish underground documents hidden inside it. If that was the case then Karski’s role as a courier was similar to that of a postman carrying a bag of unopened letters. Unlike a normal postman, of course, he carried it through enemy territory, through German-occupied Europe, and risked his life while doing so. But it was a courageous act of a man who faced mortal danger on a mission to deliver the post bag and not any particular letter.

The problem is that Karski’s ‘not the slightest idea’ remark was made to Lanzmann in 1978, thirty-six years after the event. It is also is a remark which seems to run counter to a key element of the Karski story in which the courageous courier risks his life carrying a message bearing the terrible news about the Jews to the free world. The account given in the 1944 book, written less than two years after

⁶³ For details, see Karski’s 1944 report on the book, HIA Mikołajczyk Papers, Box 13 Folder 23.

the famous mission, tells us about the volume of materials contained in ‘Witold’s post’ (more than a thousand printed pages) but does not give us any information about the volume of those which dealt with the Jewish situation in Poland. We obviously need to allow for the fact that apart from the physical materials which made up the ‘post’ there was also the information which Karski had memorised back in Warsaw and presented verbally after his arrival in London. But, as will be argued in the next chapter, it is highly unlikely that he delivered any verbal reports in London before November 30. What he told his MI19 interrogator on November 27, when he was detained on arrival in England, was the first time he conveyed what he knew to the ‘free world’. This was a special case, of course, and as we saw in the MI19 report he was a relatively unimportant ‘Class C informant’ who was requested to answer specific questions asked by the MI19 officer.

On November 30, two days after being released from British detention, Karski wrote a confidential report in which he described the central purpose of his mission and the materials he carried from Warsaw. The report will be examined in some detail in the next chapter.

6 November 30, 1942: Karski's Note to the Polish Government

6.1 'The nature of my mission... is as follows'

Apart from the testimonies Karski gave to Lanzmann in 1978 and those he gave to Wood and Jankowski over a decade later, apart also from the brief reference he made to it in his 1944 book, Karski described the purpose of his mission and the materials he was carrying in a four-page, single-spaced, 1260-word typewritten report he wrote immediately after his release from British detention at 3pm on Saturday, November 28, 1942. The report is dated 'London, November 30, 1942' and it is signed by 'Jan Karski', its full title is 'Note to the Polish Government on Jan Karski's mission to London'.¹ We will refer to it here as 'the Note'. It was clearly intended to be a confidential report for the inner circle of the Polish government: there is a handwritten annotation, 'Most Secret' (*Najściślejsze tajne*) at the top of the first page in what appears to be the deputy prime minister Mikołajczyk's hand. The Note has already been cited briefly by historians studying Karski or the actions of the Polish Government in late November 1942, so it is not being presented here as an archival discovery.² The aim is to examine it in some detail because it tells us much about how Karski himself saw his mission in the days immediately after his arrival in London, and also because it contains Karski's own, somewhat general, description of the materials he took from Warsaw.

It seems reasonable to assume that the Note is as close as we can possibly get to what Karski thought at the time about the purpose of his wartime mission to London and about the materials he took with him from Warsaw. We can also expect that because it was written so soon after his arrival in London, the Note should give us clearer answers to the key questions we have been pursuing here: how did Karski himself see the purpose of his mission at the time? Was it to bring

¹ PISM, PRM 105, 'Notatka dla Rządu Polskiego Dotycząca misji Jana Karskiego w Londynie'.

² Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 149.

news of the Jewish catastrophe to the free world? Did he give any indication that among the documents and materials he took with him from Warsaw there were those which contained detailed accounts of the horrors of the ghetto deportations, documents which we believe may have been the basis for the Report of 24 November? How important were concerns about the Jews to Karski's mission? Was he required to meet Jewish leaders in London and convey messages from their counterparts in Poland?

To begin with, the Note clearly shows that when he arrived in London, Karski saw himself as an emissary rather than a mere courier. He writes in the Note that 'my role here is that of a courier',³ i.e. someone who carries materials to a specified destination and whose task is completed once the delivery is made. But we can take that as polite humility, he also makes a great effort to describe himself as an emissary who has been authorised to represent the leadership of the Polish underground state to the Polish government and political parties in London. His mission is 'official' in a sense that a courier's is not, he is bound by an oath. As we will see later, a significant part of his credibility was based on the general acceptance of this emissary role, first by the Polish government in London and then, when he himself became a part of the exiled government, by the senior allied leaders he talked to.

Let us focus first on the circumstances in which Karski wrote the Note and on the tone he adopted in it. The date of the Note, November 30 1942, is important because it suggests that Karski began writing it almost immediately – two days - after his release from MI19 detention in Wandsworth, South London, at 3pm on Saturday November 28. This is not a document he brought with him, we can be almost certain that Karski did not carry any documents when he arrived in London, he would have been searched by MI19 before being detained and, if found, any materials he might have carried would have been at least mentioned in the MI19 report which we already examined.⁴ The Note, therefore, must have been

³ Note, p. 3. '*Charakter mój tutaj jest charakterem kurierskim*'.

⁴ See Chapter 3, Section 3.4. In the interviews Karski gave to Wood and Jankowski in 1992, half a century later, Karski said that the MI19 officer, Major Malcolm Scott, speaking in fluent Polish, told Karski that he 'would not be personally searched, but his suitcase would be examined'. (Wood & Jankowski, p. 142).

drafted, dictated, edited, typed and proofread between late Saturday, November 28 and sometime on Monday, November 30. We cannot be certain about the length of time it took Karski to produce it but it must have taken a significant part of the two days after his release from British detention in mid-afternoon on the 28th. As reported by Wood and Jankowski, in 1992 Karski recalled that he was exhausted after the ordeal of a mission which we know lasted for nearly two months. It is important to add here that a significant feature of these later recollections, as recorded by others, is their clear suggestion that the central purpose of Karski's mission was to convey information about the Jewish tragedy to the leaders of the free world. Wood and Jankowski:

Paweł Siudak, the Polish interior ministry official (...) showed up to retrieve him [Karski] from the Patriotic School [where he had been detained]. At last Jan was free; at last he could begin carrying out his duties. But he was torn by conflicting emotions: the exhilaration of freedom, the annoyance of his detention by the British, the horror of what he had witnessed in Poland, and above all an awful sense of responsibility. The mental toughness that allowed Jan to press on with his tasks after enduring the horrors of the Ghetto and Izbica began to elude him.⁵

The references to 'what he had witnessed in Poland', 'the horrors of the Ghetto and Izbica' and ('above all') 'an awful sense of responsibility' clearly sets the stage for describing the primary purpose of Karski's mission. According to Wood and Jankowski, in the evening after Karski was taken from British detention to Siudak's apartment he was debriefed by deputy prime minister Mikołajczyk and here the recollection recorded by Wood and Jankowski fifty years after the event makes the key purpose of Karski's mission, as described in 1992, very clear. First, Karski told Mikołajczyk about messages dealing with Polish politics:

He [i.e. Karski] rattled off the names of Polish cabinet members from various parties to whom he was carrying messages, as well as other Poles like Tadeusz Bielecki, the extreme Nationalist leader in London who had been excluded from the coalition government and was a bitter enemy of Sikorski.

This was clearly not the important part of the mission: there was a message for an 'extreme Nationalist leader', the other messages were for Polish politicians whose names were 'rattled off'. Conveying these messages was important, it was part of his duty as a courier, but Karski insisted that this was 'only part of the story'. This

⁵ Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 147-149.

is how Wood and Jankowski describe what Karski told them in 1992 about what he said to Mikołajczyk on the evening of November 28, 1942:

These official missions were only part of the story, Jan insisted. There were other issues at stake, matters of life and death, “The Jewish leaders in Warsaw have begged me to approach the British government. Without their help the Jews will perish. I have to see Churchill!” he shouted. “Immediately! I have important information!” . He paced back and forth across the apartment floor, gesticulating wildly as he described the atrocities he had witnessed.⁶

At this point, according to Wood and Jankowski, Mikołajczyk and Siudak became concerned about Karski’s mental state and told him that he needed to rest. Next day (this would now be Sunday, November 29) he was taken by Siudak to the Polish church on Devonia Road, Islington, where he saw a priest and went to confession. Wood and Jankowski then state that Karski wrote the Note we are examining here on Monday, November 30: ‘Jan went to work the next day, Monday, November 30, dictating a detailed report on his missions to various political factions among the Poles’. We can be certain that this report was indeed the Note: Wood and Jankowski provide a direct quote from it, it is the passage we already cited which they translate as ‘My character is wholly that of a courier’,⁷ and it must have been produced in a few hours on Monday, November 30 1942. But in their account of what Karski recalled in 1992 the Note is presented as relatively unimportant:

Still in an agitated state psychologically, he hurried through this report [i.e. the Note] and began dictating another, on the extermination of the Jews. The stenographer, horrified by his bloodcurdling stories and flustered by his excited, rapid-fire delivery, asked him to speak more slowly and distinctly. Karski yelled harshly at the woman and ordered her out of the apartment. As the door slammed, Jan paced the floor, trembling in shame over his rudeness, furiously smoking a cigarette.⁸

If it existed, it is not clear whether this other report, the one written after the Note, was ever completed, Wood and Jankowski’s description of Karski’s first days in London comes to an end here and unlike the Note, this other report has not been

⁶ Ibid. p. 148. Note that Wood and Jankowski take Karski’s recollection as a factual account and this is probably why they do not refer directly to what Karski told them in 1992 about what he did in 1942 but refer rather to what Karski did in 1942. Note that throughout their book they refer to Karski by his first name, ‘Jan’.

⁷ Ibid. p. 149.

⁸ Ibid. p. 149-150.

found in the archives. It seems reasonable to suppose that no such ‘other report’ was ever produced, Karski must have misremembered the events in the testimonies he gave half a century later. But if we assume that Wood and Jankowski provide an accurate account of what Karski told them in 1992 then it seems clear that in 1992 Karski regarded the Note, ‘a detailed report on his missions to various political factions among the Poles (...) which he hurried through’ as far less important than the next one he started dictating, a report ‘on the extermination of the Jews’.

Did he think the same way in 1942? Does the text of the Note suggest that its author regarded it as less important than his other report, now lost or perhaps one that never existed? When we examine the Note in detail it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this was the only report Karski wrote in the two days after his release from British detention. In the Note, Karski presents himself to the Polish government, exiled in London, as an emissary of the leaders of the civilian, military and political institutions of the Polish underground state as well as of some political and social movements that are not directly affiliated with it. One of these is the Jewish Bund. They have authorised him to speak to the leaders of the Polish government and to prominent representatives of some key Polish political and social movements based in London. Among them is Szmul Zygielbojm, representing the Bund, and Ignacy Schwarzbart, representing the Zionists on the Polish National Council. In his Note, Karski describes the aim of his mission and it is clear that it is one which is primarily concerned with managing the political balance between the military and civilian institutions in occupied Poland and the exiled Polish government in London. He was an emissary of the Polish underground state to the exiled Polish government, his mission concerned matters of state and the Note can be regarded as very similar to the credentials which an ambassador presents to a government of a host country; his pre-war diplomatic service training was no doubt useful here.

It is highly unlikely, therefore, that in addition to the Note he presented to the Polish government on November 30, 1942, in the two days after his release from British detention, Karski wrote another report ‘on the extermination of the Jews’, which he apparently regarded as more important and which is now lost. We

should regard the Note as the only document he wrote a day or so after arriving in London and it is one in which he sets out the purpose of his mission. If that is so then we can return to the basic question guiding this study and ask whether the Note confirms the view that Karski's concern for the Jewish tragedy was central to his mission.

6.2 Purpose of mission determined by the Polish underground state

We can try to answer this question by examining the Note in some detail. In the very first sentence, Karski describes his role and the scope of his mission in a tone which seems to emphatically preclude any discussion:

Before starting any talks or beginning any work, I would like to define precisely and in writing what my role is on arrival in London, the mandates I have been given and the tasks I have been asked to complete.⁹

Karski follows this opening statement with a brief account of his activities in the Polish government and resistance movement over the past three years. This allows him to present his credentials, describe his connection with the underground state in occupied Poland and explain how he has been authorised to represent its key institutions before the Polish government in London.

What is immediately striking about the Note is the emphasis Karski puts on the Polish underground state, on its structures and on the fact that his mission was authorised in occupied Poland at the highest level of the resistance movement. In very broad terms, by mid-1942 the Polish underground state (*Polskie Państwo Podziemne* - PPP) was broadly divided into military, political and government wings. Given the wartime conditions, the military wing (ZWZ/AK or Home Army), commanded by General Stefan Rowecki, was the most important. The political wing was an alliance of the four major political groupings, ranging from the nationalist *endeks* on the right to the socialists on the left, in a Political Consultative Committee (*Polityczny Komitet Porozumiewawczy* or PKP).¹⁰ The government wing was headed by the Delegate (*Delegat*) who was an appointed

⁹Note, p. 1. Polish original in Appendix.

¹⁰In the Note, Karski sometimes uses the term '*Porozumienie Międzypartyjne*', which can be translated literally as 'inter-party accord' and at other times the abbreviation 'PKP'. In the present context, I will take his '*Porozumienie Międzypartyjne*' to be synonymous with '*Polityczny Komitet Porozumiewawczy* or 'PKP'.

representative in occupied Poland of the government exiled in London. The Delegate's office (*Delegatura*) was organised into departments modelled on ministries which was what they were intended to become after victory and liberation. None of the Jewish political parties was represented in the PKP, but there were subdepartments in the Delegate's office responsible for gathering information about or providing social welfare to minorities, including Jews. *Żegota*, the Council to Aid Jews, was a relief agency operated through the Delegate's office. On the military side, the Home Army's Information and Propaganda bureau (BIP) included an extremely important, though small, group charged with gathering information about the Jews, one of the few institutions in the underground state which took a strongly pro-Jewish position.¹¹

In the Note, Karski writes that in September 1942 these three main wings of the underground state in occupied Poland saw an urgent need to communicate political (rather than just military) information to the exiled government in London. At that time, Karski worked as an analyst in BIP, and in the Note he describes his function there as 'head of the political information section'.¹² The office of the Government delegate (*Delegatura Rzędu*) asked Karski if he was willing to carry such information to London as a courier. In the Note, Karski writes that 'I agreed to this' and puts great stress on the official nature of his mission and on the mandate he has been granted at the highest level of the Polish underground state: 'The Commander in Chief was (personally) notified about my departure by the Government Delegate who also officially notified the PKP'.¹³ He also adds that 'formally, I am a messenger of the Political Consultative Committee [PKP]' and this seems consistent with his earlier claim that his mission is concerned with conveying political rather than military information. He then adds that the costs of his mission were covered by the PKP who financed it through a special courier

¹¹ For a lucid account of the political, social and military context within which the Polish Underground State operated, see Antony Polonsky, *Beyond Condemnation, Apologetics and Apologies*, Korboński, S., 2004. *Fighting Warsaw: The Story of the Polish Underground State, 1939-1945*. New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc..

¹² Note, p. 1: '*Objąłem funkcję kierownika referatu informacji politycznej przy Komendzie Głównej*'.

¹³ Note, p. 2: Polish original in Appendix.

budget allocated to it by the Government Delegate. The four political parties making up the PKP paid 37,000 złoty out of this budget for Karski's mission.¹⁴

Was this a lot of money? We can try to get a very rough idea of the relative value of this złoty amount by taking the US dollar to złoty exchange rate on the black market in occupied Warsaw in early September 1942, and then adjusting the dollar amount by the cumulative inflation rate since 1942 to obtain its approximate equivalent purchasing power today. It is obvious, of course, that in occupied Warsaw in 1942 the only currency market that existed was the 'black' one, and that it is difficult to describe occupied Poland at that time as having an 'economy' or a stable price system that can be compared with today. But the fact that the US dollar was in effect the base currency in this black market gives us some means of evaluating whether the budget allocated to Karski's mission was significant. In August 1942, the month before Karski's departure, the złoty-US dollar exchange rate in Warsaw stood at around 25 złoty to the dollar.¹⁵ This means that the budget allocated for Karski's mission was about \$1,500 US dollars. Adjusting the amount by the cumulative rate of inflation for the US dollar from 1942 to 2020 (1483%), the purchasing power of this amount would be equivalent today to just under \$24,000.¹⁶ Even allowing for the special circumstances of occupied Poland and the stretched financial resources of the resistance movement, this looks like a significant amount by today's money.¹⁷ The key point here is that the importance of Karski's mission is demonstrated not only through the fact that it was initiated and authorised at the highest level of the Polish underground state, it is shown also through the apparently significant financial resources devoted to it by the underground state's political institutions.

¹⁴ Ibid. Polish original in Appendix.

¹⁵ In his August 4 and 19 radio despatches from Warsaw to London General Rowecki refers to the collapse of the currency market in Warsaw as a result of the ghetto deportations. On August 4th he wrote that the 'paper dollar' stood at 23 złoty (zł) in the Ghetto and 26 zł in "aryan" Warsaw. On August 19th he wrote that it stood at 10-14 zł in the Ghetto and 23 zł in the rest of Warsaw. For a discussion of these and other Rowecki despatches to London and their role in the transfer of information about the Warsaw ghetto deportations to the West, see Adam Puławski, 'Nie ujawniać czynnikiem nieoficjalnym', p. 73.

¹⁶ See, for example, www.usinflationcalculator.com, accessed February 23 2020.

¹⁷ An examination of Karski's 37,000 zł as an item in the PKP budget would give us a more reliable indicator if the relative value (and importance) of his mission to the PKP. I am not aware of any studies which deal specifically with the PKP budget in 1942.

At this point in the Note Karski stresses once again the ‘official’ nature of his mission. It is not a mission of a single individual, its ‘character’ has been determined by the Government Delegate and the Political Consultative Committee; these Polish underground state institutions have defined his mission’s purpose ‘as follows’,¹⁸ and Karski now provides a five-point list of tasks which he has been assigned. He was instructed to ‘carry’ and ‘convey’ materials and information from Warsaw to specific Polish institutions, organisations and individuals in London. These made up his ‘post’, referred to in the courier movement dispatches, as we have seen, as ‘Witold’s post’. Here Karski distinguishes between the ‘printed’ and the ‘verbal’ materials which this comprised. Apart from the printed matter, he also ‘carried’ information which he had memorised and which he was to convey verbally in London. We will look at this distinction later. At this stage we need to note that Karski’s five-point list does not explicitly refer to any information about the Jewish catastrophe unfolding in the Warsaw he left in late September; it refers to the three main wings of the Polish underground state which have given Karski his instructions and then generally to as yet unnamed ‘organisations’, ‘political parties’ and ‘individuals’ which he is to contact in London. Later on in the Note, as we shall see, he provides the names and among these we have the Bund as well as the two Jewish members of the National Council, Szmul Zygielbojm and Ignacy Schwarzbart.

6.3 What materials did Karski take from Warsaw?

Karski’s description of what he took with him from Warsaw clearly suggests that the volume of the ‘printed’ materials he carried, together with the information which he was to convey verbally, was enormous. It also suggests that the materials dealing with Jewish matters probably made up a very small part of it; it thus seems reasonable to expect that most of his materials and information must have dealt with the political and social issues in occupied Poland which did not directly concern Jews. At face value, this is not necessarily a claim about the

¹⁸ Note, p. 2: ‘The nature of my mission, as determined by the Government Delegate and the PKP is as follows’ (*‘Charakter mej misji ustalony przez Delegata Rządu i przez Porozumienie Stronnictw jest następujący’*).

perceived relative importance or otherwise of the materials dealing with Jewish topics but simply refers to their likely proportion in the overall package. However, the Karski story, as has been noted, is based on the premise that information about the Jewish tragedy was the key element of the message Karski brought to London from Warsaw. This was questioned, as we have mentioned, by David Engel in 1990: 'Karski's own secret reports, composed during various stages of his mission, show that Jewish concerns were not central to his activities'.¹⁹ Let us examine Karski's Note of November 30, 1942 in the light of Engel's remark. What importance did it attach to 'Jewish concerns'?

We can approach this question by looking more closely at the five-point list in which Karski describes the materials and information he took from Warsaw.

According to its first point:

1. I am carrying ('wiozę') two types of materials: written materials which I was officially given by the Delegate's office or the PKP or Home Army Headquarters, and verbal materials, to be conveyed verbally to designated organisations and individuals in London. Apart from the above, I am carrying a whole series of extracts, reports and notes drawn from the archive of my [political information] section for my private use so that I can precisely and faithfully inform these designated individuals.²⁰

There is nothing here which deals specifically with the Jewish tragedy unfolding in Poland. It does seem to be the case that *among* the written and oral materials which Karski was 'officially given' there were those which dealt with the Jewish situation in occupied Poland. It is also possible that *among* the 'whole series of extracts, reports and notes' which Karski carried there were those which deal with the Jews. However, it seems quite obvious that, in contrast to what would be claimed many years later, in the report which he himself wrote on November 30, 1942, there is nothing that would indicate that the *primary purpose* of his mission was to deliver information about the Jewish catastrophe to the West. The Note makes it very clear that the mission's main purpose was concerned with the affairs of the Polish state at a time of war.

¹⁹ Engel, 'Jan Karski's Mission to the West'. Abstract/summary on p. 363.

²⁰ Note. p. 2. Polish original in Appendix.

This is made even more evident further in items 2-4 of Karski's list. In item 2 he refers to the information he has brought from the various departments of the Polish underground state:

2. I was given the task of delivering to the Government [i.e. the London-based government in exile] (written) materials and political briefings (*oświetlenia*) of the government delegate and his five most important departmental directors (Interior Affairs, Propaganda, Reconstruction, Education and Social Welfare, and the Delegate Office director). For that reason I have had detailed conversations with all these gentlemen before my departure.²¹

The important point made here is that a significant portion of the materials Karski is carrying originate from five different departments and we know that at this time it is only one of these which included a relatively small section responsible for Jewish matters.²²

Point 3 of Karski's list states that he is carrying ('wiozē' again) 'authorised briefings' ('*autorytatywne oświetlenia*') of the commander of the Home Army (General Rowecki) on the political situation in occupied Poland. We can assume that these briefings, which Karski is to deliver to the government in London, are primarily concerned with the institutional arrangements of the military, political and government wings of the Polish wartime state and not about the extermination of the Jews. In point 4 Karski once again refers to 'authorised briefings' but now it is those of the four political parties which made up the Political Consultative Committee. These parties represented the four main currents of Polish politics: the nationalists (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*), the peasants (*Stronnictwo Ludowe*), Christian democrats (*Stronnictwo Pracy*) and the Socialists. None of the main Jewish political movements (eg. the Zionists or the Bundists) were included in the Committee and so none of the 'authorised viewpoints' mentioned here came directly from the Jews.

The final item in Karski's list, number 5, covers all the institutions, organisations and people not referenced in items 1-4:

²¹ Ibid. Polish original in Appendix.

²² *Żegota* became a part of the Delegatura in Dec 42. Before that, the 'small section' was the 'referat żydowski' in BIP which was in the *Komenda Główna* (the Command Headquarters of the Home Army).

5. I have with me the briefings (*oświelenia*) on the situation in [Poland] and the declarations of a whole series of people and political groups prominent in the underground movement who are not institutionally linked with the structures of the Government Delegate, or the Political Consultative Committee or the Command Headquarters (*Komenda Główna*). The talks I had with these people or with the representatives of these groups were conducted either on instruction from or with the knowledge of the Government delegate, I am giving a list of these below.²³

It is here that we can look for the materials which originate directly from Jewish organisations and resistance groups because they were among those which in September 1942 were ‘not institutionally linked’ (*niezwiązanych organizacyjnie*) with the Polish underground state. Note however that Karski emphasises that such materials were obtained ‘on instruction from or with the knowledge of the Government delegate’, in other words, his contacts with the groups which gave him these materials were requested by the officials of the Polish state and if they were initiated by Karski personally, they were approved by the state.

6.4 *The meetings with the Jewish resistance leaders*

A key part of the Karski story is the account of his dramatic meetings in Warsaw with two leaders of the Jewish resistance movement, Menachem Kirszenbaum,²⁴ a Zionist, and Leon Feiner, a Bundist. The meetings took place on the “aryan side” at a time when the agony of the Warsaw ghetto deportations was at its worst; in broad terms, we can assume that Karski saw them sometime between the middle of August and before his departure from Warsaw on September 27, 1942.²⁵ How did these meetings come about? We can try to answer this question by putting together point no 5 of the Note, discussed above, and an account of the meeting Karski gave many years later in a speech he made in October 1981 at the ‘International Liberators Conference’ in Washington. It is of course necessary to remain cautious about his later testimonies, but in this case what Karski said about these meetings in 1981 seems entirely consistent with the Note he wrote in

²³ Ibid. Polish original in Appendix.

²⁴ Note that the identity of the Zionist leader is not entirely certain.

²⁵ Karski gives an extensive account of the meetings in *Story of a Secret State*, pp. 347-367. Żbikowski adds some background detail in *Karski*, pp. 260-263. I am using Puławski’s date.

November 1942. Karski began his speech at the Liberators Conference by explaining that

In the middle of summer of 1942 I received a message from the Delegate of the Polish government in exile for the homeland, Cyril Ratajski, that he approved of my request to be sent secretly to London as a courier for the leaders of political parties organised in the central political committee and for the Delegate himself (...). Sometime in September 1942 the Delegate informed me that the leaders of two Jewish underground organisations, the socialist Bund and the Zionists, learned about my mission and requested permission to use my services for their own communication to their representatives in London, to the Polish government and to the Allied authorities. The Delegate was sympathetic. I agreed. Soon after I met the two Jewish leaders on two occasions.²⁶

The ‘leaders of political parties organised in the central political committee’ is a reference to the Political Consultative Committee (the PKP) or what Karski calls ‘*Porozumienie Stronnictw*’ in the 1942 Note. As we noted, this was a coalition of the four main political parties in Poland which did not include any of the Jewish parties. We may then assume from the above that as Karski went about gathering materials from the four political parties, from the Government Delegate and from the Home Army commander Stefan Rowecki, the leaders of the Jewish underground learned about his planned mission and wanted to add their own materials to those he was to take to London. But they did not go directly to Karski, they ‘requested permission to use [Karski’s] services’ by approaching the Government Delegate who was ‘sympathetic’ to the request and who then asked Karski if he would agree to go along with it. To his eternal credit, Karski agreed.

In order to fully appreciate what is striking about this account we need to remind ourselves again that all this was taking place in Warsaw sometime between the middle of August and the end of September 1942. Except for a few days, this was a time when the Warsaw ghetto deportations were proceeding at a rate of

²⁶ Transcribed from a video of Karski’s speech at the 1981 Liberators Conference in Washington. US Holocaust Memorial Museum, RG-60.3815. I am grateful to Bruce Levy and Lindsay Zarwell at the Museum for making this rare video record available. Karski translated his conference speech into Polish and published it in an important Paris *Kultura* publication, *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Karski, J., 1982. *Przywódcy Wolnego Świata Wiedzieli o Zagładzie w 1943 Roku. Zeszyty Historyczne*, Volume 59, pp. 187-195). Note also that the account is consistent with what Karski told Claude Lanzmann three years earlier, in October 1978. In the full original transcript of his interview with Lanzmann, not shown in *Shoah*, Karski describes how the meeting with the Jewish leaders came about: ‘At a certain point the information came from the delegate of the Government that Jewish leaders wanted to see me, apparently they wanted to use my services. Did you want to see them? “Yes, I will”. Meetings were arranged, and I met them twice’. USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*, p. 8.

between 6,000 to 15,000 people transported daily to their death, mostly in Treblinka.²⁷ Because at that time the Jewish underground organisations were ‘not institutionally linked’ (*niezwiązani organizacyjnie*) with the Polish underground state, their access to the courier ‘services’ provided, in this case, by Karski was comparatively limited, full of accident and contingency. We can assume that the leaders of the Jewish underground learned about Karski’s mission through the informal personal contacts they had with people working in the various institutions and sections of the Polish underground state, especially with those in the Jewish section within BIP. If so their knowledge of Karski’s mission was gained through the lucky accidents of personal friendships, there were no formal and institutional arrangements which could have ensured that they would be informed about it. Once the Jewish leaders learned of the mission they had to approach the Government Delegate – and it seems reasonable to assume that this was not a direct approach - and ask him for permission to add their materials to those Karski was to take to London. Possibly because of what was then happening in the ghetto, the Delegate at the time, Ratajski, happened to be sympathetic to this request, but perhaps another Delegate might not have been, there was no institutional requirement for the Delegate to grant permission. The Delegate then asked Karski if he would agree to take this additional material, another courier might not have agreed.

6.5 *The primary purpose of Karski’s mission*

Let us now return to the Note and try to summarise what it tells us about the primary purpose of Karski’s mission, as described by Karski himself a few days after his arrival in London in late November 1942. It is clear that its primary purpose had to do with the affairs of the Polish wartime state: as shown by the first four points of his five-point list, Karski was to convey political information obtained from the key military, political and government wings of the underground state in occupied Poland to the exiled government in London. We can expect that Jewish matters would probably make up only a small proportion of this

²⁷ Cf. Rowecki telegram of August 19th, see Section 4.6, pg. 86.

information, possibly because in the middle of 1942 the underground state included only one sub-department responsible for Jewish affairs. However, as he writes in the fifth point of his list, in addition to the ‘official’ information referred to in points one to four, Karski also obtained materials from people and groups who were not a part of the underground state but whom he approached either on advice from or by permission of the state’s top officials. The fifth point of his list tells us that the ‘courier service’ he provided to the various segments of the underground state, a service whose nature and scope was defined by the Delegate and sponsored by the Political Consultative Committee, was extended also to people or groups not linked to the state but approved by it. His contacts with the Jewish resistance leaders clearly came under this category.

After describing the sources of the materials he took with him from Warsaw, Karski then gives a brief description of what we might today call the ‘service level’ of the courier service he was providing:

I am bound by oath to convey the above materials faithfully, precisely and with the best will; I will be fully guided by the principles of impartiality. I have no right officially to explain, comment or analyse the work and the personnel of the above groups [*ośrodków*]. My role here is that of a courier. The briefings [*oświecienia*] which I will present to the Commander-in-Chief as well as to the Government, to particular parties and to particular persons – will be official statements.²⁸

This understanding of the nature of his mission clearly extended to all the materials Karski brought from Poland including those which came from organisations or people ‘not institutionally linked’ with the Polish underground state, as described in point five of his list. Which means that just as with the materials received from General Rowecki, the commander of the Home Army in Poland, the materials obtained from the Jewish leaders he met in Warsaw were also to be conveyed as their ‘official statements’, without the addition of Karski’s own impressions, comments or analyses.

Karski then names the sections of the underground state and the organisations which have granted him mandates to convey ‘official statements’ to their superiors or counterparts in London, he also gives the names of people he has been instructed to talk to. His Note thus gives us two additional lists which follow

²⁸ Note, p. 2-3. Polish original in Appendix.

on from the five-point description of the ‘nature’ of his mission. These lists are more specific: the first one names the sources who have given Karski mandates to convey their materials and the second gives the names of the persons to whom he is to deliver the materials in London. Both follow a pattern which emphasises once again that the primary purpose of his mission is to convey materials dealing with the affairs of the Polish wartime state.

The first list identifies nine organisations which are part of the Polish underground state as well as five organisations and a broad category of people who are ‘not institutionally linked’ to it:

I have received a mandate from the following organisations in Poland (surnames to be given verbally):

1. The Government Delegate, 2. Five of his Departmental directors and the Delegate Bureau director, 3. The Commander in chief, 4. The People’s Party, 5. The National Party, 6. PPS-WRN [Socialists], 7. PPS- Polish Socialists, 8. The Labour Party, 9. The Democratic Party, 10. FOP [*Front Odrodzenia Polski* – The Polish Rebirth Front], 11. The Bund (in the name of all Jewry),²⁹ 12. The Patriotic Society, 13. The Social Welfare Bureau, 14. Warsaw clergy, 15. Persons not organisationally linked with any underground political circles.³⁰

The sequence of this list is clearly not random, it is an arrangement which seems to follow an order of importance. The most significant people or institutions are placed before the less significant ones and so the Government Delegate and his six directors come first, they are the government and they defined the nature of Karski’s mission. The Commander in chief is next because of the overwhelming significance of the Home Army and the military side of the resistance movement. Then come the political parties who initiated and financed the mission. Four of these were members of the PKP at the time, one (the PPS-WRN socialists) was temporarily outside it and the remaining one (the Democratic party), though not a

²⁹ This is a literal translation of *Bund (w imieniu całego żydostwa)*. Another possible translation, ‘Bund (representing the whole of Jewry)’, may suggest that Karski was ignorant about the different Jewish political movements in Poland and mistakenly regarded the Bund as one which represents all Polish Jews. But when Karski met the Bund leadership (i.e. Leon Feiner) in Warsaw he was asked to convey a message about Nazi Germany’s extermination campaign which affects *all* Jews. This is confirmed by Feiner’s letter to Zygielbojm, which Karski took from Warsaw, in which Zygielbojm was instructed to seek Western help in rescuing all those Jews who still remain alive.

³⁰ Note. p. 4. Polish original in Appendix. We can assume that even though the Note was marked as ‘highly secret’ and confidential, Karski did not wish to include the names of people in Poland for security reasons.

member was closely associated with it.³¹ Karski then lists the FOP, an organisation whose programme for the ‘rebirth of Poland’ was based on deeply Catholic principles. The placement of FOP – a relatively small organisation - in this position in the list suggests that Karski regarded it as a very important part of the wider Polish resistance movement. There seems to be very simple explanation for this: Karski was a member of the FOP or was at least very closely associated with it.³²

The Bund, ‘in the name of all Jewry’, comes next, it is number eleven in a list of fifteen. The materials received from the Jewish leadership thus seem less important than those received from the directors of the various departments of the Government Delegate, but they come before, and thus seem more important than those obtained from other sources, the Warsaw clergy for example. This sequential ordering of institutions and their materials, made by Karski himself in a confidential Polish government document written a few days after his arrival in London, may be taken to illustrate the degree of importance his mission attached to the Jewish materials he carried from Warsaw. They were important, more important than materials received from the Warsaw clergy, but not as important as those he received from the various sections of the Polish underground state. This seems consistent with what Karski described earlier in the Note as the main purpose of his mission: it was to convey materials related primarily to the political balance between the three wings of the Polish underground state: the government delegate, the Home Army and the main political parties. Materials originating from Jewish sources are important but in the context of the mission’s main purpose secondary.

This is clearly at odds with the later account of his activities which places such materials at the very centre of his mission. This apparent discrepancy is

³¹ When Karski wrote his Note on November 30 1942, the Polish socialists were split into two main factions: PPS-WRN and Polish Socialists, the socialists’ membership of the PKP was one of the points of their disagreement and the PPS-WRN were not members of the PKP at the time. The small Democratic Party was not a member of the PKP but it was affiliated with the mainstream resistance movement.

³² On Karski’s FOP membership, see Bartoszewski, W. & Komar, M., 2010. *Środowisko Naturalne. Korzenie*. Warszawa: Świat Książki, p 193-204. Andrzej Żbikowski gives a persuasive account of the close relationship between Karski, the FOP and its putative leader, the Catholic writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka: Andrzej Żbikowski, *Karski*, Świat Książki, Warszawa 2011, p. 213-228.

further illustrated by the final list in Karski's Note, it is a numbered list, this time giving the names of sixteen people to whom he has been officially instructed to speak in London. Its sequence, once again, is arranged in what looks like an order of significance which reflects the key purpose of Karski's mission:

I have been instructed to speak in an official capacity with the following persons:
1. Gen[eral] Sikorski, 2 Chairman Mikołajczyk, 2 Min[ister] Seyda, 4. Min[ister] Popiel, 5 Min[ister] Stańczyk, 6. Min[ister] Kwapiński, 7. Min[ister] Stroński, pp. 8. Ciołkosz, 9. Zygielbojm, 10. Dr Schwarzbart, 11. Bielecki, 12. Folkierski, 13. Bishop Gawlina, 14. Tabaczyński, 15. Olszewski, 16. Z[ofia] Zaleska.³³

The list gives the names of people prominent in the Polish government or in the political circles exiled in wartime London, but the order in which the names are listed seems to reflect something more than mere protocol. The list begins by naming the head of the Polish government and armed forces: Sikorski, followed by his deputy in government, Mikołajczyk and then five ministers. The first seven names in the list are thus directly connected with the government. Adam Ciołkosz, the leader of the Polish socialists comes next. Then come the two Jewish members of the National Council, Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart. It is clear that just as with all the others, Karski has been 'instructed to speak' to them 'in an official capacity' by their counterparts in Warsaw, Kirszenbaum and Feiner. He was to convey their 'verbal' report to Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart in a meeting which had not yet taken place when he wrote the Note on November 30. Even without knowing the content of this report we can be fairly certain that it would focus on the Jewish tragedy unfolding in occupied Poland.

In the list of people to whom he has been 'instructed to speak in an official capacity', the two Jewish members of the Polish National Council, Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart, come almost immediately after a list starting with the prime minister and his ministers. 'Almost immediately' because Ciołkosz, the prominent socialist mentioned just before Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart, might be construed as having an important role in uniting the socialists, one of the four parties making up the PKP and hence directly relevant to a state institution. But the Jewish members of the National Council come before two people who at the time were associated with the evacuation of Polish armed forces from the Soviet Union, deported there after

³³ Note, p. 4. Polish original in Appendix.

the Soviet attack and occupation of Poland on September 17, 1939. When Karski arrived in London Bishop Gawlina was in the Soviet Union heading the pastoral care activities of the Polish Catholic clergy during the evacuation, Tabaczyński was in the Polish embassy in Kuybyshev assisting with the difficult negotiations and logistics.³⁴ Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart also come before the London-based leader of the right-wing National party, *endecja*, Bielecki, an important representative of what might be regarded as the unofficial right-wing opposition acting outside Sikorski's government. Another prominent activist of the National (*endecja*) party and vocal member of the National Council, Zofia Zaleska, is last in the list.

The rule Karski applies in the sequential ordering of these three lists is clear: institutions, people and materials associated with the Polish state come first, those which are 'not institutionally linked' with it come second. The offices of the state are presented in order of seniority (eg. prime minister, deputy minister, ministers) whereas the organisations and people who are 'not institutionally linked' with the state are presented in the order decided by Karski. It may be argued that given the primary purpose of Karski's mission it could not be otherwise: as he explained in the Note, he was to convey political information from Warsaw to London because the leadership of the Polish resistance movement thought that this would improve the functioning of the Polish state, especially in the area of the links between the London-based government in exile and its clandestine agencies working in occupied Poland under conditions of German terror. This is how Karski explained the scope of his mission a few days after arriving in London. It clearly strengthens the argument that an account of the Jewish tragedy unfolding in Poland was not central to it. Engel's comment about reports such as the November 30 Note ('Karski's own secret reports, composed during various stages of his mission, show that Jewish concerns were not central to his activities'³⁵) seems entirely correct. However, although such concerns were not central, they were important, the Note clearly states that a part of Karski's mission was the delivery of

³⁴ Grabowski, W., 2013. Kurierzy cywilni (kociaki) na spadochronach. *Zeszyty Historyczne*, Volume 12, pp. 175-201.

³⁵ David Engel, 'Jan Karski's Mission to the West'. Abstract/summary on p. 363

information obtained from the Jewish resistance leaders in Warsaw to their counterparts in London.

The Note tells us much about the central purpose of Karski's mission and it helps us understand the relative importance of Jewish concerns within it. However, it makes only general references to the materials with which Karski was entrusted to bring from Warsaw. These arrived in London on November 13, nearly two weeks before he did, and our task now is to examine them and identify the reports on the Jewish tragedy which they included.

7 Karski's materials

In his November 30, 1942 Note Karski summarizes the type of materials he was bringing to London and makes it clear that the primary purpose of his mission was political. The materials focused on the precarious nature of the Polish wartime state and on the importance of the support it needed from the the exiled government in London if it was to survive. It is reasonable to expect that these materials included documents on Jewish matters and that is what interests us in this study. In the Note, Karski does not give us any details about these or any other documents; he writes that he had spoken to Jewish leaders in Warsaw and that he had a mandate to speak to their counterparts in London, but nothing is said about the content of specific documents or reports on Jewish issues.

The key issue is whether these documents influenced the West's reaction to the Holocaust at the end of 1942, above all the Allied Declaration of December 17 which was the result of a diplomatic and political campaign launched by the Polish government in exile and Jewish organisations. A significant event at the beginning of this campaign was the delivery of a two-page Polish government report to the British Foreign office on November 26. This was followed by the December 10 diplomatic note Polish Foreign Minister Raczynski sent to the allied governments with detailed information about the mass murder of Jews by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland. Reference was also made at the time to the 'most recent reports' which had arrived from Poland. The December 17 declaration, which referred directly to such reports, was the outcome of that campaign. Was Karski the bearer of these 'most recent reports'?

7.1 *'I am carrying two types of materials'*

As we saw in the previous chapter, in his Note of November 30 Karski distinguishes between 'verbal' and 'written' materials he took from Warsaw. At that time, he had not yet had any meetings at which he could deliver 'verbal' materials to

their designated recipients. The meeting with Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart, for example, took place on December 2, two days after the Note was written. But on November 27, when Karski was still in British detention after his arrival two days earlier, the Polish National Council issued a declaration calling ‘all the Allied nations and all nations’ to join forces and take action to stop Germany from continuing an extermination ‘whose most horrific demonstration are the recent mass murders of Jews in Poland’. The Polish deputy prime minister Mikołajczyk said,

Hitler’s order that 1942 must be the year of liquidation of at least 50 per cent of Polish Jewry is being carried out with utter ruthlessness and a barbarity never before seen in world history. Every one of us knows the details, so I will not go into them again.

The figures themselves are most eloquent. Out of over 400,000 people living in the Warsaw ghetto, over 260,000 have been liquidated in the last three months.¹

Mikołajczyk’s statement shows that on the day of the National Council session, when Karski was still in British detention in Wandsworth, information about the Warsaw deportations was already familiar to the members of the National Council: it was front-page news in the previous day’s edition of *Dziennik Polski* [Polish Daily], the official daily newspaper of the Polish government in exile. Mikołajczyk saw no need to repeat it. The *Dziennik Polski* article, however, was simply the Polish version of the report which had been released on November 24 and that report, as we have seen, refers to the ‘most recent reports’ which had arrived in London. It is clear it could not have been based on any ‘verbal’ materials brought by Karski.

By November 30 the political and diplomatic campaign which led to the December 17 Allied Declaration had already started in earnest. As we have already seen,² Schwarzbart passed this Report to Silverman and Easterman in the evening of November 25 and they in turn met British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden’s deputy,

¹ English translation taken from Polish Fortnightly Review, December 1 1942, p. 7, ‘Declaration of the Polish Government’. Note that this translation refers to ‘Himmler’ rather than ‘Hitler’ as in the original Polish text. It is not clear whether this is a simple error, but I have used ‘Hitler’ because that is in the transcript of the 27 November 1942 session of the Polish National Council, PISM A.5.2/47a, p. 29. Polish original in Appendix. Note that Mikołajczyk’s ‘nearly three months’, counted from July 17th, would mean that the Warsaw deportations ended sometime in the middle of October 1942. In fact, they started on July 22 and ended on September 21st.

² See Chapter 3, section 3.5.

Richard Law, at the Foreign Office on the 26th. In a letter he wrote to Eden on the same day, Law reports that Silverman

asked first of all that a Four-Power Declaration should be made to the effect that the United Nations had been informed of this plan [to exterminate the Jews of Europe], that if it was carried out the perpetrators of it would be held responsible and would receive their due punishment.³

On the Polish side of the campaign, Schwarzbart, Easterman and Barou (political secretary of the British Section of the World Jewish Congress) met with the Polish Foreign Minister Raczynski next day at 4pm on the 27th,⁴ two hours before the Polish National Council issued the above declaration, proposed by Schwarzbart, condemning Nazi Germany. This meeting is described in more detail in World Jewish Congress sources cited by Penkower who writes:

The Polish National Council arranged a conference for Easterman and Barou on November 27 with Foreign Minister Eduard [*sic*] Raczynski, where the delegation suggested a formal memorandum summarizing the underground reports from Poland and a *demarche* seeking an Allied expression of protest.⁵

In his diary entry for November 29 Raczynski has the following short note:

The Germans have occupied France and in Poland they are murdering the Jews. Deputies Zygelbojm [*sic*] and Szwarzbart [*sic*] have asked me to launch a protest action which we are preparing.⁶

Note that the request for a diplomatic *demarche* with an official ‘formal memorandum’ or a ‘protest action’ came from the Jewish side. Despite Schwarzbart’s misgivings, Raczynski’s response was positive: in the days and weeks that followed, his *demarche* turned into an effective diplomatic campaign which led up to the Allied declaration of December 17. It is therefore clear that the launch of this campaign was not a result of anything that Karski might have verbally reported in meetings with Raczynski, Mikołajczyk or anyone else before November

³ Richard Law to Anthony Eden, 26th November, 1942. NA, FO 371/30923. Document C11923.

⁴ Schwarzbart diary entry for November 27, 1942, YVA), M2/751. ‘At 4PM at Raczynski’s with Barou and Easterman. About the same matter. I do not trust Raczynski, nothing he does for us is heartfelt. Easterman pretended to be a representative of the Jewish state, Barou was sensible and decent. Result: probably zero, as always in such cases when the heart has no desire and the brain looks for a way to cheat’. Original Polish in Appendix.

⁵ Monty Noam Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free world diplomacy and the Holocaust*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983; p. 82 and note 65.

⁶ Edward Raczynski, *W Sojusznicy Londynie: Dziennik ambasadora Edwarda Raczynskiego 1939-1945*; Orbis, London 1960, p. 156 [English translation: Count Edward Raczynski, In Allied London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1962].

30. A key element at the start of this campaign, as we have seen, was the two-page Polish government document in English which a Jewish member of the Polish National Council, Ignacy Schwarzbart, lent to the Political Secretary of the World Jewish Congress, Alexander Easterman, who passed it on to Richard Law, an Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Anthony Eden's deputy, whom Easterman saw at the Foreign Office on November 26 along with the British MP and chairman of the British section of the World Jewish Congress, Sidney Silverman. The link with Karski is based on the assumption that the content of this report is an English summary of 'recently arrived' information, on the 'printed' materials which Karski carried from Warsaw about the extermination of Jews taking place in occupied Poland. These materials arrived about two weeks before Karski and if the information they contained was an important part of the campaign leading up to the December 17 Allied declaration then Karski's role as the messenger who risked his life carrying it to the West is significantly enhanced.

We now need to examine this assumption. If the report is an English summary of the reports which had recently, it is claimed, arrived from Poland then we need to identify these original reports and show that the report is a summary of them. We then need to establish whether the information used at various stages of the campaign leading up to the December 17 declaration originates from these 'recent' reports. This would demonstrate that these original reports were important because the message they carried had an impact on events. We then need to ask when these reports arrived in London and also whether it was Karski who carried them from Warsaw.

7.2 What is the Report of 24 November based on?

The Report of 24 November, which is sometimes erroneously called the 'Karski Report', is linked to Karski not because Karski wrote it but partly because that is how a number of prominent historians subsequently referred to it.⁷ What we first need to examine is the link between it and the materials which arrived in London sometime before the official Polish government statement of November 24. As

⁷ See Chapter 3, Section 3.5.

already mentioned in Chapter 3, it is generally assumed that the Report is simply an English language summary of these documents which were photographed on a roll of microfilm concealed inside a house key which Karski was given in Warsaw. The key was passed on to Polish agents in France from where it was re-routed separately to London; the latest research by the Polish historian Adam Puławski has shown that the microfilm had reached London on November 13. Puławski's research will be reviewed in some detail in Chapter 9, what is important is whether there is a clear connection between the microfilmed materials containing the original reports, the Report of 24 November and Karski himself.

As a summary in English, the Report of 24 November has the characteristics of a secondary source which raises the question of the availability of the primary sources or the original Polish documents it is based on. If they were transmitted on a roll of microfilm have they survived? Until quite recently, historians have not been able to identify these primary sources and had to rely instead on suggestions based mostly on the account provided in 1994 by Wood and Jankowski. Richard Breitman, for example, in his *Official Secrets*, published in 1998, neatly sums up the problem about the Report of 24 November:

It would help historians to have access to the microfilm, to the twenty-page Polish report prepared from it, or to the British interrogations of Karski. The microfilm and the twenty-page report have not been located, and the British War Office file that probably contains Karski's debriefing is scheduled to be declassified in the year 2018.⁸

Breitman's reference to the 'twenty-page Polish report' comes from Wood and Jankowski who quote from a November 27 telegram sent by A. L. Easterman to the World Jewish Congress headquarters in New York'.⁹ Easterman's 'twenty pages' may possibly refer to the page count of the set of original Polish reports, which we will review shortly and which Schwarzbart read a few days prior to November 27, or to the English translations which were published a few days later in the December 1,

⁸ Breitman, *Official Secrets*, p. 147.

⁹ Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*, p.287 n.143. The authors refer to a telegram in the World Jewish Congress Collection of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati 'Easterman ... mentions a "special twenty-page report received Polish government giving terrible details mass massacres' (File A14/12).

1942 edition of the *Polish Fortnightly Review*. The microfilm has not yet been found, but one can assume that the reports they contained would have been typed up for internal distribution. Our task is thus to locate the original Polish typewritten documents summarised in the Report of 24 October.

Let us look briefly at attempts historians and biographers of Karski have made to find the archival evidence which would clearly identify the documents which the Report of 24 November and the Polish press and diplomatic campaign was based on. In their 1994 biography of Karski, Wood and Jankowski write that the roll of microfilm which Karski took with him included ‘a ten-page letter from Leon Feiner [the Bund leader in Warsaw] with crucial information about the Holocaust under way in Poland’. Also,

It included a copy of orders issued by the German-run Jewish Council mandating deportation procedures at the outset of the Warsaw Ghetto liquidation on July 22. It included a section on the process of liquidation that then ensued in Warsaw and towns surrounding the capital. It included the account of a policeman who had worked at the Warsaw Ghetto. It included a report on Bełżec, written in July. And it incorporated several other accounts of the systematic destruction of Jews in Poland.¹⁰

Wood and Jankowski add an important (but incomplete) archival reference to this in a footnote:

The items included on the microfilm are listed in a ledger headed ‘Materiały otrzymane od Delegata z Kraju’ (‘Materials received from the Homeland Delegate’) p. 4, SPP.¹¹

Given the context of Wood and Jankowski’s Karski biography, it seems reasonable to read this as stating that the ‘ledger’ is an inventory and a complete list of the documents held on the microfilm which Karski took from Warsaw. Michael Fleming has managed to locate the ‘ledger’ in the SPP archive in London, he also provides the crucial archival reference and a comment about the link to Karski,

In fact there is no such ‘ledger’. There is a Ministry of the Interior file entitled ‘*Materiały otrzymane od delegata z kraju*’ [‘Materials received from the Homeland Delegate’] (MSW 16) which, on pages 4 (the same cited by Wood and Jankowski)

¹⁰ Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 131.

¹¹ Ibid. Footnote on p. 283 referring to ‘microfilm’ on p. 131.

and 5, lists the same reports which Wood and Jankowski claim were carried by Karski. This file seems to be the source to which Wood and Jankowski refer, but it contains no reference to Karski (or his pseudonym 'Witold'). It seems that Wood and Jankowski drew their conclusions regarding the material which Karski carried on the basis of the dates of reports and the contents of reports in this file, the reports Karski wrote in London and Karski's testimony. Their deductions are, as far as can be ascertained, sound.¹²

The MSW 16 document at SPP is clearly the 'ledger' which Wood and Jankowski refer to. Since it is not a record of financial transactions, calling it a 'ledger' might be seen as slightly confusing, it is a sequentially numbered inventory of documents with a brief description followed by a journal number identifier and, sometimes, a date reference. The title, 'Materials received from the Homeland Delegate' (*'Materiały otrzymane od Delegata z Kraju'*), identifies this as a list of non-military materials, received by the Polish government in London from the civilian wing of the underground state in Poland. There is a subtitle which suggests that this is an inventory of materials received in 1943 and 1944, these are probably London filing years rather than dates when the documents were created in Poland; the list includes items created in 1941 and 1942. There are over two hundred entries listed and from the descriptions we can try to identify the materials which match those given by Wood and Jankowski and other historians. Before we do that, however, it is important to underline Fleming's observation that the document 'contains no reference to Karski'. This is connected to the question of whether this document is an inventory only of the materials carried by Karski from Warsaw. This is clearly not the case since it includes items which refer to events which occurred after Karski arrived in London in late November 1942. For example, item no. 113, which does not have a journal or a date reference, is described as 'Katyń and German propaganda' and refers to the news which the Germans released in mid-April 1943 about the discovery of the mass graves of Polish officers executed in Katyń by the Soviets in 1940. The 'ledger' must therefore be a list of non-military materials brought to London by different couriers over an extended period. At this point we can only speculate about the items on the list which were brought by Karski.

¹² Fleming, *Auschwitz*, note 85, ch 4.

As regards the materials on which the Report of 24 November is based the ‘ledger’ is a useful starting point, although it is not clear when the documents it lists arrived in London and whether they were brought from Warsaw by Karski. However, although the SPP MSW 16 document list does not provide us with information about arrival dates or couriers, we can use it to try and identify the documents which are linked with text of the Report of 24 November. It seems reasonable to assume that it is a *complete* list of all the non-military materials couriered from Poland during the the second half of 1942, and that the Report of 24 November is based on materials within that list.

We are helped here by suggestions made by a number of other historians who provide additional detail to the list given by Wood and Jankowski. Twelve years earlier, Teresa Prekerowa referred to these materials in her 1982 study of the Underground Relief Council for Jews, *Żegota*, in Warsaw. She made a clear link between Karski and the arrival in the West of ‘comprehensive documentation on the recent events in the ghetto’ which was ‘brought to London by the special courier Jan Koziński (Jan Karski)’. This documentation was ‘the basis of a comprehensive note which the Polish government sent to the governments of the allied countries on December 10, 1942’. Prekerowa added that it was prepared by Stanisław Herbst and Henryk Woliński who worked in a small section of the Home Army’s Information and Propaganda Bureau (BIP) responsible for compiling information about the Jews in occupied Poland (*referat żydowski*), Dariusz Libionka, writing in 2006, refers to ‘documentation on Nazi crimes prepared in the Warsaw ghetto and in the BIP’. Following Prekerowa, Libionka writes that the BIP provided Karski with materials which were ‘made up of two parts – a report titled *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* [*The Liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto*] and six attachments’. He adds that the six attachments were made up of a special report from the Bełżec extermination camp, the July 22 1942 deportation notice issued by the Warsaw Jewish Council, three testimonies of people who managed to escape from the ghetto during the deportations and an August 11, 1942 testimony about the ghetto made by a Polish ‘blue’ policeman.¹³ This adds detail to the description given by Wood and

¹³ Libionka, ‘ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP’, p. 49, also note 183.

Jankowski. Another prominent Polish historian, Andrzej Żbikowski, provides a similar account in his 2011 biography of Karski.¹⁴ In his 2015 book on Auschwitz, Michael Fleming refers to a ‘radio message from Piekalkiewicz [the *Delegat* or head of the civilian wing of the underground state in Poland] to Mikołajczyk [the deputy prime minister in the government in London] sent on October 7 which refers to a package being prepared for sending to London, it ‘ included material on the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, and six attachments’.¹⁵ The most recent and probably the most definitive examination of this material and its journey to London was presented in 2018 by Adam Puławski who states that *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* ‘is one of the most important accounts of the extermination of the Jewish population, especially in the Warsaw ghetto’.¹⁶

The Report of 24 November, presented to the Foreign Office by Easterman and Silverman, is primarily focused on the Warsaw ghetto deportations, its opening sentence reads, ‘News is reaching the Polish Government in London about the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw’.¹⁷ As Prekerowa pointed out, this was also the focus of the diplomatic note issued by the Polish government on December 10. Once again, we need to keep in mind the fact that the Warsaw ghetto deportations ended more than two months earlier. As we will see in the next chapter, the reports which the Report of 24 November is based on were written in August – early September 1942, their main focus is on the Warsaw ghetto deportations.

¹⁴ Żbikowski, *Karski*, p. 383.

¹⁵ Fleming, *Auschwitz*, note 64, p. 345.

¹⁶ Puławski, *Wobec „niespotykanego w dziejach mordu”*, p. 307. The quotation comes from the beginning of Section 3 of Chapter III, ‘*Losy raportu pt. “Likwidacja getta warszawskiego”*’ [The fate of the ‘Liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto’ report].

¹⁷ NA, FO371/30923. Reproduced in Section 3.5.

8 The Key Reports

We now need to identify and locate the reports about the mass-murder of the Jews couriered to the Polish government in exile in London in late 1942. Apart from providing a brief summary of these reports, we do not need to analyse them in depth, it will suffice to trace the path of the information and the text contained in them. The reports were written in Poland in late summer 1942 and arrived in the West later that year. Much of their content was summarised or reappeared in the internal reports, declarations and news articles produced by Polish and Allied governments, Jewish organisations and the Western press. The reports are important because much of what they said and how they said it was repeated or echoed by their Western recipients.

Based on the most recent historical research, especially by Adam Puławski whose research will be reviewed in Chapter 10, and also on a detailed study of the reactions recorded at the time by people like Ignacy Schwarzbart,¹ we can be fairly certain that these reports arrived in London on November 13, 1942.

We can begin by identifying the reports. The following table, with an added English translation of the report description, is a selection from the SPP MSW 16 list of non-military materials, mentioned in the previous chapter, couriered from Poland to London sometime between late 1942 and 1944. An English translation of the description has been added here, all other table column entries are taken directly from the MSW 16 document. Based just on the description and the occasional handwritten annotation, the nine documents were selected because they are about the Jews and as we shall see, they all focus in some way on the Warsaw ghetto deportations. The MSW 16 items have a sequence number and some an attachment indicator. The Journal number (*Liczba dziennika*, 'L.dz') is significant when it occurs because it is a sequential filing indicator assigned in London. As Puławski has shown recently, this helps us understand how different materials were gathered in a package which arrived in London as a single set.

¹ See Chapter 5, Section 5.4 'The Schwarzbart Diary, November 16, 1942'.

It is important to note that this is a selection made from a list of just over two hundred items and so the remaining materials, by and large, are not about the Jews. It is also important to bear in mind that at this point we do not know if it was Karski who took these materials from Warsaw.

MSW 16 Sequence no.	Description (PL)	Description (EN)	Attach-ment: Y/N?	Journal number (L.dz.K.)
80	Likwidacja ghetta warszawskiego	The liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto	N	4408/42
81	Meldunek nadzwyczajny z miejsca tracenia Żydów w Bełżcu z 10 lipca 1942, zał. „A”	Special July 10 1942 report from the location where Jews are exterminated in Bełżec, att[achment] “A”	Y	4407/42
82	Obwieszczenie Rady Żydowskiej w Warszawie z 22/7.42., zał. „B”	Warsaw Jewish Council announcement on 22 July 1942, att[achment] “B”	Y	4407/42
83	Protest Frontu Odrodzenia Polski, zał. „C”	Protest of the Front for the Rebirth of Poland, att[achment] “C”	Y	4407/02
84	Relacja policjanta, z 11.8.1942, zał. „D”	Policeman’s testimony from 11 August 1942, att[achment] “D”	Y	4407/42
87	Relacja uciekiniera, z 25/8.1942, zał. 3.	Escapee’s testimony from 25 August 1942, att[achment] 3,	Y	4411/42
88	Relacja 3. Zał. 5., Obrazki z terroru	Testimony 3. Att[achment] 5., Pictures of the terror	Y	4412/42
89	Relacja uciekiniera Nr 2., zał.4.	Escapee’s testimony nr. 2., att[achment]4	Y	n/a
107	List L. Berezowskiego z Warszawy 31/8.42. do p. Zygielbojma	Letter from L. Berezowski in Warsaw 31 August 1942 do Mr Zygielbojm	N	n/a

Table 1 - List of the key reports

We may assume that ‘Liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto’, the ‘*Likwidacja*’ report, refers to the central report of a set described in the Piekalkiewicz² radio message as ‘material on the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto’. This central report is listed as no. 80 on the MSW 16 document and is immediately followed by what is marked as attachments A-D (nos. 81-84, all with journal number 4407/42) and then three testimonies which are also marked as attachments (nos. 87-89, journal number 4412/42³). We also have the ‘Letter from L. Berezowski’, written by the leader of the Jewish Bund resistance in Warsaw, Leon Feiner, to Szmul Zygielbojm, the Bundist representative on the Polish National Council in London. ‘Berezowski’ was Feiner’s *nom de guerre*.

This appears to be a list of the documents on which the Report of 24 November is based but note that it lists seven and not six attachments. It will be shown in a moment that item 83, ‘Protest of the Front for the Rebirth of Poland, att[achment] “C”’, was not issued in Poland as an attachment to the *Likwidacja* report.

The items selected from the MSW 16 list match the general descriptions, mentioned in the previous chapter, of the materials on the extermination of the Jews which some historians thought Karski took from Warsaw on his mission to London. They also match the description given in the October 6, 1942 radio despatch from Warsaw to London (the Piekalkiewicz message cited above) which refers to ‘material on the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, and six attachments’ (but note again that this does not refer to Karski).⁴ It will be shown that these documents were part of a much larger set carried on rolls of microfilm to London where they were enlarged and transcribed on to typewritten copies available today in the Sikorski Museum (PISM) and the Polish Underground Study (SPP) archives in London. There are a number of copies of these documents distributed in the two archives—we will be examining the ones held in the SPP archive under file

² Cited by Fleming, *Auschwitz*, note 64, p. 345.

³ The MSW 16 list does not show a journal number for item no 89, ‘Escapee’s testimony nr. 2’. This seems like a clerical omission, the 4412/42 number appears on the actual report, SPP 3.1.1.13.5 p.60

⁴ See the Piekalkiewicz October 7 dispatch cited in the previous chapter, also Fleming, *Auschwitz*, note 64, p. 345.

reference A.3.1.1.13.5A.⁵ Note also that the original versions of these documents are available in the AAN archive in Warsaw. It is worth adding that in at least one case the typewritten copy available in the SPP archive omits a fragment of what we may regard as the more original text available in Warsaw.

The individual reports can be examined by following the link from the items in the MSW 16 list to the archived documents. The documents are dated and it can be assumed that the date refers to when they were written in Poland and not when they were received in London. They are typewritten and single-spaced. An English translation of the beginning or of a representative fragment of the document has been added here to convey a sense of the content.⁶ Once again, it is useful to bear in mind that the latest research shows that these reports arrived in London on November 13, 1942.

⁵ This is the 'old' SPP reference (*'stara sygnatura archiwalna'*), the new reference is A.272. The folder title is 'Jews – Civilian Documents' (*'Żydzi – Dokumenty Cwilne'*). Since both references are in use, I will tend to use the more familiar 'old' one here. For a full list of the London archival references of all copies of these documents see Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, pp 371-372, footnotes 375-389. It is assumed here that all copies are identical.

⁶ Edited English language versions of some of these documents were published in the December 1942 edition of the Polish Fortnightly Review (PFR), an official English language publication of the Polish Ministry of Information. Where possible, the text of the English translations presented here is based on the 1942 PFR version and is indicated by 'PFR' when it is judged to fully convey the original Polish of the SPP documents. I will use a translation from other sources if it exists, otherwise the translation is mine.

8.1 *The Liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto*

MSW 16 Seq. no.	Journal number (L.dz.K.)	SPP reference (new reference)	Document title/heading (PL)	Document title/heading (EN)	Date	No of Pages
80	4408/42	3.1.1.13.5/27 (A 272 p. 76)	Likwidacja ghetta warszawskiego	The liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto	Sept 1 1942	7
<p><i>The liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto has now lasted for over a month and is approaching its end. With the number of victims and the intensity of its atrocity, it is becoming one of the most painful pages of history</i>⁷.</p>						

Table 2 - *The Liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto report*

This is the *Likwidacja* report, the central document in the set of materials which interests us. It is an intensely harrowing account of the Warsaw ghetto deportations written from the point of view of a non-Jewish observer. As already mentioned, historians generally agree that it was a report produced by members of a small section of the Information and Propaganda Bureau (BIP) responsible for gathering information about Jewish matters (*referat żydowski*), its authors were Henryk Woliński, Stanisław Herbst and Ludwik Widarszal.⁸ Soon after its arrival in London, an English translation of the main part of the report was published in the December 1, 1942 issue of the *Polish Fortnightly Review*. For what looks like routine formatting and consistency reasons, the English version omitted the opening paragraph of the original Polish text. This is an important part of the report because it provides a brief introduction to the documents making up the set, identifies the six attachments and tells us something about the different narrative perspectives presented in the central report and the attachments. There is a deep and pervasive concern about credibility, about ensuring that the reader accepts the report as a true account of the horrors of the Warsaw ghetto deportations.

⁷ SPP 3.1.1.13.5/27 p. 1. Polish original in Appendix.

⁸ Cf. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom*, p. 38. See also Puławski *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordy"*, p. 307. Puławski also gives an extensive commentary on the report.

In the opening paragraph, the authors explain that *Likwidacja ghetta warszawskiego* is a partial, initial report which is merely a chronicle based on a selection of ‘authentic material’, on the most typical testimonies of people ‘whom we know personally, who are trustworthy’. We are told that the information in the report has been checked and confirmed by other testimonies and by news arriving from the ghetto every day. The authors also explain that the report is limited and one sided: these testimonies come from a small section of the ghetto population, from the ‘assimilated intelligentsia, in one case Christian’. They are written by people who are traumatised, who have not yet shaken off their depression, ‘they lost their loved ones, they escaped death by accident and are unsure about their fate.’⁹ Significantly, the authors also recognise the limitations of these materials by drawing attention to the missing, and possibly the most important testimonials. The central report is written by deeply sympathetic Poles working in the Information and Propaganda bureau of the Polish underground, it expresses the empathy of the observer, of the bystander, for the suffering Jews. The three testimonies of the escapees give us the views of what is admitted to be a certain narrow circle of survivors. But the authors also admit that what is missing is the most harrowing and perhaps the most important perspective which is that of the victims. The testimonies of the survivors end just before the final tragedy begins, they ‘do not step over the threshold of the “deportation” car, they miss out the final and the worst fate which their authors managed to avoid’.¹⁰ The testimony of those who were not so lucky, the vast majority of the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto, is missing.

⁹ SPP A 3.1.1.13.5/76, *Likwidacja ghetta warszawskiego*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 1. Polish original in Appendix.

8.2 The July 10 1942 Bełżec report

MSW 16 Seq. no.	Journal number (L.dz.K.)	SPP reference (new reference)	Document title/heading (PL)	Document title/heading (EN)	Date	No of Pages
81	4412/42	3.1.1.13.5/20 (A 272 p. 51)	Meldunek nadzwyczajny z miejsca tracenia Żydów w Bełżcu z 10 lipca 1942, zał. „A”	Extraordinary Report from the Jew-extermination Camp at Bełżec. Attachment ‘A’	July 10 1942	1
<p>(...)</p> <p><i>When a trainload of Jews arrives at the station in Bełżec, it is shunted to a side track up to the wire surrounding the place of executions (...). After unloading, the men go to a barracks on the right, the women to a barracks situated on the left, where they strip, ostensibly in readiness for a bath. After they have undressed both groups go to a third barracks where there is an electrified plate, where the executions are carried out.¹¹</i></p>						

Table 3 - The July 10 1942 Bełżec report

This brief attachment is an intelligence report based on ‘information from a German employed at the extermination camp’ in Bełżec. Note that it is dated nearly two weeks before the start of the Warsaw ghetto deportations. It includes factual information, some of which we now know to be inaccurate (the executions in Bełżec used carbon monoxide pumped into a sealed chamber). The central *Likwidacja* report states that the deportation trains go from Warsaw to ‘three death camps: Treblinka, Bełżec and Sobibór’.¹² This attachment seems intended to provide additional detail.

¹¹ English translation of title and text fragment taken from Polish Fortnightly Review, December 1, 1942, Annex I, p. 1.

¹² *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego*, SPP 3.1.1.13.5/27, p. 5.

8.3 The July 22, 1942 Warsaw ghetto Jewish Council notice

MSW 16 Seq. no.	Journal number (L.dz.K.)	SPP reference (new reference)	Document title/heading (PL)	Document title/heading (EN)	Date	No of Pages
82	4407/42	3.1.1.13.5/19 (A 272 p. 49)	Rada Żydowska w Warszawie. Obwieszczenie	Warsaw Jewish Council. Notice	July 22 1942	2
By order of the German authorities all Jews living in Warsaw, without regard to age or sex, are to be deported to the East (PFR). ¹³						

Table 4 - The July 22 1942 Warsaw ghetto Jewish Council notice

The original notice distributed in the Warsaw ghetto on July 22, 1942 was bilingual, the German version is in larger type above the Polish one. It seems reasonable to assume that most of the inhabitants of the ghetto would have understood the Polish rather than the German version.¹⁴ The heading and signature of both versions might suggest that the notice was issued by the Jewish Council, *Der Judenrat in Warshau* and *Rada Żydowska w Warszawie*, but the placement and size of the German text makes the power relation very obvious and is emphatically asserted in the very first sentence of the notice: the deportations have been ordered by the German authorities.

¹³ English translation from Polish Fortnightly Review, December 1, 1942, Annex II, p. 5. Note that the more euphemistic 'resettled' may have been a more appropriate translation of the term '*przesiedleni*' used in the Polish version of the notice. The German version uses *umgesiedelt*.

¹⁴ A photograph of the original notice is available in the Oneg Szabat collection of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw: <https://onegszabat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/obwieszczenie.jpg>, accessed May 17, 2019.

8.4 Polish policeman's testimony

MSW 16 Seq. no.	Journal number (L.dz.K.)	SPP reference (new reference)	Document title/heading (PL)	Document title/heading (EN)	Date	No of Pages
84	4407/42	3.1.1.13.5/22 (A 272 p. 54)	Relacja Policjanta	Policeman's Testimony	August 11 1942	2
<p><i>The monstrous liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto is going ahead swiftly. Of the some 400,000 Jews in the ghetto, down to August 11th inclusive some 180,000 have been carried off (PFR)¹⁵.</i></p>						

Table 5 - Polish policeman's testimony

The introduction of the main *Likwidacja* report describes this attachment as a fragment of a testimony made by a Polish “blue” (“*granatowy*”)¹⁶ policeman who had a permit to enter the ghetto. This is followed by a suggestion that the policeman worked for the Polish underground: the authors of the *Likwidacja* report add that the policeman’s ‘rank, function and surname are known to us’ but cannot be disclosed for security reasons. In the text of the attachment there is a reference to a Polish Police station situated within the ghetto and we may assume that this policeman’s permit was issued by the German authorities to allow him to carry out police duties inside the ghetto. This immediately raises a question about the involvement of the Polish Police in the deportations, the policeman is quick to dispel any possible misunderstandings:

There is also a Commissariat of Polish Police in the ghetto area, but the Polish police have nothing to do with the liquidation of the ghetto. The fact that the occupying authorities do not use these police for this activity is without doubt a proof of their lack of confidence in the Polish police, because of the attitude of the entire Polish population.¹⁷

The policeman’s testimony is presented as a factual eyewitness account of a bystander reporting from inside the ghetto at a time when the horror, brutality and

¹⁵ English translation taken from Polish Fortnightly Review, December 1, 1942, Annex III, p. 5.

¹⁶ The Polish policemen wore a blue uniform, hence the name.

¹⁷ English translation taken from Polish Fortnightly Review, December 1, 1942, Annex III, p. 5.

unspeakable cruelty of the deportations was reaching its peak, 'Recently from seven to ten thousand Jews have been carried off from the ghetto every day'. The detached tone may perhaps be deliberate, the bare facts as the policeman reports them speak for themselves and this is especially evident in his description of the Jewish victims,

Very striking is the complete, absolutely pathological passivity of all the Jews, the absence of any desperate reaction. They have broken down psychologically so completely that although at first many Jews hid, now a large number voluntarily turn up for deportations, desiring a speedy death. Not one of the Jews has any doubt that they are being carried off in order to be murdered.¹⁸

Note that the policeman does not make any comment or reflect on the fact that the victims of the ghetto deportations have been left to their fate, abandoned.

¹⁸ Ibid.

8.5 *Escapee testimony 1*

MSW 16 Seq. no.	Journal number (L.dz.K.)	SPP reference (new reference)	Document title/heading (PL)	Document title/heading (EN)	Date	No of Pages
87	4411/42	3.1.1.13.5/23 (A 272 p. 56)	Relacja uciekiniera. Zał.3.	Escapee's testimony. Att.3.	August 25 1942	4
<p><i>Today is a week since the day when thanks to the help of my Polish friends, by a miracle I just managed to get out of the Warsaw Ghetto. My friends have asked me to write down what I saw, what I heard from others and what I lived through during the most recent and terrible time of my life in the Jewish district.¹⁹</i></p>						

Table 6 - *Escapee testimony 1*

This eyewitness testimony was written by a woman who worked in one of the ghetto workshops, from the text we we can assume that she was a young, 'assimilated' Jewish woman with ID papers which helped her avoid the initial wave of deportation. She describes the rumours preceding the deportations and then the horrors which began when they started on July 22. At first the deportations were managed by the Jewish Police but,

If the Jewish Police could not deliver the daily quota [for deportation], which the Germans kept increasing from day to day (sometimes up to 10 and even 15 or 20 thousand), then the Germans went into action themselves, accompanied by Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Latvians.²⁰

At this stage the ID papers were of little use, the deportations were now scenes of terror fuelled by random acts of murder, survival became a matter of pure luck. Blocks of flats would be 'blockaded' and people were marched to the deportation trains,

[a blockade] would usually begin with shots being fired in the courtyard, this was a signal for all the inhabitants to leave their flats. Whoever stayed in a flat, in the attic or in the cellar was shot on sight. (...) Thousands of people were herded to the departure place [the Umschlagplatz]. Sometimes they had to run the whole way and those who could not keep up were shot.²¹

Apart from the reference to the help she received from her Polish friends, the woman does not explain how she managed to escape from the ghetto sometime in the middle

¹⁹ SPP 3.1.1.13.5/23 p. 1, Polish original in Appendix.

²⁰ SPP 3.1.1.13.5/23 p. 3, Polish original in Appendix.

²¹ Ibid. Polish original in Appendix.

of August, when the deportations were at their peak. It is worth noting also that although this eyewitness testimony describes the desperation of people who are clearly about to be transported somewhere where they will be murdered, the place where they are being transported to appears unknown. On Stawki street (the Umschlagplatz) they were forced into cattle cars, at least 100 at a time, and ‘transported to an unknown destination’.²²

The testimony is dated August 25, its final paragraph reminds us that this is an eyewitness account of something that is not yet over:

I managed to get out of this hell thanks to my friends. The Ghetto deportations are continuing, I heard that they are now deporting all the children.²³

²² Ibid. Polish original in Appendix.

²³ Ibid. p. 4.

8.6 *Escapee testimony 2*

MSW 16 Seq. no.	Journal number (L.dz.K.)	SPP reference (new reference)	Document title/heading (PL)	Document title/heading (EN)	Date	No of Pages
89	4412/42	3.1.1.13.5/24 (A 272 p. 60)	Relacja uciekiniera 2. Zał. 4	Escapee's testimony 2. Att.4.	August 27 1942	4
<p>(...) <i>In the meantime the Germans began to raise their requirements. They now demanded 5-6 thousand victims daily, then 10,000. There were days when they deported about 15,000 people.</i>²⁴</p>						

Table 7- *Escapee testimony 2*

This is a testimony of a 34-year-old Jewish man described as a ‘well-known scientist who was trapped in the factory he worked in while his wife was taken from their home and “deported”’.²⁵ He describes the random executions and murders in the months preceding the deportations, and the rumours which fuelled a sense of panic and despair when they started on July 22. At first it was the Jewish police, under the watchful eye of the SS, who had forced people to the Umschlagplatz and then on to the deportation trains. But then the Germans raised the daily quotas and the SS officers, with of their Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Latvian helpers, took over, ‘that was when the proper pogrom began on a huge scale. Those who tried to hide as well as random passers-by were brutally beaten or shot by the Germans’. They ‘hunted’ especially the elderly and children, killing some at the Jewish cemetery and herding others on to freight cars. ‘Most are probably gassed in Treblinka’.

The author of the testimony describes the fate of those employed in the ghetto factories. Their status offered some chance of avoiding deportation, but it soon became obvious that for many it meant being left alone while their families were deported, this is what happened to the author of this testimony. ‘The number of suicides is constantly increasing’.²⁶

²⁴ SPP 3.1.1.13.5/24 p. 3, Polish original in Appendix..

²⁵ A note which the editors placed at the end of this testimony. Polish original in Appendix.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

According to this testimony, by August 27 over 200,000 people had been deported but the deportations are still continuing. The author estimates that there were about 150,000 still left in the ghetto and that that they too will be deported in the months to come. His conclusion once again reminds the reader that he only described a few individual facts which by themselves cannot convey the enormity of the greatest pogrom in human history.

8.7 *Escapee testimony 3*

MSW 16 Seq. no.	Journal number (L.dz.K.)	SPP reference (new reference)	Document title/heading (PL)	Document title/heading (EN)	Date	No of Pages
88	4412/42	3.1.1.13.5/20 (A 272 p. 51)	Relacja 3. /Fragmenty/ Zał. 5.	Testimony 3. /Fragments/ Att.5.	July 28 1942	1
<p>(...)</p> <p><i>4. On a street in the aryan side a German policeman caught a Jewish mother who managed to escape from the ghetto with a baby in her arms. He shot the mother, threw the baby onto the pavement and trampled on it, he then opened a sewer manhole cover and threw the baby, still crying, into the sewer. This took place on July 24, 1942 on Okopowa street near the Jewish cemetery.²⁷</i></p>						

Table 8 - Escapee testimony 3

This brief one-page report consists of five short eye-witness accounts of murder and atrocity committed in the ghetto by the Germans during the deportations, the ‘days of terror’. We are not told anything about the author of the report, we can only assume that as an ‘escapee’ (*uciekini*) it is a Jew and not, as in another report, a Polish policemen. The heading of the report suggests that this is a selection taken from an extensive list of many such atrocities, these five incidents are merely ‘fragments’ of that list. The selection seems to focus on the intensely harrowing cruelty of the Germans towards the most vulnerable and defenceless: fragment 1 describes two SS soldiers finding an elderly man sitting in a chair in a fourth-floor apartment, they grabbed the chair, with him still sitting in it, threw it out through the window and, playing at target practice, shot at it from their revolvers as it was falling down. Fragments 2, 4 and 5 describe the murder of babies and infants held in their mothers’ arms. In fragment 4, as we see above, the mother is murdered as well as the baby. Fragment 5 describes a variant of this murder: the mother is a member of a group of Jews engaged to do slave labour on the “aryan” side, they thus have a permit to leave the ghetto. Fearing that she might not find her two-year-old when

²⁷ SPP 3.1.1.13.5/20. Polish original in Appendix.

she gets back at the end of the day, she carries the child in her arms at the ghetto exit gate. The gendarme at the gate lets the group pass through the gate and then suddenly halts it. He kills the child and then tells the group – which includes the mother who is now holding her dead child – to march on. Fragment 4 describes the undertaker cars which the Germans ordered to follow their deportation squads, the aim being to clear up the bodies that they clearly expected to be left in their wake.

As with the other reports, there is an obvious concern here about the believability of these brief fragments, where possible, time and place is added to enhance credibility. The elderly man in the chair was in Nowolipie between Karmelicka and Przejazd street. The murder of the baby in Fragment 4 (quoted above) was on Okopowa street, near the Jewish cemetery, on July 24, 1942. The murder of the two-year-old whose mother was in the work group was on July 28, 1942 at the gate at Leszno and Źelazna street. In fragment 2 we are told that these individual incidents are a common occurrence.

8.8 The 'Protest' issued by the Front for the Revival of Poland (FOP)

MSW 16 Seq. no.	Journal number (L.dz.K.)	SPP reference (new reference)	Document title/heading (PL)	Document title/heading (EN)	Date	No of Pages
83	4407/42 (att. 'C')	3.1.1.13.5/26 (A 272 p. 74)	Protest	Protest	August 1942	2
<i>In the Warsaw ghetto, behind the wall which cuts it off from the world, several hundred thousand condemned are awaiting death. For them there is no hope of rescue, no help is coming to them from anywhere (PFR).</i> ²⁸						

Table 9 - 'Protest' pamphlet issued by the Front for the Revival of Poland (FOP)

This brief pamphlet was issued by the Front for the Rebirth of Poland (*Front Odrodzenia Polski – FOP*), an underground Catholic organisation unaffiliated with the Polish underground state. Five thousand copies were printed and distributed at the beginning of August, the text was written by the Catholic author Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, co-founder of the FOP.²⁹ Her genuine empathy for the suffering Jews is deeply complicated by her anti-Semitism and these contradictory attitudes are combined in a text whose coherence is not immediately obvious. It is a pamphlet which nevertheless expresses the response of a Polish Catholic to the mass murder of Jews taking place in Poland; as Antony Polonsky puts it, it tries to reconcile 'opposition to the genocide and sympathy for the Jews (...) with some of the characteristic ambiguities of most Catholic thinking about the Jews before Vatican II'. Its contradictions are significant because they tell us much about the mindset of a Polish Catholic bystander looking at the Jewish tragedy unfolding before him in 1942. Polonsky cites Jan Błoński, the late Polish historian and literary critic, who wrote that the text of the pamphlet enables us 'to penetrate the thoughts and feelings of a significant (dominant?) section of Polish society at that time'.³⁰

²⁸ English translation from Polish Fortnightly Review, December 1, 1942, Annex IV, p. 6.

²⁹ Teresa Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom*, p. 53.

³⁰ Polonsky, A. & Michlic, J., 2003. *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 20. Polonsky and Michlic quote Błoński, J., 1994. *Biedni Polacy Patrzą na Getto*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, p. 40.

Timothy Snyder's comment on Kossak-Szczucka may help to highlight the problem, he writes that 'her significance as a rescuer is indisputable'. She was a Catholic anti-Semite who in September 1942 co-founded an organisation dedicated to helping Jews. Three months later this was absorbed within the institutions of the Polish underground state as the 'Council to Aid Jews', *Żegota*. She was deeply appalled by what was happening to the Jews, but it seems that there was something else which troubled her even more; as Snyder puts it, 'She was concerned for the souls of Catholics who could stand by and do nothing while mass murder took place before their eyes.'³¹

It is worth quoting one fragment of the pamphlet to illustrate how the Catholic response to the extermination of the Jews is mixed together not only with the anti-Semitism but also with a deep moral reproach against a world that remains silent. The pamphlet begins with a description of the horrors of the Warsaw deportations and half-way through it condemns the world for remaining silent:

The world observes this crime, more terrible than any seen in history – and it remains silent. The massacre of millions of defenceless people is taking place amid a universal ominous silence. The executioners are silent; they do not boast of what they are doing. Neither England nor America raises its voice. Even international Jewry, so influential and formerly so sensitive to injuries to its own, is silent. Poles are also silent. Polish politicians sympathetic to the Jews limit themselves to writing articles in newspapers. Polish opponents of the Jews demonstrate a lack of interest in a matter to which they are indifferent. The dying are surrounded on all sides by Pilates washing their hands.³²

What is interesting about this fragment is that a large section of it is omitted in the document archived in London, SPP 3.1.1.13.5/26. The SPP copy omits the section beginning with 'Neither England nor America raises its voice' up to the final sentence, 'The dying are surrounded on all sides by Pilates washing their hands.'. We know about the missing text because an original copy of the pamphlet is available in Polish archives.³³ The omission is important because our main focus is on the information that reached London in 1942 and we now cannot be certain whether the text we see today in the SPP archive was edited in London or in

³¹ Snyder, T., 2015. *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*. New York: Tim Duggan Books., p. 270.

³² Antony Polonsky translation in Polonsky, 'Beyond Condemnation, Apologetics and Apologies', p. 212.

³³ A photograph of the original is available in the Polin Museum in Warsaw <https://images.app.goo.gl/SkWe1EN9uDL9Yetb7> (Accessed June 4, 2019).

Warsaw. The accusation that the powerful allies, Britain and America, as well as the Poles and ‘international Jewry’, observed this historically unprecedented crime in silence and with indifference, might have been politically unacceptable to the Polish government in London and that is where the editing was done. But why would they need to do this in a document which we assume to be an internal, confidential and a verbatim transcript of materials which just arrived from Poland? It is also interesting that they did not omit the anti-Semitic passage which is in the original pamphlet and in the SPP document, but which would be omitted subsequently when it was published in London:

We therefore, Polish Catholics, raise our voice. Our feelings towards the Jews have not undergone a change. We have not stopped regarding them as the political, economic, and ideological enemies of Poland. What is more, we are well aware that they hate us more than the Germans, that they hold us responsible for their misfortune. Why, on what basis – this remains a secret of the Jewish soul, but it is fact which is constantly confirmed. Our awareness of these feelings does not free us from *the obligation to condemn the crime*.³⁴

³⁴ Polonsky translation, op.cit.

8.9 Letter from Leon Feiner (Warsaw Bund) to Szmuel Zygielbojm, August 31, 1942. The ‘Berezowski letter’

MSW 16 Seq. no.	Journal number (L.dz.K.)	SPP reference (new reference)	Document title/heading (PL)	Document title/heading (EN)	Date	No of Pages
107	N/A	3.1.1.13.5/25 (A 272 p. 64)	Do p. Zygielbojma, członka Rady Narodowej Rz. P. w Londynie	To Mr Zygielbojm, member of the National Council of the Polish Republic in London	31 August 1942	10
<p><i>One of the most urgent and shocking matters which for some months past faces not only Poland, but also the people of the world, is the murder of the entire Jewish population of Europe. This population numbered many millions of souls, the majority of whom, three and a half million, lived in Poland.</i></p> <p>(...)</p> <p><i>Warsaw August 31, 1942 signature: (-) L. Berezowski³⁵.</i></p>						

Table 10 - Letter from Leon Feiner to Szmuel Zygielbojm

We can regard this as an internal Bund party letter from the leader of the Bund in Poland, Leon Feiner³⁶ to the Bundist representative on the Polish National Council in London, Szmuel Zygielbojm. The letter is signed with Feiner’s *nom de guerre* pseudonym, ‘L. Berezowski’. It is a document which originates from the Bundist wing of Jewish resistance in Poland and it is addressed, in the first instance, to its Jewish representative in London. The signature at the end tells us that this letter was written at a time and place when the nightmare of the Jewish catastrophe was at one of its most intense moments, during the Great Deportation in Warsaw,

³⁵ English translation taken from Bartoszewski and Lewin,(1969), Document 77, *To Mr Zygielbojm, Member of the National Council*, p. 719 - 728. Note that this English translation has ‘ed.’ (assumed to mean ‘edited by’), the SPP Polish original has ‘*podpis*’, ‘signature’, as shown here, followed by Feiner’s resistance pseudonym ‘L. Berezowski’ (see note below).

³⁶ Leon Feiner (‘Berezowski’), 1886-1945, represented the Bund in the Jewish resistance movement in Warsaw and was responsible for its contacts with the Polish underground state. Cf. Ghetto Fighters House Archives page on Feiner, http://www.infocenters.co.il/gfh/notebook_ext.asp?book=34074&lang=eng&site=gfh. Accessed June 8 2019.

August 31, 1942. The letter ends with a postscript which is important for us because it almost certainly refers to Karski:

PS. The content of the interview given to the messenger delivering this document may be communicated by him to officials authorised to read it only after you and the Central Committee [of the Bund] have first read it and received it.³⁷

The syntax of the postscript is complicated and this English translation is also an attempt to unravel the Polish original.³⁸ It is an instruction from Feiner stating that the messenger who delivers this letter has also been given a verbal report which he is to convey after the document (*pismo*, i.e. this written letter) he is carrying has been delivered and read by Zygielbojm and the members of the Bund Central Committee in New York. We can be almost certain that the ‘messenger’ is Karski and the ‘content of the interview’ was the verbal report which he was given during the two meetings he had with the Jewish underground leaders in Warsaw in September 1942. Feiner was one of those leaders. The letter reached London on November 13, 1942 and Zygielbojm, its addressee, received it sometime before November 27. Karski met Zygielbojm on December 2, a week after his arrival in London, and it was then that he ‘conveyed the content of the interview’. This is the ‘verbal report’ from the Jewish underground leaders which he memorised in Warsaw; we will try to reconstruct its content in Chapter 11.

Feiner’s letter to Zygielbojm is particularly important because it is written from the perspective of a Jewish resistance leader in Warsaw who is witnessing the annihilation of his people. He lists the ‘horrific numbers and facts’ which describe ‘the mass tragedy of the Jewish population’, especially in occupied Poland. He describes the scale and brutality of this ‘nightmarish spectacle of death’ (*koszmarne misterium śmierci*) as unprecedented in human history. And it is a nightmare that is continuing, new reports of massacres are arriving every day, it is a planned and

³⁷ Berezowski (Leon Feiner) letter to Zygielbojm, SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 10. Polish original in Appendix.

³⁸ The English translation in Bartoszewski and Lewin,(1969) (op. cit., p. 728) is a brave attempt to untangle the original Polish which unfortunately fails to unravel the sense: ‘The contents of the interview given to the messenger bringing this present document may not be communicated to Official Circles by him until you and the Red Cross have become acquainted with it and after it has been delivered to it.’. Apart from the ambiguous precedent for ‘it’, the English translator takes Feiner’s ‘C. K.’ to mean ‘*Czerwony Krzyż*’, hence the ‘Red Cross’. But it means ‘*Centralny Komitet*’, the text at the top of the same page uses ‘*C. K. B. w New Yorku*’, which is an abbreviation of ‘*Centralny Komitet Bundu w New Yorku*’.

systematic mass murder. Feiner briefly lists the reasons for the apparent lack of active resistance and ends by giving what seems like the most important reason,

Finally, awareness of the absence of a response on the part of the Allies abroad in the first place, and the absence of hope for help from outside the walls of the ghetto in case of a possible outbreak of the Jewish population.

As he puts it, this is what ‘fills to the brim the chalice’ of reasons for this ‘mass departure from this world – without mass resistance’, it is what tips the balance against active resistance, against ‘*ewentualne wystapienie*’, a possible uprising.³⁹ For Feiner, to understand this it is necessary to know that apart from the terror and brutality of the Germans and the desperate hope of many Jews that some, at least, will somehow manage to survive the mass murder, it is the absence of any external help and a sense of complete abandonment which undermines resistance:

The Jewish population (...) maltreated, humiliated, for three years crushed by various repressive German decrees, imprisoned inside the walls of ghettos, watched by the police, the army and the gendarmes, surrounded by machine guns and an atmosphere of lawlessness, horror and death, without any hope of help from anywhere – in this tragic way it perishes completely.⁴⁰

Note that ‘without any hope of help from anywhere’ refers not only to the Allies abroad but also to the Poles and, possibly, to the Polish resistance outside the ghetto walls.

Feiner makes it clear that the extermination of the Jews is a German war aim. Apart from the war waged against the Allies, Germany is also engaged in a war against the Jews:

One of the war aims of the Hitler regime, declared many times from the highest Nazi throne by the Führer and by Goebbels himself, was the complete physical annihilation of the Jewish population (...). And whereas all other [German] war aims will eventually turn into their opposites and the defeat of German fascism is inevitable, this aim - the complete extermination of the Jewish population - is already being fully realised. Here the brutal Hitler regime is achieving a complete and easy victory, one which no-one will be able to take back from it even when the regime is crushed.⁴¹

³⁹ Berezowski (Leon Feiner) letter to Zygielbojm, 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 5. Polish original in Appendix.

⁴⁰ Ibid.. See also the translation in Bartoszewski and Lewin (1969), op. cit. p. 723. Polish original in Appendix.

⁴¹ Berezowski (Leon Feiner) letter to Zygielbojm, op. cit. p. 1. See also the translation in Bartoszewski, W. & Lewin, Z., 1969. *Righteous Among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews 1939-1945*. London: Earls Court Publications Limited. p. 720. Polish original in Appendix.

He refers to this war in his conclusions. In a war in which one side, Nazi Germany, is armed to the teeth while the other, the Jewish people, has remained disarmed and made helpless, there is a desperate need to save those Jews who are still alive. The letter is a call for rescue; Feiner underlines the most burning and the most essential matter: ‘This is about saving the one to one and a half million Jews who are still alive’.⁴² But in order for the rescue to have any effect, it must itself become part of an Allied war aim, there must be ‘immediate reprisals’ that are ‘strategic’ rather than ‘political’ and by this Feiner clearly means that such rescue must become part of the Allied war effort,

The Jewish people, being one of the small members of the great Allied family, have the right to demand from the other Allies an immediate and effective help in this unequal war.⁴³

Help can only come through reprisals which are military in nature and here Feiner seems quite clear about what will make them effective. As we will see in the next chapter, in the first of his seven demands he is calling for the retaliatory execution of German civilians living in Allied countries.

In the historic November 27 session of the Polish National Council in London, which we will discuss briefly in the next chapter, Zygielbojm – the addressee of Feiner’s letter - made a speech in which he referred to his Bundist colleague’s letter and tried to convey its desperate call for help. Three weeks after that session, the December 17 Allied Declaration condemned Germany for its ‘bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination of the Jews’ and re-affirmed the Allies’ solemn resolution ‘to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution’.⁴⁴ As Feiner makes it emphatically clear in his letter, this is the sort of response he was afraid of,

Declarations and promises to punish Hitler’s murderers after the war are pointless and meaningless. Because before this happens those Jews who are still alive (...) will be exterminated without trace and what will remain is a gigantic cemetery in which will rest millions of Jews.⁴⁵

⁴² Berezowski (Leon Feiner) letter to Zygielbojm, op. cit. p. 8. Polish original in Appendix.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 9. Polish original in Appendix.

⁴⁴ December 17 Allied Declaration. Hansard, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1942/dec/17/united-nations-declaration> (accessed August 15, 2019). See also text of the Declaration on p. 78-79.

⁴⁵ Berezowski (Leon Feiner) letter to Zygielbojm, op. cit. p. 8. Polish original in Appendix.

9 The key reports and their impact in the West

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the importance of the key reports which arrived in London on November 13, 1942 is partly – but only partly - based on the fact that they were taken from Warsaw by couriers who risked their life trying to ensure that the reports reached London. There is a noteworthy heroic aspect to this story which, once again, is captured by Raul Hilberg's account of the non-Jewish 'messengers', the 'risk takers', who 'brought the dire news of annihilation to the outside world'.¹ Karski was one such messenger and the 'dire news of annihilation' was contained in those key reports. But there is another important aspect to the 'messenger' story which needs to be highlighted. The 'dire news of annihilation' was received in London by the Polish government on November 13, 1942, towards the end of what might be considered the worst year in the Holocaust timeline. This is in contrast to the reports on Bełżec and Treblinka which another messenger described by Hilberg, Kurt Gerstein, tried to pass on to the allies but which were only revealed after the war, when it was too late. The reports listed in the previous chapter were important because they included desperate calls for help which reached the West during and not after the war. Rescue was still a possibility. But rescue would come only if these calls for help and the news contained in the reports were then used by the Polish government to reach Western leaders, Western press and the Western public before it was too late.

The aim of this chapter is to examine whether and how they did so. Their importance has much to do with the effect they had once they arrived in London. The Report of 24 November originated with the Polish government in exile and was passed on to the Foreign Office where it had a significant impact on the launch of the diplomatic campaign which led to the December 17 Allied Declaration. It was also released to the free world's press on November 24 and was quoted extensively in major newspapers such as the November 25 edition of the *New York Times*, which was examined in some detail in Chapter 4. Essentially this was the Polish

¹ Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*, pp. 217-224.

government's English summary of reports which it had recently received from Poland, and it was these reports, listed and described in the previous chapter, which contained the 'dire news of annihilation'. They are clearly the basis of the 'summary' presented in the Report of 24 November and, more generally, the message they carried was used in the various declarations, press reports and diplomatic notes which played an important role in the campaign leading up to the December 17 allied declaration condemning Germany for its 'bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination' of the Jews'. Apart from the *Likwidacja* report and its attachments, we also have the *Protest* leaflet issued by the FOP (*Front Odrodzenia Polski*, [Front for the Rebirth of Poland]) as well as the extremely important Bund letter from Leon Feiner to Szmul Zygielbojm. Sections of the FOP leaflet were used by the Polish government to illustrate the reaction of Polish society to the Jewish tragedy. The Bund letter included calls for an Allied reaction to the mass murder which Szmul Zygielbojm raised repeatedly until his suicide on May 13, 1943.

The later statements and reports, issued in the West, are based on these reports which arrived in London on November 13. They are marked especially by similarities – and at times exact repetitions - of content, form and style to the *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* (Liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto) and its six attachments.

9.1 *The Report of 24 November : a summary of the Likwidacja ghettas warszawskiego (Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto) report*

As described in Chapter 3, the Report of November 24, referred to by some historians as the 'Karski Report', is an English-language text in a document preserved and archived in the FO371 Foreign Office collection of the British National Archives and available to historians who wish to examine it. From the accompanying Foreign Office internal notes, it may be assumed that this document is a hastily typed-up and unformatted copy of one which needed to be returned to the Jewish visitors who brought it to the Foreign Office on the morning of November 26, 1942. The original document was almost certainly the one which was typed up in Ignacy Schwarzbart's office a day earlier. A copy is available in the Board of Deputies archive in London, dated November 25, 1942, it is presented as a two-

page, single-spaced typewritten report on headed paper with formatting and section headings and it is almost certainly this document or a copy of it that was delivered to the Foreign Office on November 26, 1942. A copy of both documents is reproduced in Section 3.5 of this thesis.

The content of the Report is summarised through its opening statement: ‘News is reaching the Polish Government in London about the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw’. It can be shown that the text of the Report is a direct summary of the *Likwidacja ghetta warszawskiego* [the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto] report.² It is not one based on some other, unspecified, document or on news which the Polish government had been accumulating from a number of different sources over the past months. Most recently, the Polish historian Adam Puławski has suggested that the Report is ‘without doubt’ a summary of the *Likwidacja* report.³ The aim here is to remove any doubt by taking a close translation of the Polish text and comparing it with the English text of the Report.

The first two pages of the *Likwidacja* report provide a brief chronicle of events from the creation of the Warsaw ghetto on November 1, 1940, through the suffering, hunger and disease of its 433,000 inhabitants in the year that followed. In the first paragraph on page three the report describes how by the autumn of 1941 news about a systematic mass murder spreading westward from the Eastern regions of occupied Poland began to arrive in the Warsaw ghetto. In the second paragraph of this page we have information about Himmler’s visit in occupied Poland in March 1942, and his order that 50% of all Jews are to be ‘liquidated’ by the end of the year. All this is summarised in the second paragraph of the Report of 24 November:

The persecution of the Jews in Poland, which has been in progress from the very first day of the German occupation, has taken on extremely acute forms since March 1942, when Himmler ordered the extermination of 50% of the Jewish population in the Government General, to be carried out by the end of 1942.⁴

The *Likwidacja* report then describes how rumours about the liquidation began circulating around the ghetto. It was expected to start in April, and then in late May;

² We will refer to it as the ‘*Likwidacja* report’ or just ‘*Likwidacja*’.

³ Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, p. 678.

⁴ NA FO371/30923. See reproduction of the report in Chapter 5.

in June it was thought that it would be delayed for some time. But when Himmler visited occupied Poland in mid-July he ordered it to start immediately and with full intensity. The Report of 24 November summarises this in the third paragraph:

Though the German assassins had started this work with extraordinary gusto, the results apparently did not satisfy Himmler for during his visit to the General Government in July 1942 he ordered new decrees personally, aiming at the total destruction of Polish Jewry.

In the page that follows, the *Likwidacja* report describes the days immediately preceding and then the two days at the beginning of the deportations, July 21 to 23. By comparing some key portions of this report with the corresponding text of the Report, it can be shown how the English summary tries to capture the essential message of the Polish original while retaining some key details which provide a direct link between the summary and the original. The *Likwidacja* report begins its description of the July 21 events as follows, note the reference to the police cars:

On July 21 1942 at 11 police cars carrying SS officials arrived at the Jewish Council building on Grzybowska Street and ordered the head of the Council, Czerniaków, to assemble all members of the Council, – after arriving, all were arrested and taken by police cars to the Pawiak [prison]. Most of them were released after a short detention. At about the same time police cars appeared on the streets of the ghetto. Uniformed Germans broke into apartments looking mostly for members of the Jewish intelligentsia whom they killed immediately in their homes without checking identity papers (...) as it turned out later, the detained part of the Jewish Council as well as passers-by caught at random were to be held as hostages.⁵

This is summarised in the Report as

The persecutions in Warsaw started on the 21st July 1942, when German police cars suddenly drove into the ghettos. The soldiers immediately started rushing into houses, shooting the inhabitants at sight, without any explanation. The first victims belonged mostly to the educated classes. On that day almost all the members of the Jewish Municipal Council were arrested and held as hostages.⁶

The *Likwidacja* report then adds a brief paragraph stating that at the end of July 21 nobody in the Jewish Council was told about the significance of these events or what they were leading up to. All that changed the next day, as explained in the next paragraph:

⁵ *Likwidacja* report, SPP 3.1.1.13.5/76 p. 4. Polish original in Appendix.

⁶ Report of November 24, p. 1.

On 22.7.42 after 10 o'clock police cars arrived again at the Jewish Council building and those members of the Jewish Council who were still free were called to hear a dictated announcement about a "resettlement" of Warsaw's Jewish population.⁷

The Report's English summary of this makes sure that a Western reader will not be confused about who made the announcement, it also omits some details but it is otherwise a very close translation:

On 22nd July 1942 the Jewish Council was ordered to proclaim the decree of the German authorities dealing with the re-settlement of all the Warsaw Jews.⁸

This is followed by a brief description of the key points of the "decree": all Jews are to be "resettled" except those working in the German factories or in the Jewish police, the daily quota is 6,000 and the Jewish Council were 'ordered to carry out the order under pain of death'. This summarises a much longer paragraph in the *Likwidacja* report which gives more details about the notice posted throughout the ghetto on that day. Recall that the text of this notice was contained in one of the attachments which arrived together with the report (see Chapter 8 for more details).

The next paragraph in the Report describes Czerniaków's suicide:

By the next day, however, on 23rd July, the German police again appeared in the Jewish Municipal Council and demanded to see the chairman, Mr. Czerniakow. After the police had left, Czerniakow committed suicide. From a note he left for his wife, it became clear that he had received an order to deliver 10,000 people the next day and 7000 daily on the following days, in spite of the fact that the quota had been fixed originally at 6,000.⁹

Which is a summary of the following Polish text, directly translated here into English, in the *Likwidacja* report :

On 23.7.1942 at about 19:00 two uniformed Germans appeared again in the Council building and demanded to see Czerniaków who committed suicide soon after they left his office. It is not known exactly what they talked about because Czerniaków did not speak about it to anyone before his death, but from the note he left and also from a letter to his wife we can conclude that for the next day he was ordered to deliver for deportation 10,000 instead of 6,000 people, and then 7,000 people per day.¹⁰

⁷ *Likwidacja* report, op. cit. p. 4. Polish original in Appendix.

⁸ Karski Report, p. 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Likwidacja* report, op.cit. pg. 4-5. Polish original in Appendix.

Once again, the wording, style and sentence sequence of this paragraph in the Report of 24 November is almost an exact English translation of the corresponding Polish paragraph in the *Likwidacja* report.

The Report then continues with a broad summary of the remaining three pages of the *Likwidacja* text, describing the intense brutality of the first stages of the deportations, the loading of the transport trains which are ‘sent to special camps at Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor. Once there, the so-called “settlers” are mass murdered’.¹¹ Then there are the numbers. The ones in the Report are the same as those in *Likwidacja*: since the start of the Warsaw ghetto deportations on July 22, 1942, 250,000 Jews had been murdered, 120,000 ration cards were printed for September, 40,000 for October. In March the population of the ghetto was 433,000. There is one discrepancy between the two texts which may or may not be a simple typing error. The Report states that ‘By the end of September 250,000 Jews had been eliminated’,¹² The *Eliminacja* report states that ‘So far (1.IX) about 250,000 have been “resettled”’,¹³ and in Polish date formatting ‘1.IX’ stands for September 1. The fact that this date is mentioned twice in the *Eliminacja* report,¹⁴ which is itself dated on September 1, tends to suggest that this may not be a typing error in the Report, leaving room for speculation about the possible motives behind the discrepancy. Given that the Report was released on November 24 its authors might have been concerned that ‘September 1’ would be “old news” to Western correspondents, ‘end of September’ makes the news more current.

The final paragraph of the Report refers to the reaction of the Polish population witnessing the horror:

These bestial murders sometimes take place in the presence of the local non-Jewish Polish population, who are helpless and overcome with horror at the sight of such inhuman violence.¹⁵

There is an important detail contained in this use of the term ‘sometimes’: it can be taken to mean ‘not always’. In Warsaw, the mass murder was occurring inside the

¹¹ Karski Report, *ibid.*, p.1.

¹² Karski Report, *ibid.*, p.2.

¹³ *Likwidacja report*, *op. cit.*, p. 6, Polish original in Appendix.

¹⁴ On page 6 the *Likwidacja* report refers to the ‘scale and intensity of the murder which has already been committed here by 1.IX.42’: ‘skali i natężenia mordy, który tu dokonano już 1.IX.42’.

¹⁵ Karski Report. *Ibid.*, p 2.

ghetto walls and as we know from numerous testimonies, the “aryan side” of Warsaw was a different world. The Polish population of Warsaw could hear the gunfire and the screams, see the smoke rising from the burning buildings, and in certain places see what is happening in the ghetto through the windows of buildings bordering on the ghetto boundary. The suggestion here is that although the Poles were fully aware of what was happening in the Warsaw ghetto, they were not in direct contact with the horror that was taking place beyond the walls, it was occurring in their city but not in front of them, they were witnessing it from a distance. We can see how this could present another problem for the authors of the Report who needed to convey some notion of the empathy which the Poles felt for the suffering Jews. The above passage in the Report tries to do this by summarising a *Likwidacja* account of a five-day pause in the deportations on August 20-24. This was not really a pause, the Germans and their auxiliaries were now conducting deportations in the suburbs of Warsaw and the towns nearby. Here the ghetto boundaries were marked by barbed wire rather than walls, the Jews were murdered as they were force-marched from one town to the next.¹⁶ As described in *Likwidacja*, all this was taking place in full and direct view of the Poles:

They now began murdering the Jews living near Warsaw. The murder was taking place before the eyes of a deeply shocked Polish population. The shooting of children, the killing of pregnant women, the hunt for fugitives in the area, hundreds of bodies on the streets, by the roadside, along the railway tracks, all this was seen by masses of Poles.¹⁷

At this point the Report of November 24 leaves the *Likwidacja* report and ends with a reference to the *Protest* pamphlet published by the Front for the Revival – here translated as ‘Liberation’ - of Poland (FOP):¹⁸

What the Poles’ reactions to these unspeakable crimes are, is best proved by a pamphlet by the “Front for the Liberation of Poland”, containing a strongly worded protest against the terrible extermination of the Jews. According to the pamphlet, the total number of Jews murdered in Poland since September 1939 exceeds one million¹⁹.

¹⁶ Cf. Engelking, B. & Leociak, J., 2013. *Getto Warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście*. 2nd ed. Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów., pp 620-628.

¹⁷ *Likwidacja* report.op.cit., p. 6: See also an English translation of this passage in the Polish Fortnightly Review, December 1, 1942, p. 4. Polish original in Appendix.

¹⁸ For more details on this pamphlet, see section 8.8 of the previous chapter.

¹⁹ Report of November 24, p. 2.

9.2 *Western media reports and the official Polish government announcement*

As described in Chapter 4, the information contained in the Report was released by the Polish government on November 24 at a press conference attended by correspondents from major Western newspapers. The November 25 *New York Times* article is a prominent example confirming the release date which was confirmed also by an Associated Press report published on the same day by other major American newspapers such as the *Washington Post* (page 6), and the *Chicago Tribune* (page 4). The English-language text must therefore have been prepared sometime before it was presented to the press on November 24. Schwarzbart obtained a copy and had it typed and formatted on his office's headed paper on the 25th, this copy was then taken to the Foreign Office on the morning of the 26th where it was copied again. But these copies are all in English, and since this text was released by the Polish government we may assume that it is a translation of an original and earlier version, with the 'official' wording, in Polish, drafted sometime on or before November 24.

This Polish text does in fact exist. On Thursday, November 26, *Dziennik Polski* [The Polish Daily] published a front-page article entitled '*Likwidacja ghetta w Warszawie*' ['Liquidation of the ghetto in Warsaw']. *Dziennik Polski* was the official newspaper of the Polish government in exile, Michael Fleming describes it as 'an official organ of an allied government', it served as the main medium for official announcements.²⁰ It may be assumed that this November 26 article in the *Polish Daily* was the official Polish government announcement, in its original Polish, about the Warsaw ghetto deportations. Comparing this Polish text with the English text of the Report of 24 November, or with that of the Schwarzbart copy, it is clear that they are almost direct translations, and because we are dealing with an official announcement by the Polish government, the Polish version must have been the original which was later translated into English. If that is the case then why did the

²⁰ Fleming, *Auschwitz*, p. 72. See also Wróbel, P., 2003. *Dziennik Polski: the official daily organ of the Polish Government-in-Exile, and the Holocaust, 1940-1945*. In: R. M. Shapiro, ed. *Why didn't the Press Shout? American and International Journalism during the Holocaust*. Jersey City: Yeshiva University and KTAV, pp. 507-34.

Polish government make its official announcement in the *Polish Daily* on November 26, two days after the press conference on November 24 when it released the English version to the international press? Why did it wait two days before issuing the Polish version, which we assume must have been available for translation into English before the press conference? Why was the Polish version not printed in the *Polish Daily*, the official newspaper of the Polish government, on November 24, when the English version was presented to the foreign press?

We can only speculate about the answers: printing delays at the *Polish Daily*, perhaps. A more interesting hypothesis raises the possibility that the Polish government wanted to see how the Western press reacted to the November 24 press release. On November 25 it saw that there was a reaction, the article on page 10 of that day's *New York Times* edition would be one important confirmation. But on the same page that newspaper also reported news about the Jewish tragedy which originated from other sources: the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem and the Stephen Wise press conference in Washington. This may suggest that the 'official' announcement issued by the Polish government on November 26, through the *Polish Daily*, was made because on November 25 it became evident that the report issued on the previous day had an impact on Western press channels. But so too did similar news which came from other sources. It was now important for the Polish government to make an official announcement and it was made on November 26. No source documents have been found to provide evidence for this possibility, which could be taken as suggesting that if on November 25 the West had not reacted to the news released on November 24, there would have been no official Polish government announcement on November 26. The 'official silence', as David Engel called it, would have been maintained and, once again, we can speculate about the reasons. One plausible, but not the only reason for the continued silence may have been the West's lack of interest or its unwillingness to listen to reports about the Jewish tragedy.

9.3 *The 'latest news' and the November 27 session of the Polish National Council*

On November 27, one day after the official publication in the *Polish Daily* of the news about the Warsaw ghetto deportations, the Polish National Council met in a special session beginning at 5pm at which it passed an emergency resolution condemning Nazi Germany for its systematic mass murder of Jews in occupied Poland. An English translation of the resolution was published four days later in the *Polish Fortnightly Review* (examined in the following pages), its opening paragraph refers to the 'latest news' (*ostatnie wiadomości*) which the Polish government received from Poland:

The Government of the Polish Republic has brought the latest news about the massacres of the Jewish population in Poland, carried out systematically by the German occupying authorities, to the attention of the Allied Governments and of public opinion in Allied countries. The number of Jews who have been murdered by the Germans in Poland so far, since September 1939, exceeds 1,000,000.²¹

It is worth noting the emphasis on the official nature of the resolution and on the actions taken by the Polish state: the resolution itself was passed by the Polish National Council (the exile parliament), an institution of the Polish state, the Polish government had recently received 'news about the massacres' which it then 'brought...to the attention of the Allied governments and the Western press'. It seems clear that the 'latest news of the massacres of the Jewish population' arrived in the reports which the government received on November 13.

As described in Chapter 4, the text of the resolution itself was drafted that day by Ignacy Schwarzbart who needed to find a form of words which would be acceptable to the right-wing members of the Council.²² It is possible to establish the connection between the Council's November 27 session and the key reports by examining the speeches about the resolution, as recorded in the official typescript of

²¹ *Polish Fortnightly Review*, December 1, 1942, p. 7.

²² In his November 27 1942 diary entry, Schwarzbart describes the efforts and compromises he needed to make to get the wording of the motion acceptable to other members of the Council. Cf Schwarzbart diary, *Yad Vashem M.2 751 p. 195 'Londyn 27 listopada 1942'*. See also Section 4.1.

this session.²³ The Council agreed to an emergency debate and a vote on the resolution that afternoon, speeches were made by the deputy Prime Minister Mikołajczyk and then by the two Jewish members of the Council, Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart. It is in the speeches by Mikołajczyk and Zygielbojm that the connection with the key reports becomes immediately obvious: Mikołajczyk's speech included a nearly-complete recitation of the *Protest* pamphlet (described in Chapter 8 section 8.8), Zygielbojm read key sections of the letter from Leon Feiner (Warsaw Bund, see section 8.9). In both cases there were omissions and departures from the original text and it is worth commenting on these very briefly.

After he had finished reading from the *Protest* leaflet, Mikołajczyk went on to describe it as the voice of protest of all Poles, in occupied Poland and abroad and in the name of the Polish state. In his words: '[I]n the name of the Polish Government I support this protest of Poles in Poland and that of the Polish National Council'.²⁴ It was thus announced as the unified voice of protest of Polish society and of the Polish state. Mikołajczyk's reading of the leaflet was nevertheless marked by the omission of the anti-Semitic passage discussed in Chapter 8, Section 8.8, he did not read the passage which stated that 'our [Polish Catholics'] feelings towards the Jews have not undergone a change. We have not stopped regarding them as the political, economic, and ideological enemies of Poland'.

The *Protest* leaflet was one of the key materials which arrived in London on November 13, as we showed in the previous chapter. Although the anti-Semitic passage in the original was not read by Mikołajczyk, it is fairly certain that another passage, in the last paragraph of the pamphlet, which he did read, would have echoed the one that was omitted. This last passage was omitted in the English translation of Mikołajczyk's speech which appeared four days later in the *Polish Fortnightly Review*. The passage, in Antony Polonsky's English translation, echoes the view that the Jews are the 'enemies of Poland':

We also protest as Poles. We do not believe that Poland can derive any advantage from the German cruelties. On the contrary. In the stubborn silence of international Jewry, in the efforts of German propaganda attempting to shift the odium of the

²³ PISM A.5.2/47a, *Stenogram z XLVIIa plenarnego posiedzenia Rady Narodowej R.P. z dn. 27.XI.42 o godz. 10.15 w Londynie*. [Stenogram of the 47a plenary session of the National Council of the Polish Republic on 27 November 1942 at 10:15 in London].

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 31. Translation taken from the *Polish Fortnightly Review*, December 1, 1942, p. 7.

massacre on to the Lithuanians and ... the Poles, we sense the planning of an action hostile to us'.²⁵

'An action hostile to us' is a translation of the Polish '*wrogiej dla nas akcji*' which uses the adjectival form of 'enemy' ('*wrogiej*', from '*wróg*'). This resonates with the missing passage about the 'enemies of Poland', and it carries the suggestion that 'the stubborn silence of international Jewry' is part of the enemy's plan. Four days later, the English translation of this passage in the *Polish Fortnightly Review* made sure that this suggestion was not to be carried any further, the paragraph was truncated just before the start of the reference to the 'stubborn silence of international Jewry', with the omission hinted through an ellipsis:

At the same time we protest as Poles. We do not believe that the German atrocities will turn to Poland's benefit. By no means. ...²⁶

Szmul Zygielbojm, the representative of the Bund in the National Council, spoke after Mikołajczyk. He began by explaining that given the recent news and announcements, he will not be making a speech, he will simply share with the Council fragments of a report which arrived together with those recently received by the Polish government. He described it as a report which came from 'an underground organisation in the ghetto itself'.²⁷ As we read the transcript, it becomes immediately obvious that Zygielbojm is referring to the letter from the Warsaw Bund leader, Leon Feiner, the 'Berezowski letter', described briefly in Chapter 8 (Section 8.9) as one of the key reports on the mass-murder of the Jews which arrived in London on November 13. As already explained, it is an internal letter from the leader of the Bund resistance in Warsaw, Leon Feiner, addressed to Zygielbojm, his Bundist colleague on the Polish National Council, who is now presenting to the Council what he takes to be the letter's essential message: the Allies – and that includes the Poles - must act now to save those Jews who remain alive. The letter is a desperate call for help. Zygielbojm read a fragment in which Feiner stated that this is not the time to go into the details of the mass murder of a million and a half Jews,

²⁵ Polonsky (1997), p 212-213.

²⁶ *Polish Fortnightly Review*, p. 6.

²⁷ Berezowski letter. PISM A.5.2/47a, p. 32, Polish original in Appendix.

[What is] most urgent, most burning, most essential is (...) rescuing 1 – 1,500,000 Jews who are still alive, rescuing them from an inevitable death. The dead, the murdered and those tortured to death cannot be resurrected. We must rescue the living.²⁸

As recorded in the Council session transcript, the text of the passages which Zygielbojm read is identical to what is in the original document. Because of time constraints he was compelled to omit much of the ten-page, single-spaced typewritten text, but the omissions do not distort the message but rather emphasise it.

We can easily collate this message from the original document – the Feiner or ‘Berezowski’ letter - to Zygielbojm’s speech in the National Council session. The letter ends with ‘conclusions and demands’ for action from the Allied powers and Zygielbojm clearly feels that he has a duty to pass these on; in this case to the Polish National Council in which he is the Bundist representative. In doing so he adapts the original message in accordance to a judgement he makes about what may be received as an acceptable demand in the West. Towards the end of his letter Feiner states that ‘In consequence of the above sketch of the mass tragedy of Jewish society occurring before our eyes’ one is forced to seven conclusions, all of which entail actions that must be taken immediately by the Allies and by Bundists active in Allied countries if there is to be any chance of rescuing the Jews who are still alive.

In his National Council speech, Zygielbojm lists five of these seven conclusions. He omits the last two which deal with internal Bund party matters.²⁹ Of the remaining five he mentions number 4 as ‘an appeal to the socialist movement’ and does not read it out. This leaves numbers 1-3 and 5 which Zygielbojm reads verbatim. Number 1 is clearly the most important, it is a demand for Allied reprisals and it clearly calls for extreme measures to stop the mass murder of Jews. Feiner emphasises

1. The necessity for immediate reprisals against citizens of German countries living in Allied territories with the threat of further and immediate reprisals if the massacre of the Jewish population continues.³⁰

²⁸Ibid.: See also a slightly different translation of this passage in Bartoszewski and Lewin, *Righteous Among Nations*, Document 77, *To Mr Zygielbojm, Member of the National Council*, p. 726. Polish original in Appendix.

²⁹In no. 6 Feiner instructs Zygielbojm to convey the contents of his letter to the Bund Central Committee In New York, in the Soviet Union (if such a committee exists there) and in other countries. In no. 7 Feiner asks to be informed about developments through reports and documents sent to Warsaw ‘to the remaining member of the [Bundist] Central Committee’.

³⁰Berezowski letter, op. cit. p. 34. Polish original in Appendix.

‘Reprisals’, *‘retorsyj’*, refers to retaliatory measures against German civilians resident in Allied countries and Feiner cannot be thinking here of mere arrest or internment. The reprisals must be based on a response that is to some degree proportionate to the German massacre of the Jews in Poland: it could be taken as a call for the execution of innocent German civilians.

Number 2 is a request directed to the Polish government and to the Polish National Council to issue an appeal to ‘all free societies of the world’ describing the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany on the Jewish population, with a call to their respective governments to retaliate immediately. Here Zygielbojm does not quite read the Feiner letter verbatim, he omits a bracketed note in which Feiner explains that the retaliation is to be as described in point no. 1. Number 3 is a request for the Polish government to issue a call to the Polish population in occupied Poland, urging it to provide all possible help to the Jews. Number 5 is a request that the underground state in Poland provide all possible material help to the remaining Jewish population ‘pauperised and condemned to die of hunger’.³¹

Having read Feiner’s main conclusions and demands to the Council, Zygielbojm then proceeded to act ‘according to the instruction which I received from Poland’, this ‘instruction’ is based on what he had just read in Feiner’s letter. Zygielbojm puts forward three motions proposing that the National Council, an advisory body, asks the Polish government to respond in three different ways to the Jewish catastrophe that was just debated. Each motion is based on Feiner’s ‘conclusions and demands’ but, significantly, there is no reference to Feiner’s first, and what he no doubt thought was the most important demand: reprisal executions of German citizens living in Allied territory. We can only speculate why Zygielbojm omitted that first demand, perhaps he thought that it would be rejected as an abhorrent criminal act which went against the basic values of the Western allies.

Zygielbojm’s first motion is based on Feiner’s second demand which, as we saw, called on the Polish government to appeal to the ‘free world’ to retaliate against the ‘scourge of German fascism’. But Feiner added a note explaining the nature of

³¹ Ibid.

this retaliation: it was to be based on the execution of German civilians living in Allied territory. The wording of Zygielbojm's motion clearly avoids any mention of this:

1/ The National Council is of the view that the Polish government should immediately approach the governments of Britain, United States and other allied countries with a demand that a reprisal plan against Germany be worked out immediately with the aim of forcing it to stop the mass murder of the civilian population and its planned extermination of the whole Jewish nation.³²

Here the nature of the reprisals is yet to be decided, and although Feiner's letter is emphatic about the desperate urgency of an Allied action which might save those Jews who remain alive, Zygielbojm seems hesitant here about the type of Allied response proposed by Feiner. This may well have been for tactical and procedural reasons.³³ It is interesting that a Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) report on the November 27 National Council session, published on November 30 but with a dateline of November 29, did not reveal any such hesitation. The JTA report states that the Council 'will consider practical proposals aimed at checking the Nazi outrages at a forthcoming session' and summarises the three motions proposed by Zygielbojm. The JTA summary of the first 'practical proposal' is significantly different to the one proposed by Zygielbojm:

1. Taking steps, together with other members of the United Nations, for reprisals against Germans who are at present in the hands of the Allies.³⁴

We can trace here the route of the message which the Bundist leader, Leon Feiner gave to Jan Karski in Warsaw. It reached London on November 13 and Feiner's Bundist party colleague read passages from it in the November 27 session of the Polish National Council. It was then passed on to the JTA – probably by Zygielbojm himself – for further distribution. But apart from the letter, Karski also

³² Ibid. Polish original in Appendix.

³³ Zygielbojm's motions were passed on for discussion in the Foreign Affairs Committee. As we follow the National Council debates in the next session, on December 1, it emerges that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on January 2 1943. See PISM A.5.2/48.

³⁴ JTA, Monday, November 30, 1942. 'Polish Leaders Urge Retaliation for Nazi Annihilation of Jews in Poland'.

carried another report from Feiner, a verbal report which he conveyed to Zygielbojm in a meeting that took place a few days later, on December 2. That meeting will be discussed in the next chapter.

The November 27 session of the National Council was relatively short, it lasted an hour and ended at 6 pm with a vote accepting the proposed wording of the resolution, as drafted by Schwarzbart. Schwarzbart himself spoke very briefly at the end of the session, just after Zygielbojm. He said that he did not have the words to convey ‘the inexpressible sadness, the inexpressible suffering’ he felt. He could only remain silent.³⁵

Somewhere around this time Schwarzbart sent a telegram to his colleagues in the World Jewish Congress headquarters in New York. The telegram is dated December 2 but this must refer to the arrival date and it seems reasonable to assume that Schwarzbart sent it just before the November 27 session of the Council. He states: ‘Have read today all reports from Poland’, presumably the key reports listed in Chapter 8. He mentions the ‘compulsory order Jewish council Warsaw for deportation’, so he must have seen the July 22, 1942 Warsaw ghetto Jewish Council notice (described in Chapter 8, Section 8.3). He continues with references to the death camps: Bełżec, Treblinka, Sobibór. It is clearly a telegraphic summary of the *Likwidacja* report. This is confirmed by a phrase he uses to conclude the telegram: ‘Believe the unbelievable’³⁶ a direct translation of ‘*Uwierzcie w rzeczy nie do wiary*’ in the *Likwidacja* report.

9.4 The December 10 diplomatic note sent by the Polish government to the Allies

In Chapter 4 we considered briefly the significance which many historians assign to the Allied declaration of December 17, 1942 condemning Nazi Germany for its ‘bestial policy of extermination’ of the Jews.³⁷ The Declaration was the only

³⁵ November 27, 1942 session of the Polish National Council. PISM A.2/47a, p. 36; ‘*niewymowny smutek, niewymowne cierpienie*’.

³⁶ Quoted in Wood and Jankowski (1994), p. 150 (citing Schwarzbart telegram to World Jewish Congress, December 1, 1942, American Jewish Archives/World Jewish Congress Collection, File A14/12).

³⁷ See Chapter 4, Section 4.4 ‘The December 17 1942 Allied Declaration and the Poles’.

occasion when the Allies referred directly to the extermination of the Jews as a unique event in the war against Nazi Germany. It was significant partly because it officially announced that the Allies knew about the systematic, state-controlled nature of the mass murder, they knew that Nazi Germany is ‘now carrying into effect Hitler’s oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe’. There was no longer any room left for official doubt about the news reaching the West, no basis for claims that it was ‘black propaganda’ or calls for further confirmation. This was the moment when a basic question could no longer be avoided: now that they knew, what would the Allies do? The Declaration was also significant because it presented the general framework of the Allied response and the logic that would guide that response: the extermination of the Jews in German-occupied Europe was a crime of historic proportions perpetrated by criminals who would be punished when Germany is defeated. The final sentence of the Declaration clearly suggests that after victory a legal process will be put in place by the victorious allies who will ensure that ‘those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution’. In other words, saving those Jews who still survive, forcing Nazi Germany to stop the extermination, is not to be a part of the current Allied war effort. There will be no immediate military response that would be tied specifically to the Jewish tragedy; the criminals will be punished after the war.

The December 17 Allied declaration was the result of a diplomatic and press campaign whose start may be dated on November 24, the day when the Polish government published its Report, when Stephen Wise held a press conference in Washington and when the Jewish Agency released in Jerusalem a report on the testimonies of refugees returning to Palestine. In Chapter 4 we focused on the timing of the release of the Report, noted that it was almost exclusively about the Warsaw ghetto deportations which ended two months earlier and examined the question of whether the Polish government concealed – or was pressured to conceal – this news for a significant period of time before that release. After November 24 the government made consistent references to ‘recent reports’ from Poland which arrived in London in mid-November. The importance of these reports was stressed in the diplomatic note which the Polish foreign minister, Raczynski, sent to the Allied governments on December 10. Its role in the campaign leading up to the

Allied declaration of December 17 was acknowledged by the British foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, when he read the text of the Declaration to the House of Commons on that day.

As already mentioned in Chapter 4, the text of the December 10 diplomatic note, along with ‘other documents’, was included in a pamphlet published by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in late December 1942.³⁸ The following reproduction shows the front cover of this well-known document:

³⁸ Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1942. *The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland*. The pamphlet does not have a publication date. We know that it was after December 17 since one of the ‘other documents’ which it includes is the text of the BBC broadcast made by Raczyński on December 17. See <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/94aaefca-4b68-4808-bb06-2032c88b6ba2> p. 2 (accessed Sept 4, 2020).

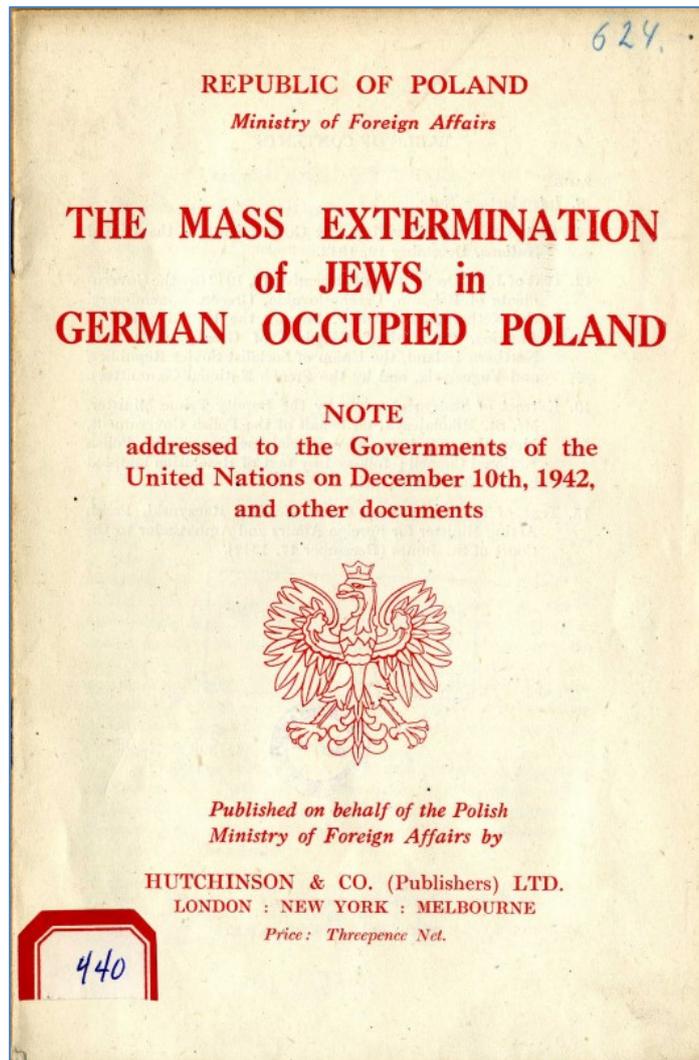


Figure 7- December 10 diplomatic note cover page

The 'Introductory Note' explains why the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to publish the pamphlet:

The purpose of this publication is to make public the contents of the Note of December 10th, 1942, addressed by the Polish Government to the Governments of the United Nations concerning the mass extermination of Jews in the Polish territories occupied by Germany, and also other documents treating on the same subject.³⁹

The five-page diplomatic note consists of 21 numbered paragraphs. Paragraphs 1 and 2 refer to the diplomatic efforts made at the January 1942 St James Palace Conference when Poland and other occupied countries aimed to persuade the major

³⁹ Ibid. p. 3.

Allied powers to adopt a policy for ‘the punishment, through the channel of organised justice, of those guilty of, or responsible’ for German war crimes. Warnings and declarations have since been issued by the major powers but this has had no effect:

The German Government has not ceased to apply its methods of violence and terror. The Polish Government have received numerous reports from Poland testifying to the constant intensification of German persecution of the subjected population.⁴⁰

Note how Raczyński is framing his diplomatic note: in the first two paragraphs he states that the Allied response to German atrocities has been inadequate, German persecution has intensified. He will come back to this in the very last paragraph (21) where he urges the Allied governments to find a more effective response. Note also that apart from a reference in the ‘Introductory Note’, he has not yet mentioned the Jews. He does so in paragraph 3:

3. Most recent reports present a horrifying picture of the position to which the Jews in Poland have been reduced. The new methods of mass slaughter applied during the last few months confirm the fact that the German authorities aim with systematic deliberation at the total extermination of the Jewish population of Poland and of the many thousands of Jews whom the German authorities have deported to Poland from Western and Central European countries and from the German Reich itself.⁴¹

At paragraph 4 Raczyński’s diplomatic note begins a detailed account of the creation, the agony and the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto. This provides the main focus of the note and it continues up to, and including, paragraph 18, just before the end at paragraph 21. It very quickly becomes obvious that the ‘most recent reports’ mentioned in paragraph 3 are primarily the ‘key reports’ we examined in Chapter 8, especially the *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* report and its attachments. We can see this clearly when we compare the English text of the diplomatic note with the Polish text of the *Likwidacja* report.

Almost without exception, the English text of the diplomatic note is a close summary or a direct translation of the Polish text. There are some differences: the note uses the term ‘non-Jews’ or ‘non-Jewish’ where the *Likwidacja* report uses ‘aryan’ or ‘non-aryan’. This is probably a reflection of what had become common

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 4. Paragraph 2.

⁴¹ Ibid. Paragraph 3.

usage in occupied Poland. Paragraph 4 of the diplomatic note, for example, describes how the ghetto was created:

4. The initial steps leading to the present policy of extermination of the Jews were taken in October, 1940, when the German authorities established the Warsaw ghetto. At that time all the Jewish inhabitants of the Capital were ordered to move into the Jewish quarter assigned to them not later than November 1st, 1940, while all the non-Jews domiciled within the new boundaries of what was to become the ghetto were ordered to move out of that quarter.⁴²

The corresponding Polish text of the *Likwidacja* report can be translated as follows:

The Germans opened the Warsaw ghetto in October 1940. Until November 1 1940 all Jews had to move to a quarter assigned to them and the Aryans had to move out.⁴³

Paragraph 5 of the diplomatic note describes life in the days just after the closing of the ghetto:

5. After the isolation of the ghetto, official intercourse with the outside world was maintained through a special German office known as "Transferstelle". Owing to totally inadequate supplies of food for the inhabitants of the ghetto, smuggling on a large scale was carried on; the Germans themselves participated in this illicit trading, drawing considerable incomes from profits and bribes.⁴⁴

'Owing to totally inadequate supplies of food...' is a summary of a long sentence in the *Likwidacja* report about the acute hunger and food shortages which gripped the ghetto by the Spring of 1942. The rest of this passage is a direct translation from the Polish original, rendered here in English:

After the closure of the ghetto, official trading with the Aryan quarter was conducted through a special German office – Transferstelle. [...] From the very beginning trade with the ghetto was based on large-scale smuggling in which the Germans participated, making huge revenues from profiteering and bribes.⁴⁵

Raczyński's diplomatic note continues with a close summary of a brief section of the *Likwidacja* report describing the months before the start of the Warsaw ghetto deportations on July 22, 1942. This includes a reference to Himmler's March and July visits to Poland and Warsaw. In paragraph 8 the note states that during the March visit, 'Himmler issued an order for the extermination of 50 per cent of the

⁴² Ibid. Paragraph 4.

⁴³ *Likwidacja* report, SPP 3.1.1.13.5/76, p. 1. Polish original in Appendix.

⁴⁴ Raczyński diplomatic note. Pg. 5, paragraph 5.

⁴⁵ *Likwidacja* report, SPP 3.1.1.13.5/76, p. 2. Polish original in Appendix.

Jews in Poland by the end of the year'. The order was then re-issued by Himmler in mid-July and this 'became the signal for the commencement of the process of liquidation, the horror of which surpasses anything known in the annals of history.'⁴⁶ There is a subtle but significant difference in the way the *Likwidacja* report and the diplomatic note describe Himmler's two visits to occupied Poland. This is how the *Likwidacja* report describes Himmler's March visit:

In March of this year, after Himmler's visit to the General Government [i.e. occupied Poland] when he issued his order to liquidate 50% of Jews before the end of 1942, there could no longer be any doubt that this enormous mass murder could be stopped only by some huge military or political events, for which all are waiting in vain to this day.⁴⁷

The note refers to the horror 'which surpasses anything known in the annals of history', the *Likwidacja* report to the desperate hope that the Allies might find some way to rescue the Jews from it. 'Waiting in vain to this day' is almost certainly the day when the *Likwidacja* report was written, September 1, 1942. But Raczyński's diplomatic note was issued more than three months later on December 10, it was addressed to the leaders of allied governments who might not like the reproach contained in the 'waiting in vain' remark. As we will see, Raczyński the seasoned diplomat, omits this phrase and saves his call for an effective Allied response for the last paragraph of his note.

The next six paragraphs (9-14) of the diplomatic note continue with a harrowing description of the horrors of the Warsaw deportations. As in the Report of 24 November, the events are presented in a sequence which is the same as in the *Likwidacja* report but here the note provides more detail from the the *Likwidacja* report: paragraphs 9 and 10 describe the days just prior to the deportations, paragraph 11 is about the July 22 deportation notice and the original 6,000 daily quota, 12 is about Czerniaków's suicide, 13 and 14 describe the desperate panic of the ghetto inhabitants and the 'appalling brutality' of the German police, the SS and their auxiliaries.

In paragraphs 15 to 19 the diplomatic note attempts to convey the vast scale of the mass murder being perpetrated in Warsaw by referring to the number of

⁴⁶ Raczyński diplomatic note, Pg. 6, paragraph 7.

⁴⁷ *Likwidacja* report. Op.cit.. p. 3. Polish original in Appendix.

victims. The Report of 24 November, as we saw, takes the numbers directly from the *Likwidacja* report and clearly states that ‘By the end of September 250,000 Jews had been eliminated’.⁴⁸ The diplomatic note, on the other hand, allows for some small degree of doubt and uncertainty. In paragraph 14 it states that

As far as is known, the trains were despatched to three localities – Tremblinka (*sic*), Belzec and Sobibor, to what the reports describe as “Extermination camps”. (...) It is reported that on arrival in camp the survivors were stripped naked and killed by various means, including poison gas and electrocution.

The phrases ‘as far as is known’, ‘it is reported’ do not occur in the *Likwidacja* report. The hesitancy continues in the next paragraph of the diplomatic note:

15. According to all available information, of the 250,000 Jews deported from the Warsaw ghetto up to September 1st 1942, only two small transports, numbering about 4,000 people, are known to have been sent eastwards in the direction of Brest-Litovsk and Malachwicze, allegedly to be employed on work behind the front line. It has not been possible to ascertain whether any of the other Jews deported from the Warsaw ghetto still survive, and it must be feared that they have all been put to death.⁴⁹

‘According to all available information’, ‘It has not been possible to ascertain’, ‘it must be feared’ may reflect Raczyński’s concern that the hard facts, as reported in the *Likwidacja* report, might strain the credibility of the diplomatic note if they were not softened in some way. By contrast, the *Likwidacja* text on which the above passages are based is clear and direct: on the railway siding in Warsaw up to 120 people at a time are pushed into freight cars that can accommodate 40, after that

The freight cars are padlocked and the trains leave. (...) They go to three death camps: Treblinka, Bełżec and Sobibór, where the cars are unloaded, the victims are stripped naked and killed, probably with gas. Of the quarter million deported only two small transports, totalling about 4,000 [deportees], were directed towards work by the frontline (towards Brest-Litovsk and Małachowicze).⁵⁰

In paragraph 19 of the diplomatic note Raczyński tries to give numbers which are clearly intended to convey a sense of the vast scale of the mass murder of Jews in occupied Poland. Once again, there is a hint of uncertainty and it is hard to tell whether it is because he cannot quite believe these numbers or whether he suspects

⁴⁸ Karski Report, op.cit., p.2.

⁴⁹ Raczyński’s diplomatic note, op.cit., p. 9.

⁵⁰ *Likwidacja* report. Op.cit.. p.5. Polish original in Appendix.

that his readers may not: 'It is not possible to estimate the exact numbers of Jews who have been exterminated in Poland since the occupation of the country by the armed forces of the German Reich'. The numbers are so huge that we do not need them to be exact and Raczynski continues by stating that 'all the reports agree that the total number of killed runs into many hundreds of thousands'. He then adds that these same reports 'all agree' that the total number of Jewish victims is significantly higher: 'of the 3,130,000 Jews in Poland before the outbreak of war, over a third have perished during the last three years'. Raczynski had probably based this on the November 27 National Council resolution which states that 'The number of Jews who have been murdered by the Germans in Poland so far, since September, 1939, exceeds 1,000,000'.⁵¹

Raczynski's diplomatic note served to dismiss claims that any allied action would need to wait until the news was confirmed, in fact it itself could be regarded as an official and final confirmation. More significantly, the note can be read as an attempt by a member of the alliance to persuade the major allies to adopt a strategy which included reprisals as a part of the war effort. Paragraph 21, the final one of the note, ends with an assertion of a 'confident belief' that the Allies will condemn German crimes and that the criminals will be punished. But it also refers to the 'necessity...of finding means offering the hope that Germany might be effectively restrained from continuing to apply her methods of mass extermination.' Note the diplomatic tone – some might say 'vagueness' - of this request: the major Allies need to find the 'means' through which Germany may be 'effectively restrained'. At the same time it is stressed that the 'means' through which the major Allies have so far tried to restrain Germany have failed. Threats of post-war retribution and punishment of criminals have made no difference, the mass murder has continued. Indeed, the main body of the diplomatic note provided credible evidence that its scale had increased dramatically and that over a million Jews have now been murdered. Raczynski is clearly suggesting that military reprisals are the only means through which Germany could be 'effectively restrained from continuing' mass extermination.

⁵¹ Polish Fortnightly Review, December 1, 1942. Pg 2.

10 Karski and the key reports

10.1 *The heroic mission*

An essential theme of the Karski story is the heroic aspect of his wartime mission: the reports he took from Warsaw were about the extermination of the Jews, they contained ‘dire news of annihilation’. Although Karski risked his life to bring them to the West, his mission was co-ordinated by Polish agencies in London, Warsaw, France and Portugal who used encrypted short-wave messages to guide ‘Witold’ (ie. Karski) and ‘Witold’s post’ through occupied Europe to London.¹

‘Witold’s post’ consisted of reports photographed on a roll of microfilm hidden inside the stem of a house key. When he reached France, Karski handed it to Polish agents who placed it on a separate route to London where it arrived two weeks before he did. In London it was naturally assumed that what arrived was ‘Witold’s post’ and on November 17 a despatch was sent from London to Warsaw confirming that ‘Witold’s post’ has been received. If we assume that it included the key reports on the Jews listed in Chapter 8 then the link with Karski is obvious: he was the one who carried them from Warsaw and, with help from Polish agents in France, it was thanks to him that they reached London.

In their 1994 biography of Karski, Wood and Jankowski provide an early account of how the microfilms were prepared in Warsaw in early September 1942. There is a strong suggestion that the microfilmed materials were primarily about the extermination of the Jews. They also mention a ‘cache’ of ‘several documents written by political leaders and destined for their counterparts in exile, as well as a few samples of Jan’s [i.e. Karski’s] own analysis of underground publications, written some months earlier’.² We can assume that these ‘several documents’ and ‘few samples’ were not about the Jews, they were clearly about the politics of the underground state in Poland. To Wood and Jankowski they seem peripheral, the most important materials were those on the Jewish tragedy, carrying them to London

¹ An account of Karski’s journey from Warsaw was first provided in Wood and Jankowski’s biography of Karski, (Wood & Jankowski, *Karski*, pp. 130-143). See comments below.

² Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*, p.130

is presented as the central purpose of Karski's mission.³ They describe how these materials were prepared for the mission:

All this material was to be shrunken to fit on a tiny roll of film. That film would then be stuffed into a hollow house key, which would then be welded shut. All Jan [Karski] had to do was carry it across Hitler's empire.

Wood and Jankowski then stress the enormous significance of what was inside this house key:

(...) it was the material in the key, reaching London by clandestine means before Jan [Karski] himself did, that was destined to shock the world.⁴

According to Wood and Jankowski, using false papers, Karski travelled by train via Berlin to Paris where he handed over the key and its materials to the head of the Polish underground in France, Aleksander Kawałkowski. Soon afterwards, Karski and the key were put on separate routes and Wood and Jankowski provide a highly-abbreviated account of how the key – and the microfilmed reports hidden inside it – reached London:

Kawałkowski would make use of his consular connections to send the key out of France in the diplomatic pouch of a neutral country. The key, bearing microfilmed "mail" that would shock the world, was to arrive in London about ten days before Jan [Karski].⁵

10.2 An 'unheard of volume of materials'

Wood and Jankowski's account is primarily based on the conversations and meetings they had with Karski in the years 1987-1993⁶ and there is every reason to assume that their book is an accurate record of the testimonies and interviews which Karski gave them in those years. They also added a few useful archival references relating to courier traffic despatches. These later testimonies tell us something about the volume of materials Karski took from Warsaw. In Chapter 5 (Section 5.7) it was noted that in his 1944 book, *Story of a Secret State*, he stated that the microfilm contained 'about a thousand pages of print', this is also the number given

³ Wood & Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 130-131.

⁴ Ibid. p. 132.

⁵ Ibid (1994), p. 138.

⁶ Ibid. p. 284.

in Piasecki's 2017 biography of Karski.⁷ In 1978 Karski mentioned to Lanzmann that it contained about '400 typed pages'.⁸ Apart from an estimate based on those later testimonies, there are also original documents which refer to the arrival in London of a huge volume of materials. On December 11 Polish government officials sent messages to General Sikorski, who was on an official visit in America at the time, informing him about the arrival of 'an unheard of volume of materials'.⁹ But the key reports on the extermination of the Jews listed in Chapter 8 add up to 33 typewritten pages.¹⁰ This suggests that the reports on the Jews made up a relatively small proportion of that volume, at best about 8%.

It is important to fix some key dates of Karski's mission. The MI19 report we examined in Chapter 5 states that Karski arrived in the UK on November 25 and was moved to an interrogation facility in South London on November 26, 1942.¹¹ His departure date from Warsaw had been a matter of speculation because, until recently, historians based it primarily on his later testimonies rather than on any direct references to original documents. In his testimonies, Karski mentions October 1 and this is the date given by Wood and Jankowski. In his biography of Karski, Andrzej Żbikowski suggests that he left Warsaw 'sometime between the 12th and the 18th or the 19th of September'.¹² Adam Puławski's suggestion seems most convincing as it is based on two messages sent at the time from France to the Polish government in London. The first message was sent by Karski himself from Lyon to London over the encrypted radio link used there by a Polish resistance cell. The message is dated October 4 and Karski writes, 'I arrived in Lyon on September 30'. Just over three weeks later the head of Polish resistance in France sent a letter to London stating that it took Karski 'four days' to arrive in Lyon from Warsaw. Taken

⁷ Piasecki, W., 2017. *Jan Karski, Jedno życie. Kompletna historia. Tom 2. (1939-1945) Inferno*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Insignis. Ebook, Chapter LXXXIV, loc. 15947-15961. Piasecki adds some useful information about the Contax microfilm camera and its ability to photograph documents at a scale of 1:200.

⁸ See Section 5.7, note 58.

⁹ 'Niesłyszana ilość materiałów'. IMGS, A.9.III.4/11, Messages 71, 72, 73, 11 XII 1942 are cited in Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, p. 367.

¹⁰ See page counts shown in Chapter 8. A typewritten version of the microfilmed reports was prepared in London but we can assume that the page count of the Warsaw originals would be the same if not smaller.

¹¹ See Chapter 3, Section '3.4 November 25th 1942: the British MI19 welcomes Karski in London'.

¹² Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 135. See also their 'October 1' endnote on p. 286. Żbikowski, *Karski*, p. 272.

together, these two messages show that Karski left Warsaw on September 27.¹³ The date is important for at least two reasons, it means that Karski left Warsaw almost a week after the Warsaw ghetto deportations ended on September 21, 1942.¹⁴ It also means that after September 27 any reports despatched from Warsaw could not have been carried by Karski.

Puławski has recently presented compelling evidence showing that Karski's materials arrived in London on November 13, 1942 and not on November 17 as previously thought.¹⁵ This date is important because it fits in with Schwarzbart's November 16, 1942 diary entry examined in Chapter 5. This was the day when Schwarzbart visited the offices of the Polish ministry of interior and by chance met officials who told him about 'the horrific news which arrived from Poland about mass murders in the Warsaw ghetto'.¹⁶ Documents cited by Puławski show that Polish agents took Karski's house key from France to Lisbon, from there it was sent to London where it arrived on November 13. The date is mentioned in various messages sent to Lisbon and Warsaw confirming that the microfilmed materials which Karski took from Warsaw, 'Witold's post', had been received in London.¹⁷

10.3 Karski and the contents of "Witold's post"

It is generally assumed that all the reports on the extermination of the Jews listed in Chapter 8 were included in 'Witold's post', in the materials which arrived in London on November 13, 1942. These would include the crucial *Likwidacja* report which provided the basis for the reports and summaries on the Jewish tragedy which the Polish government issued from November 24 onwards. There are however two important questions about the connection with Karski. The first raises doubts about whether Karski knew exactly what reports were held on the microfilm hidden inside the house key. The second raises doubts about whether the *Likwidacja* report was taken from Warsaw by Karski.

¹³ Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, p. 352. Puławski cites IMGS A.9.VI.9/19, „Roland's” 04/10/1942 message 103 F, and IMGS A.9.VI.9/1b, “Roland's” 27/10/1942 letter.

¹⁴ Engelking & Leociak, *Getto Warszawskie*, Pg. 630 (V.1.). The deportation of the remaining Jewish policemen is taken as the end date.

¹⁵ Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, p. 364.

¹⁶ Cf. Chapter 5, Section 5.4, pg. 107.

¹⁷ Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, pp. 364-365.

It was noted in Chapter 5 that in 1978 Karski told Lanzmann, ‘of course I had not the slightest idea of what was in that key’¹⁸ and this should not be surprising given the ‘unheard of volume of materials’ held on the roll of microfilm hidden inside it. Karski’s November 30 report, examined in Chapter 6, provides a broad overview of the Polish underground institutions and resistance groups which supplied the reports – and these included the ‘Bund, (in the name of all Jewry)’ – but there is no mention of any specific reports. It thus seems reasonable to assume that Karski ‘had not the slightest idea of what was in that key’ simply because other people decided what reports to include in the microfilm. All this suggests that if the *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* document was on the microfilm inside the key, he would not know about it, even though he may have been very familiar with a report written by his colleagues at BIP, the Information and Propaganda Bureau, a section of the Central Command of the Home Army.

In a recent study, Adam Puławski has tried to show that the *Likwidacja* report and its six attachments was not taken from Warsaw by Karski.¹⁹ It was included in the materials which arrived in London on November 13 in a package containing two separate microfilms dispatched from Warsaw by different routes. One was carried by Karski via Berlin and the other by other, unidentified couriers on a route through Budapest and Switzerland. In Karski’s case, the roll of microfilm was hidden inside a hollow house key, the other couriers carried the microfilm in a hollowed out battery inside a torch (flashlight). In a series of mistakes, misunderstandings and near-misses, described in great but fascinating detail by Puławski, at the end of October the torch reached Polish agents in France soon after Karski left for Spain. Karski’s key and the torch were then taken to Lisbon and sent on as one package to London where Polish government officials assumed that this was the set of materials carried from Warsaw by Karski. This was ‘Witold’s post’ that they had been waiting for and it included reports on the Jewish tragedy, especially the all-important *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* report. Puławski argues that the officials in London were mistaken, the *Likwidacja* report was not in the key taken from Warsaw by

¹⁸ See Chapter 5, Section 5.7.

¹⁹ Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, Especially p. 307-389.

Karski, that report was on the microfilm taken by unnamed couriers who carried it via Budapest.

Puławski has uncovered important documents which show that apart from the key carried by Karski, Polish agents in France also received microfilmed materials hidden inside a torch couriered from Budapest via Bern.²⁰ Documents sent between France, Lisbon and London seem to provide good evidence that the package which arrived in London on November 13 contained two sets of microfilmed materials sent by separate routes from Warsaw and combined in France. The combined set included the key reports such as the *Likwidacja* report and its attachments. Having shown that the November 13 materials were made up of two separate sets of microfilms, Puławski then tackles what appears to be the more important question of whether the microfilmed reports on the Jews, and especially the *Likwidacja* report, were in the key or in the torch. He concludes that *Likwidacja* and its six attachments was in the torch and that means that it was routed from Warsaw to France via Budapest. This means that the most important document on the extermination of the Jews which arrived in London on November 13 was not carried from Warsaw by Karski who travelled via Berlin.²¹

In support of this conclusion Puławski presents a detailed examination of a number of documents which contain fragments of information about the content and the route of the two sets of microfilmed reports. He claims that taken together, these fragments show that a separate set of microfilmed materials, hidden inside the torch, was despatched from Warsaw to Budapest on October 1, 1942. This was the 'October post' and it contained the *Likwidacja* report and its attachments. It thus could not have been carried by Karski who left Warsaw four days earlier and travelled via Berlin.

Of the numerous documents cited here by Puławski, two are particularly important. On October 7 the government delegate sent a message to London clearly stating that the *Likwidacja* report was included in a recent post taken by a courier from Warsaw and destined for London. But it does not identify the courier.

²⁰ See especially PISM, A.9.VI.9/1b. Letter from Kawalkowski to Kowalewski (Lisbon) and Jan Librach (head of Continental Action in London). Also PISM IMGS, A.9.VI.17/5, Letter 170 from Kowalewski to Librach, November 6 1942, Cited extensively in Puławski, *ibid.*, pp. 351 - 364.

²¹ Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordy"*, p. 389.

The message is a covering letter for the materials compiled on October 7 but, confusingly, it is a list made up of three parts: the first lists the current – October 7 - materials while the second identifies an item which was omitted by error in the covering letter for materials sent on September 1.

What is most important however is the third part of the government delegate's message: 'The last courier also carried materials which I list below', the list consists of 6 items and item number 2 is 'A report on the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto (with 5 attachments)'.²² This is clearly a reference to the *Likwidacja* report. The question is whether it was Karski who was the 'last courier'. In his 2011 biography of Karski, the Polish historian Andrzej Żbikowski suggests that '[i]t was probably Karski' because the materials listed in the covering letter were 'almost certainly' taken by Karski²³. This view was echoed by Michael Fleming in 2014 who is careful to distinguish between the first part of the list, which describes the contents of the materials sent on October 7, and the third part which lists materials sent at some previous, unspecified date.²⁴ This important document illustrates the fragmentary nature of the available evidence: there is a clear reference to the *Likwidacja* report but only a vague one to an unnamed 'last courier' who carried the report at some unspecified date after September 1 and before October 7.

Another document cited by Puławski helps to fill some of the gaps but it also illustrates the analytical challenges: on October 15 the deputy prime minister Mikołajczyk sent an urgent request to Warsaw asking for the latest information on the persecution of the Jews. The government delegate in Warsaw replied on December 27, nearly two and a half months later: 'I sent detailed reports about the extermination of the Jews via B... on September 1 and October 1'.²⁵ The *Likwidacja* report is clearly one of these 'detailed reports' but it could not have been

²² AAN 203/I-31 K. 57. Microfilm 2201/9I. 'Przez ostatniego kuriera zostały również przesłane materiały, których wykaz poniżej załączam: (...) 2) Sprawozdanie z likwidacji getta warszawskiego (z 5 załącznikami)'. Cited by Puławski, *ibid.*, 316-319. See also a detailed analysis of this message in Fleming, *Auschwitz*, pp. 141-142.

²³ Żbikowski, *Karski*, p. 272-273.

²⁴ Fleming, *Auschwitz*, p. 141-142, see also note 64 (p. 345). Refer also to the *Errata* which applies to the text in both places.

²⁵ Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordu"*, p. 317-318. Puławski cites SPP, MSW11, Mikołajczyk's message 91, sent 15 Oct 1942. The Delegate's reply is in AAN, DR, 201/1-6, message 179, sent 29 December 1942: 'Szczegółowe sprawozdania dotyczące likwidacji Żydów wysłałem na B...dnia 1 września i 1 października'.

sent on September 1 because that was the date when it was written, so it must have been sent on October 1. But in this document the ‘via B...’ introduces another problem, it refers to the route taken by the courier carrying the reports and we can assume that the abbreviation helped to make it confidential. The reports could have been couriered via Berlin or via Budapest; Puławski refers to other documents which appear to show that Polish officials in London knew that ‘B...’ in this case referred to Budapest.²⁶

Puławski concludes that the *Likwidacja* report and its attachments was sent from Warsaw to London on October 1 via the Budapest route. In other words, one of the most important reports on the Jewish tragedy which arrived in London on November 13 could not have been carried by Karski because he left Warsaw on September 27 and travelled via Berlin.

It is difficult to fully accept Puławski’s conclusion. We may note that it is based on an elaborate assembly of individual source documents which provide fragments of indirect information; there is no one covering letter or message listing the materials on the roll of microfilm hidden inside the key Karski took from Warsaw. However, given the ‘unheard of volume of materials’ as well as the wartime constraints, it may not have been prudent or practical to compile such a list. We may also try to raise doubts about some of the precise dates this conclusion depends on but the evidence for the important ones seems fairly solid: Karski’s message saying that he ‘arrived in Lyon on September 30’ means that he could not have carried the materials despatched from Warsaw in the October 1 post. That date in turn is confirmed in a number of different sources cited by Puławski.

We can however ask about the significance of his conclusion. If Karski ‘had not the slightest idea of what was in the key’ then the question of whether he carried the *Likwidacja* report from Warsaw becomes unexpectedly complicated. If he did carry it, he would not have known that he did so but that is no different to what he knew if he did not carry it. He risked his life carrying ‘an unheard of volume of materials’ through occupied Europe but the risk was associated primarily with materials about the resistance structures in Poland and the identity of the people

²⁶ Ibid. p.318.

leading them. These would have included the Jewish resistance leaders he met in Warsaw. Leon Feiner's letter to his Bundist colleagues was important but it was an internal party document. The *Likwidacja* report contained the 'dire news of annihilation' aimed for what Hilberg called 'the outside world', it was written in the Jewish unit of the Home Army's Bureau of Information and Propaganda by people who wanted the free world to 'believe the unbelievable'. The important fact is that this report, along with the others on the Jewish tragedy, reached London on November 13, 1942.

11 Karski's December 2 meeting with Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart

In the internal November 30, 1942 report we examined in Chapters 6 and 7,¹ Karski stated that he carried 'two types of materials: written materials (...), and verbal materials, to be conveyed verbally to designated organisations and individuals in London.'² The 'written materials' were the ones which arrived in London on November 13 and we have examined these in previous chapters. The 'verbal' ones were delivered by Karski in person after his arrival in Britain late on November 25. As we saw in Chapter 3, the British MI19 detained him until November 28 and in his November 30 report he made it clear that before doing anything else, he would first explain to the Polish leadership 'the nature of my mission'. It thus seems reasonable to assume that the meetings at which he delivered the 'verbal materials' started the next day, on December 1. On December 2 he met the two Jewish deputies on the National Council, Schwarzbart and Zygielbojm. On December 4 he sent a message to Warsaw, 'I am in the middle of completing my mission'.³

There must have been many meetings but it is the one with Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart which interests us. In *Story of a Secret State* Karski tells us that the December 2 meeting with Zygielbojm was just one of the 'literally hundreds of conferences, conversations, contacts, and reports' with which he was 'swamped' since his arrival in London about a week earlier. In other words, it was not in any way meant to be a special meeting, it was one of many. As with all the other meetings, so too with Zygielbojm, Karski writes that he proceeded by 'emptying my memory of everything that it had stored up for just such an occasion'.⁴ As he put it many years later, he was a 'recording machine, a tape recorder', he played back what he was told – and 'recorded' - in Warsaw and delivered a verbal report in London. In Zygielbojm's case, the 'printed' report from the Bundist leader of the Jewish

¹ Chapter 6 'November 30 1942: Karski's Note to the Polish Government' and Chapter 7 "'Karski's Materials'", especially section 7.1 "'I am carrying two types of materials'".

² PISM, PRM 105, 'Notatka dla Rządu Polskiego Dotycząca misji Jana Karskiego w Londynie', p. 2.

³ AAN, DR collection, 202/1-2, message nr 142 sent from London on 4 December 1942: 'Jestem w trakcie zdawania mojej misji'.

⁴ *ibid.* P. 337.

resistance in Warsaw, Leon Feiner, which we examined in Chapter 8 (Section 8.9) arrived in London on November 13. Recall that in the postscript of that report, Feiner writes:

PS. The content of the interview given to the messenger delivering this document may be communicated by him to officials authorised to read it only after you and the Central Committee [of the Bund] have first read it and received it.⁵

We can assume that the ‘content of the interview’ is the ‘verbal report’ from Feiner which Karski delivered to Zygielbojm in the December 2 meeting. It is this verbal report which interests us here.

11.1 The Ghetto Speaks article on the December 2 meeting

There is an account of this meeting in the March 1, 1943 edition of a periodical issued by the American branch of the Polish Bund, *The Ghetto Speaks*. It is significant because it was not written by Karski, it can thus help us verify his testimony. The article refers to a meeting with a ‘special messenger from Poland’ who reached London ‘in the last days of November, 1942’; it took place ‘On the 2nd of December 1942’ when ‘the Polish Minister of Interior, in London, summoned S. Zygielbojm, (...), as well as Dr. I. Schwartzbart [*sic*] (...) to a conference with that messenger from Poland. (...) stenographic notes were taken of the message from Poland’.⁶ The ‘special messenger from Poland’ is clearly Karski and, based on later accounts, it can be assumed that Zygielbojm and Schwartzbart saw Karski separately. We do not know if the ‘stenographic notes’ were taken by Zygielbojm’s Bund or by the Polish ministry of interior staff but we would expect such notes to be a verbatim transcript of what the messenger – Karski - said. Unfortunately, if these notes have survived they have not yet been found. However, the preface to *The Ghetto Speaks* article states that it presents ‘the most important part of that message’, most of it consists of what appear to be excerpts of the stenographic notes. The meeting must have been conducted in Polish and the original stenographic notes would also have

⁵ Berezowski (Leon Feiner) letter to Zygielbojm, SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 10. See section 8.9 for an analysis of the letter and this postscript.

⁶ *The Ghetto Speaks*, March 1 1943. ‘Eye-Witness Report of the Annihilation of the Jews of Poland’. Pg 1.

been recorded in Polish, *The Ghetto Speaks* article is in English and the translation includes a small clue suggesting that it is based directly on the notes: at one point the translator was unsure how to translate the Polish term used to describe the transit facility for trains transporting Jews to the Bełżec death camp. It was translated as ‘sorting point’ but, unsure about the equivalence, the translator added the original Polish equivalent in brackets: ‘*Obóz rozdzielczy*’. The article also includes three-dotted ellipses which may be taken as an indication that some parts have been omitted but everything else is taken directly from the stenographic notes. There are thus good reasons for assuming that the article is a report of what the ‘messenger from Poland’ said and that the messenger was Karski.

To understand the part of the article that interests us we need to note its use of two layers of direct speech, the first quotes Karski, the second quotes Karski quoting ‘Mr “X”’. We can be fairly certain that this is Leon Feiner, the leader of the Bundist resistance in Warsaw whom Karski met about three months earlier and whose identity had to be concealed in the article ‘for obvious reasons’. The article is thus presented as a record of what Karski said at the December 2 meeting when he was delivering the verbal report to Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart from Feiner. It begins with Karski stating the purpose of his mission (quotation marks have been kept):

“... I was in the very midst of Polish underground activities and I have been charged to transmit to you facts which I saw with my own eyes and which Mr. “X” the delegate of the Underground Jewish Workers’ Movement of Poland has requested me to tell you and to all Jews with whom I may come in contact when I get out of Poland.”

This is (almost) fully in line with the way Karski described the ‘nature of my mission’ in the November 30 internal report we examined in Chapter 6; in a list of 15 organisations in Poland from whom he ‘received a mandate’, number 11 was ‘Bund (in the name of all Jewry)’. That ‘mandate’ meant that on reaching London he was ‘instructed to speak in an official capacity’ with people named in a list of sixteen, including ‘9. Zygielbojm, 10. Dr Schwarzbart’.⁷ This is what Karski was doing at the December 2 meeting. His ‘mandate’ was an instruction ‘to transmit to

⁷ See Chapter 6, Section 6.5.

you facts which I saw with my own eyes’ and to repeat verbatim what Feiner told him in Warsaw. The text suggests that he did so without any concern about the impact this might have on his listeners,

“Mr. “X” requested me to inform you, Mr. Zygielbojm, and all other Jews the following: “Tell them ‘there’ [i.e. outside the Nazi-invaded countries] that there are moments when we hate them all; we hate them because they are safe ‘there’ and do not rescue us ... Because they don’t do enough. We are only too well aware that in the free and civilized world outside, it is not possible to believe all that is happening to us. Let the Jewish people, then, do something that will force the other world to believe us...”

‘We’ are the Jews of Warsaw, condemned to death, ‘here’ in Warsaw; ‘they’ are the Jews who are safe in England and other unoccupied countries. ‘They’ must do something to make – force - the ‘other’ – the free – world to believe the reports about the tragic fate of the Jews. There now comes the demand on what ‘they’ – Zygielbojm and all the other Jews - must do:

“We are all dying here; let them die too. ... Let them crowd the offices of Churchill and others, let them proclaim a fast before the doors of the mightiest and not retreat until they [here the antecedent is ‘Churchill and the others’] will undertake some action to rescue those of our people who are still alive”.⁸

The Mr. “X” (Finer) quotation is then closed and we get back to Karski: ‘That is the opinion of Mr. “X” and of all others with whom I came in contact there’. The article then continues with quoted text presenting Karski’s harrowing accounts of mass murder. These are similar to those in Feiner’s written report, which we examined in chapter 8 (Section 8.9), but there are also differences which suggest that apart from reporting what he was told by Feiner, Karski was also trying to present an eyewitness account of what he saw. In his report, Feiner writes that the vast majority of the people deported from Warsaw are loaded into trains which take them to death camps in ‘Tremblinka [*sic*], Bełżec, Sobibór’.⁹ We may assume that this is also what he told Karski in Warsaw. But in *The Ghetto Speaks* article Karski is quoted as saying (quotes as in original text):

I want to return to the question of “deportations”: I saw in Warsaw the first part of this act and later on the outskirts of Belzec [*sic*] the second and last part. From

⁸ *The Ghetto Speaks*, op. cit. p. 1.

⁹ Berezowski (Leon Feiner) letter to Zygielbojm, SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 4.

Warsaw the Jews are driven to the tracks on the outskirts of the city where a long train of cattle cars is already waiting for them.¹⁰

There is a clear suggestion here that he was an eyewitness of the ‘first part’ of the Warsaw ghetto deportations when he saw the Jews being marched to the *Umschlagplatz* railway yard at the northern edge of the ghetto wall. Recall that an important part of the Karski story is his dramatic account of the two visits he made to the ghetto, powerfully told especially in the interview shown in Lanzmann’s *Shoah* but described also in *Story of a Secret State*. But there is no mention there of witnessing the deportations themselves, of seeing thousands of people being driven through the streets of the ghetto to the *Umschlagplatz*. In *The Ghetto Speaks* article he observed them: ‘I saw in Warsaw the first part of this act...’. He then continues to describe the ‘second part’, the long journey to the Belżec death camp. Note that in this account the Warsaw deportation trains go to Belżec not Treblinka¹¹. Here he provides details which are a closer match with another part of the Karski story told just over a year later in *Story of a Secret State* and on a number of occasions many decades later: the eyewitness account of his visit, as a disguised guard, to the Belżec death camp. Yet once again, there are important differences. In *The Ghetto Speaks* article Karski is quite clear that it was not Belżec but rather a transit facility nearby: “‘In the uniform of a Polish policeman I visited the sorting camp near Belżec.’¹² This was a “‘sorting point” (...) located about fifty kilometres from the city of Belżec’. Another detail is the nationality indicated by the guard uniform. Here it is Polish, in the 1944 edition of *Story of a Secret State* it is Estonian, in the 1999 Polish edition it is Ukrainian.¹³

¹⁰ *The Ghetto Speaks*, op. cit., p. 3.

¹¹ But note that at the time it was thought that the deportation trains also went to Belżec. The *Likwidacja* report (See Section 8.1) states that ‘[The trains] go to three death camps (*obozów kaźni*): to Treblinka, Belżec and Sobibór’. SPP 3.1.1.13.5/27, p. 5.

¹² *The Ghetto Speaks*, op.cit., p. 4.

¹³ This is where the article provides the Polish original: *obóz rozdzielczy*. In his 1944 book Karski refers to ‘Belżec’ as the place where he went as an eyewitness disguised in the uniform of an Estonian guard. He describes trains carrying Jews away from the camp. Raul Hilberg showed that Karski could not have been at Belżec because there were no trains carrying Jews away from Belżec, and also, there were no Estonian guards there (Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, p. 155). This caused a consternation for a number of reasons, including the fact that Holocaust deniers claimed that Karski provided proof that Belżec was a transit and not an extermination camp. It was later agreed that Karski must have been at Izbica Lubelska, a transit camp near Belżec. A fuller account of this controversy is beyond the scope of this study.

The Ghetto Speaks article ends with a section entitled ‘Citations from a Message to the American Representation of the General Jewish Workers’ Union of Poland’. Once again, we must assume that it was recited by Karski as he remembered it in Warsaw and it is presented not as a quotation of what Karski said but as Karski’s recollection of what Feiner told him to say. It is a moving appeal made by Feiner to his American colleagues,

“... Underground work in the ghetto is incredibly dangerous. (...) The number of casualties is unbelievably high. (...) Under such circumstances, we are doing our utmost. (...) No one knows whether he will be alive an hour later.¹⁴

He then makes what is presented as his final message, and it contains what might be regarded as a huge reproach against the Polish underground state,

“I will not dwell any more on the details of our underground work. Even if I wished to do so, I could not bear it. There is one offense committed against us that we will never forgive: we asked for weapons that would enable us to die as human beings in organised resistance against the murderer. We did not receive them, we were refused...”¹⁵

What is significant here is the fact that the message from the Jewish resistance in Warsaw requesting weapons was not included in the Feiner letter we examined in Chapter 8 (Section 8.9). It was also not mentioned in any of the other key reports about the Jewish tragedy. *The Ghetto Speaks* article suggests that Karski conveyed it verbally at the December 2 meeting in London with Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart. There is additional evidence for this in Karski’s later testimony, sent to Walter Laqueur in September 1979 and included in Appendix 5 of his 1980 classic *The Terrible Secret*.¹⁶ Laqueur asked Karski to write down ‘the message ... transmitted to the West in November 1942 on behalf of the Polish Jewish leaders’. Karski’s response, as published in Laqueur’s book, lists the messages from the Jewish leaders in Poland and these include one which matches the reference to weapons in *The Ghetto Speaks* article. This message is addressed to ‘the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces (General Sikorski) and Zygielbojm and Szwarcbard [*sic*] only’. It includes the following,

¹⁴ *The Ghetto Speaks*. Op. cit. p. 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 5-6.

¹⁶ Laqueur, pp. 229-237.

A Jewish military organization emerged. Its leaders as well as younger elements of the Jewish ghettos, the Warsaw ghetto in particular, contemplate some armed resistance against the Germans. They speak about a 'Jewish war' against the Third Reich. They asked the Home Army for weapons. Those weapons had been denied.

The Jews are Polish citizens. They are entitled to have weapons if these weapons are in the possession of the Polish underground. The Jews cannot be denied the right to die fighting, whatever the outcome of their fighting may be.¹⁷

Note that at the December 2 meeting Karski delivered this message to Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart. Did he also deliver it to the 'Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces (General Sikorski)', as indicated in Karski's 1979 letter to Laqueur? Some historians have examined original documents which strongly suggest that he did. On December 17 a senior member of Sikorski's staff, Protasewicz, sent a message to the Home Army commander in Warsaw, Rowecki, (recall that 'Berezowski' was Leon Feiner's pseudonym),

Did the representative of the Jews in Poland Berezowski request that you issue weapons to the Jews of Poland for self-defence. Apparently he was met with a refusal.¹⁸

Citing this message, Puławski notes a relevant detail. In the journal listing all messages to and from Poland this message is recorded as the first one in a thread of messages, it was not a response to some previous message. That in turn means that the question it raised originated from Sikorski's staff in London and it is almost certain that sometime before December 17 they learned about the Jewish request for weapons and the Home Army refusal. If we assume that *The Ghetto Speaks* article gives an accurate account of the verbal report Karski delivered on December 2 to Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart from Feiner ('Berezowski'), and based on what Karski wrote to Laqueur in 1979, this same message would have been delivered to the Polish commander-in-chief at around the same time. If so then Feiner's request for weapons and his profound disappointment about the refusal was conveyed to the head of the Polish commander-in-chief's staff in London by Karski.

¹⁷ Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*, p. 234.

¹⁸ Cited by Puławski, *Wobec "niespotykanego w dziejach mordy"*, p. 333, the message is in SPP A.3.1.1.134. Polish original in Appendix v. The message was followed by a reply from Warsaw by Rowecki. This is discussed in detail by Libionka in 'ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP', p. 61.

11.2 *Schwarzbart on the December 2 meeting*

The Ghetto Speaks article begins by explaining that the December 2 ‘conference with [the] messenger from Poland’ was attended by Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart. Before we examine Zygielbojm’s reaction, it is worth mentioning Schwarzbart’s. Note that both of them would have read or were fully aware of the reports which arrived on November 13 and we saw that Schwarzbart was deeply involved in the campaign leading up to the December 17 Allied declaration. The two Jewish representatives spoke at the November 27 session of the National Council, and it was Schwarzbart who drafted the emergency motion. On December 2, however, they met an eyewitness and this seems to have added to the impact made by the reports. After the meeting with Karski, Schwarzbart sent a telegram to his World Jewish Congress colleagues in New York:

Special official envoy gentile escaped and arrived here left capital this october saw warsaw ghetto on last august and september witnessed mass murder of one transport six thousand Jews at Belzec spoke to him yesterday 3 hours confirm all most horrible mass atrocities still living all remnants of Jews facing death¹⁹

The telegram is dated December 5 but Schwarzbart must have drafted it on December 3. That was the also the day when the Board of Jewish Deputies Joint Foreign Committee held an emergency meeting and the minutes show that Schwarzbart and Zygielbojm took part as ‘Members of the Polish National Council’. Their account of their meeting with Karski is recorded as follows

(...) both Dr. Schwarzbart and Mr. Zieglbojm [*sic*] told the meeting of the information they had received from a very trustworthy source – a gentleman of high standing, who left Warsaw as recently as October 1942.²⁰

11.3 *Zygielbojm’s reaction to Karski’s ‘verbal’ report*

Zygielbojm represented the Polish Bund on the Warsaw city council during the defence of the city in September 1939. In October, after Poland’s defeat, he was the Bundist representative in the first Jewish council established by the Germans in

¹⁹ Schwarzbart to American branch of the World Jewish Congress, New York. Telegram sent from London on December 5, 1942. NA FO 371/30924 C12313.

²⁰ London Metropolitan Archive, Board of Deputies collection. ‘Note of Emergency Meeting Convened by the Joint Foreign Committee’. ACC 3121/C11/7/1/1.

Warsaw. He became isolated when he voiced his strong opposition to German plans for the ghettoization of Warsaw Jews. After resigning from the Jewish council in November 1939, he made a stirring speech to his Bundist followers urging them to resist ghettoization by staying at home until removed by force. Hunted by the Gestapo, his Bundist colleagues helped him escape to Belgium, France and then to America. He arrived in London in March 1942. The times were now incomparably worse, an act of civil disobedience in Warsaw was now pointless, but to Zygielbojm's Warsaw comrades, it seemed to make sense in London.²¹

The Ghetto Speaks article does not record Zygielbojm's reaction to the message he received from his Warsaw comrades, Karski described it later as something bordering on a nervous breakdown. In *Story of a Secret State*, written in mid-1944, about 18 months after the meeting, Karski suggests that the Warsaw Bundists' instruction about a hunger strike seems to have made Zygielbojm furious,

Zygielbojm (*sic*) started as though he had been bitten and began to pace around the room agitatedly, almost breaking into a run (...).

‘It is impossible,’ he finally said, ‘utterly impossible. You know what would happen. They would simply bring in two policemen and have me dragged away to an institution. Do you think they will let me die a slow, lingering death? Never...’²²

In the 1978 interview with Lanzmann, Karski refers to his book but elaborates on what he wrote thirty-four years earlier,

As if with hatred, frustration, after I had given him all the material, he says: ‘So what can I do! What can I do that I am not doing? I do everything! I do everything possible. So what do they want me to do? What can I do?’²³

As described by Karski, Zygielbojm rejected the Warsaw Bundists' demand that he and other Jews begin a hunger strike which ‘might shake the conscience of the world’, it was ‘utterly impossible’. But when Zygielbojm, in desperation, asks, ‘So what do they want me to do? What can I do?’ he seems to be responding to something far more wounding in the Bundists' report. As reported in *The Ghetto Speaks* article (and cited above) the Warsaw Bundists instructed Karski to tell Zygielbojm and the other Jewish leaders in the West that ‘we hate them because

²¹ See Gutman, Y., 1982. *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*. Brighton: Harvester Press, p. 49.

²² Karski, *Story of a Secret State*, p. 336.

²³ USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*,. p. 47-48.

they are safe ‘there’ and do not rescue us ... Because they don’t do enough’.

Karski makes a comment in *Story of a Secret State* which suggests that this was the most hurtful part of the report; at the end of their long and gruelling December 2 meeting, Schwarzbart’s telegram mentions three hours, both men were exhausted,

We shook hands, Zygielbojm gazing directly into my eyes, intent and questioning. ‘Mr. Karski, I’ll do everything I can to help them. Everything! I’ll do everything they demand – if only I am given a chance. You believe me, don’t you?’²⁴

This seems like a desperate response to the Warsaw Bundists’ accusation that Zygielbojm and other Jewish leaders like him “don’t do enough”. Karski’s reply, as he describes it in his book, was banal and cynical: ‘Of course I believe you’; he had just delivered one report, there were many others and he was concerned about being late for the next meeting. He had to deliver many verbal reports to a large number of Polish political, military and government figures in London. Zygielbojm was just one of them. During the Question and Answer session of the 1981 Liberators Conference, Karski was asked about his emotional state and the feelings he experienced during his wartime mission:

At that time, during the war, I was not surprised by anything, I had no human feelings. Now I have human feelings and sometimes I cannot take it. At that time I was a recording machine, I was a tape recorder. If I had any human feelings - surprise, shock – I would have gotten crazy a long time ago. I had no feelings at all! I remember when I reported to Zygielbojm, when he asked me ‘So what do they want me to do...?’ (...) He was irrational. (...) At that time, when Szmul Zygielbojm was acting this way I was annoyed. If he continues to play this act I am going to be late for the next meeting! I had no feelings at that time...²⁵

Nevertheless, his *Story of a Secret State* account of the meeting with Zygielbojm on December 2, 1942, written only a year and a half later, in the summer of 1944, clearly suggests that he regarded the meeting as different to all the others. In this account Karski is no longer a ‘recording machine’, his comments on Zygielbojm’s suicide are full of ‘human feelings’ about Zygielbojm and about the world’s indifference to a crime whose scale was unprecedented. It is important also to note that what he wrote in 1944 could not be counted as ‘late testimony’ made to fit later narratives, it was what he thought at the time or at least very soon after

²⁴ Karski, *Story of a Secret State*, p. 337.

²⁵ Karski, *Q&A Session at the International Liberators Conference 1981*. At 0:11:37-0:14:32.

Zygielbojm's suicide in May 1943. From a number of accounts, we can be fairly certain that Karski had read the text of Zygielbojm's suicide note²⁶ and the passages in the *Story of a Secret State*, suggest that he was profoundly moved by it: 'I have often thought about Szmul Zygielbojm, one of the most tragic victims of this war and its horrors', someone whose death was 'self-imposed and utterly hopeless'. Zygielbojm knew that the Allies will win the war but to Karski he also 'had the certain knowledge that victory would not stave off the sacrifice of his people, the annihilation of all that was most meaningful to him'.²⁷

How can we make sense of Karski's 1944 remark that 'of all the deaths that have taken place in this war, surely Zygielbojm's is one of the most frightening'? Millions of innocents were murdered and yet Karski states that Zygielbojm's suicide made him 'one of the most tragic victims of this war and its horrors'.²⁸ To Karski, there seems to be something special, something symbolic about Zygielbojm's death. We can try to understand his apparently puzzling remarks by reading them as echoes of passages in Zygielbojm's suicide note. These express a most desperate sense of helplessness of a Jewish leader who is unable to do anything to stop the mass murder of his fellow Jews. They are of course an expression of a profoundly distressed emotional state which is clearly obvious in at least some of the suicide note passages:

I cannot continue to live and to be silent while the remnants of Polish Jewry, whose representative I am, are being murdered. (...)

By my death, I wish to give expression to my most profound protest against the inaction in which the world watches and permits the destruction of the Jewish people.

(...) since I did not succeed in achieving it in my lifetime, perhaps I shall be able by my death to contribute to the arousing from lethargy of those who could and must act in order that even now, perhaps at the last moment, the handful of Polish Jews who are still alive can be saved from certain destruction.²⁹

²⁶ Apart from the account which Karski himself gave in *Story of a Secret State (1944)* cited here, see also Wood and Jankowski, *Jan Karski*, as well as Piasecki. *Karski, Tom 2, Inferno*.

²⁷ Karski, *Story of a Secret State*, p. 338.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ 'The Last Letter From Szmul Zygielbojm', <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/zygielbojm-letter-to-polish-president>.

We may take this as an expression of a personal tragedy, which Zygielbojm obviously went through, as the last and desperate words of someone who can no longer live with his suffering. Karski was familiar enough with this, he himself tried to take his life in June 1941 when he was captured and tortured by the Gestapo. His older brother Marian killed himself in July 1964: a brilliant career interrupted by the war, with Karski's help he emigrated to America and ended up working as a janitor in a Washington art gallery. His wife, Pola Nireńska, had suffered mental breakdowns towards the end of her life; she committed suicide in July 1992. It was at a time when Karski's biographers, Wood and Jankowski, were completing work on their 1994 book, *Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust*. They did not mention Nireńska's suicide. In the *Afterword* of the 2014 edition, written fourteen years after Karski's death, Wood and Jankowski provide some background:

The last years of Karski's life featured emotional highs and lows the Professor cannot have expected to encounter in his autumn years. For the third time in his life, he was coping with the impact of a suicide. First there was Szymul Zygielbojm. Then there was the brother who had been a surrogate father to him, Marian. And then, Pola. (...) He never acknowledged to either author that she had killed herself, and both authors concealed from him their knowledge of the fact. In deference to his Roman Catholic sensibilities, the authors decided not to mention it in editions of the book published during his lifetime.³⁰

Wood and Jankowski were probably right to defer to Karski's 'Roman Catholic sensibilities'. But the Catechism of the Catholic Church qualifies its condemnation of suicide by adding that 'We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance'. There may be reasons why people decide to commit suicide: 'Grave psychological disturbance, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide'.³¹

In contrast to his own failed attempt, or the suicide of his brother or wife, Karski does not seem to view Zygielbojm's suicide as an act of diminished responsibility, on the contrary, he regards it as the desperate action of a Jewish leader

³⁰ Wood and Jankowski, *Karski*, 'Afterword'. In fact, at the time the Washington coroner had officially pronounced the cause of Nireńska's death as 'suicide'.

³¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ccc 2280-2283.

who was left with no alternative and it was this that added to the tragedy. He tried to explain this in a speech he made in 1990 during an award ceremony held in his honour at the Washington Hebrew Congregation, a Reform synagogue in Washington DC. It was an ecumenical, Jewish and Catholic event organised jointly by the B'nai B'rith and the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington. Karski was given the 'Pius XI Award'³² and in his acceptance speech he mentioned Zygielbojm's suicide, 'a story which lies deeply in my heart':

Shmuel Zygielbojm took his life in London. He left a letter that he decided to die as a protest against the passivity of the Allies towards the fate of the Jews. Hoping that his death would save some lives of the remaining Jews.

We all know that taking one's own life violates the Judaic-Christian tradition and teaching. But my conscience tells me that a distinction should be made. One takes his life because he cannot handle any longer his personal misfortune, bankruptcy of his life, or because he wants to escape from the responsibility of his acts, or because he suffers a nervous breakdown. Zygielbojm took his life out of compassion for the suffering of his people, hoping that his death will help or save those he loved.³³

We may take this as an attempt to explain why, as he put it in *Story of a Secret State*, 'Of all the deaths that have taken place in this war, surely Zygielbojm's is one of the most frightening'. Zygielbojm took his life not because he needed to escape his personal anguish, he did it because it was the only remaining way he could bring an end to the 'suffering of his people'.

³² The 'Pius XI Award', in this case at least, must have been a special distinction created at the time just for Karski. It is not to be confused with the 'Pius XI Medal', since 1939 a biennial distinction presented by the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences to scientists under 45. Karski, of course, was never a recipient of the Medal. I wish to thank Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, of the Academy, for additional information on this.

³³ Jan Karski, Pius XI Award acceptance speech. <https://cdn.jankarski.net/files/karski-speech-piusxiaward-28-11-1990-1-.pdf>. Accessed 23 January 2019.

12 Karski's 1943 London meetings

12.1 Karski's meeting reports

This chapter comprises, in the first place, a detailed examination of two internal Polish government reports Karski wrote about the meetings he had in London with some of the most senior and influential British, American and French political leaders and opinion makers active in wartime London. The meetings were all arranged by the Polish government and took place between January and April 1943, they included the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, members of Churchill's War Cabinet, senior Labour party politicians, newspaper editors and others. The reports were marked highly confidential, Karski wrote them in March and April for some of the most senior members of the Polish government, including Sikorski, the prime minister and commander in chief, Mikołajczyk, deputy prime minister and minister of interior and Raczynski, the foreign minister. Once we have examined these two reports we will look briefly at some internal British and American documents written by the people Karski talked to. This will give an indication of the impact Karski made on them and also on how they perceived the relative importance of the various topics discussed. Our inquiry will be guided by the central question of this thesis: how important was the Jewish tragedy at these meetings? Was it being discussed? If so, what was said about it?

We need to place these meetings in context. It was the first half of 1943 and from the Polish point of view many of the key political problems at that time were based around the seriously deteriorating Polish-Soviet relations. The Polish-Soviet accord (the Sikorski-Maisky pact) of July 1941 was unravelling at an ever faster pace, the fate of the estimated half million Polish citizens deported after the Soviet attack on Poland in September 1939 was becoming increasingly uncertain and the Poles were continuously asking the Soviets to reveal the whereabouts of the Polish officers taken prisoner in 1939. The Curzon line was starting to be mentioned in discussions of Poland's post-war eastern border, the Kremlin was also reassembling the few remaining Polish communists both in the Soviet Union and Poland into an embryonic political and military force; Soviet partisans were being dropped into Polish territory. The battle of Stalingrad ended on February 3, 1943 and the Soviet

victory seemed to turn the tide of the war against Nazi Germany. There were clear indications of the kind of Poland the Soviets were planning to establish after the war.

On April 13 German radio released news about the discovery of mass graves at Katyń. This provided the Polish government with a plausible answer to the question of what happened to the missing officers: nearly 22,000 had been murdered by the Soviets in 1940. The ensuing controversy led to the breakup of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union on April 25.

By February 1943 another tide of the war was continuing to flow, to cite Christopher Browning again: 80% of all the Jews murdered in the Holocaust were already dead. Millions of Polish citizens who were Jewish had already been murdered in an extermination programme that was still being conducted by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland. In January, Jewish armed resistance stalled an attempt by German forces to murder the last remaining inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto. On April 19 the Warsaw Ghetto uprising started in what was the most desperately heroic act of Jewish armed resistance during the war. The uprising was suppressed on May 16, although some fighting continued after this date.

As we have seen, soon after reaching London in late November 1942 the 28-year-old Karski began working for the Polish government-in-exile and from about mid-January 1943 he had meetings with senior British and Allied political figures to whom he was usually introduced as a recently-arrived member of the Polish underground resistance. He had shown himself to be an effective speaker at these meetings where he managed to present a concise and credible picture of the general situation in German-occupied Poland, of Polish underground resistance and, especially, of the resilience of the Polish state. Starting at the beginning of 1943, Karski was effectively an official of the London-based Polish government-in-exile and he became an important although a comparatively junior member of the team: he had presentational skills, he was fluent in English and he had served as an intern in the Polish diplomatic service before the war. The meetings were arranged for him by the Polish government and the two reports we will look at are typical of what we might expect in any state bureaucracy where junior officials write meeting reports for their superiors.

Karski's reports are written in a tone which seems factual and objective; this is not a junior functionary telling his superiors what they want to hear. They follow a tightly-structured format which is no doubt a product of his legal and diplomatic training as well as a logical mind. He lists the names of the people he met, the agenda he intended to cover and gives a summary of how he presented each agenda item. He then describes people's reactions, sometimes adding personal impressions and candid comments about the intellectual and other qualities of the individuals he talked to. We can take Karski's agenda items as covering some of the central issues of the Polish wartime state in the first half of 1943 and the replies he recorded shed light on what some powerful and influential people in London thought about them. But these are replies as reported by Karski, made by people who may not have wanted to tell him everything. It is therefore interesting to examine later how these same people reported the Karski meetings in the confidential internal reports or minutes they themselves wrote afterwards. How important was the Jewish topic in these meetings?

The first report, dated 'London 23 March 1943' is entitled 'A note on J. Kwaśniewski's conversations with English and American personalities in London'¹ (at the end of March 1943 Karski was still meant to be returning to Poland hence the pseudonym 'J. Kwaśniewski'). This 15-page typewritten report describes meetings which Karski had 'in the past two months' with people who were clearly among the most powerful figures in London: Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, his Under-Secretary of State and 'first assistant', Richard Law, senior British officials whose brief included Poland in some way (Owen O'Malley, Frank Savery, Frank Roberts, Lord Selbourne and others) as well as Anthony Biddle, the American ambassador to the Polish government in exile.² The second report³ does not carry an exact date but from the content we can place it around the middle of April 1943,

¹ PISM PRM 105, 'Notatka s sprawie rozmów odbytych przez J. KWAŚNIEWSKIEGO z osobistościami angielskimi i amerykańskimi. Londyn dn. 25.III 43r'. To be referred to here as the 'March report'.

² Owen O'Malley was the British ambassador to the Polish Government in Exile, Frank Savery – a fluent Polish speaker - was a counsellor to the Polish Embassy in London and an advisor with the BBC's Polish Service (cf. Fleming. P. 56), Frank Roberts headed the FO's Central Department which included Polish matters, Lord Selbourne was the Minister of Economic Warfare and head of SOE.

³ PISM PRM 105, 'Notatka o rozmowach Jana Karskiego z politykami i publicystami angielskimi'. To be referred to as the 'April report'

soon after the arrival of news on April 13 about the Katyn massacre and (probably) before the breaking of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Poland on April 25. This report again includes a list of prominent British politicians such as Arthur Greenwood and Hugh Dalton, both Labour ministers in Churchill's War Cabinet. It also includes journalists and publishers such as Victor Gollancz, the Penguin book publisher Alan Lane, and the writer Arthur Koestler.⁴

The two reports follow the same three-part format: after giving the names of the people he met, some more than once, Karski lists the topics covered in his presentation and then offers an account of the 'Reactions and typical statements' made by them in response. In the March report, covering meetings since January 1942, Karski's agenda is a numbered list of his presentation topics:

1. The Soviet problem in Poland
2. The relationship of [Polish] society towards the Polish-Soviet agreement
3. The relationship of [Polish] society towards the London government
4. A basic outline of life in the Polish underground
5. The level of activity and the capabilities of the [underground] armed forces
6. German terror and living conditions
7. The Jewish question⁵

It might be reasonable to assume that the numbering sequence reflects Karski's view about the relative importance, in descending order, of these topics. If that is so then the most important topic for Karski and the Polish government in the first months of 1943 was the political problem raised by the advances made by the Soviet armed forces after the victory in Stalingrad. Next come reassurances about the authority and legitimacy of the exiled Polish government followed by a description of the underground movement in Poland. 'German terror', as we will see, refers primarily to the conditions of the Poles rather than the Jews under the

⁴Arthur Greenwood – Leader of the Labour Opposition, in the War Cabinet (until February 1942); Hugh Dalton Labour politician, in the War Cabinet, Minister of Economic Warfare, creator of the Special Operations Executive (SOE); Arthur Henderson Labour politician, in the War Cabinet, senior member of the War Office. Journalists: Kingley Martin, Editor of the New Stateman; Geoffrey Parsons, London Bureau Chief, New York Herald Tribune; Frederick Kuh Chicago Sun Times London correspondent; Ronald Hyde London Evening Standard; Writers and publishers: Derek Tangye, Victor Gollancz, Allen Lane (editor of Penguin), Arthur Koestler.

⁵'*kwestia żydowska*'. Karski (or the typist) mistakenly numbers this last item as '8'.

German occupation. The extermination of the Jews comes last. But it is on Karski's list.

The agenda given in the April report moves the 'Soviet problem' down but otherwise follows a very similar sequence:

- a) The [Polish] underground movement
- b) The Polish government
- c) The reach of the underground movement and the underground press⁶
- d) The relationship with the occupier
- e) Polish-Soviet relations
- f) Terror
- g) The Jews

In this report Karski adds a brief summary of how he presented each topic and it is important to note the way he distinguishes the fate of the Poles and that of the Jews under German occupation. Under 'f) Terror', we writes

The Germans are systematically destroying above all the Polish intelligentsia - all those who are the political, professional, cultural, social, economic, religious, etc. leaders. They do not want to have a 'Polish Nation' (*'Naród polski'*) next to them, they want a 'Polish folk' (*'lud polski'*) composed of peasants, workers and a small number of technicians and craftsmen. Mass terror.⁷

The fate of the Poles, however, is clearly distinguished from what is happening to the Jews. Under 'g) The Jews', Karski writes:

The Germans are murdering the whole of the Jewish nation. (*'cały naród żydowski'*). Examples, observed by me in the Warsaw ghetto, in the camp near Bełżec (*'w obozie pod Bełżcem'*) and a general description of the system used to exterminate the Jews.⁸

This sequential ordering of topics may suggest that the tragic fate of the Jews was the least important topic. But that may not necessarily be the case. The agenda may be interpreted as focusing on the resistance movement, on the resilience of the Polish state and then on the suffering. It is possible, however, to read the list from the bottom up: Nazi Germany is exterminating Polish Jews and it is murdering the Polish intelligentsia, decapitating Polish society, despite this, there is a resistance

⁶ *'zasięg ruchu podziemnego i prasa tajna'*.

⁷ The April report, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.* Note that in this 1943 report Karski is stating that he was 'near Bełżec' and not 'in Bełżec' as he wrote a year later in his 1944 book, *Secret State*.

movement which has almost universal support, the Polish state remains intact and it retains its constitutional legitimacy, it has underground structures in occupied Poland and a government, temporarily exiled in London, it is an active member of the alliance at war with Nazi Germany. A key problem are the increasingly evident Soviet plans to undermine Poland's territorial integrity and impose a communist regime on the country. To counteract this, Poland needs the support of its Western allies.

Whichever way we read the sequential ordering of Karski's presentation topics, it is important to note that the extermination of the Jews was on the agenda, it was not a topic that was outside the scope of what was to be discussed at the meetings. However, when we examine the two reports it appears that the extermination of the Jews, although it was on Karski's agenda and was a part of his presentation, was not a topic that was much discussed. We might be tempted to assume that this was due to the way Karski composed the reports for his superiors who may have been more interested in what the Allied political and media elite thought about the Soviet problem than in what they thought about the Jewish tragedy unfolding in Poland. Yet when we examine the third part of these two reports, in which Karski records the 'reactions and typical statements' made by the people he talked to, we can see that in fact this is not the case. If anyone made any comments about the Jews, Karski noted it in his reports and although he may have used an agenda with a list of topics arranged in what may look like a hierarchy of importance, we may assume that the people he talked to could reply to these in any order they liked. In the third part of the March report, for example, Karski records that Anthony Eden offered 'A few words of admiration for the [Polish] armed forces' but received Karski's information about Soviet incursions into Poland 'with coolness'. Nevertheless, Eden was 'interested in German terror against Jews'.⁹ This is the only reaction to the Jewish topic noted by Karski in the March report; Richard Law, Frank Savery and Lord Selbourne were all concerned with the impact of Polish-Soviet problems on the unity of the alliance and advised the Poles to accept a 'territorial compromise' with an eastern border based on the Curzon Line. Anthony

⁹ March report, op. cit., p. 6.

Biddle, the American ambassador, talked to Karski for three hours, took copious notes on the Polish underground and Soviet incursions, gave assurances of American support and condemned what he regarded as Soviet imperialism.

With one minor and one significant exception, Karski's April report presents a similar relative absence of interest or reaction to his account of the fate of the Jews in occupied Poland. Again, we can see here that Karski did not deliberately omit such reaction if it was there, that he reported it if it came up in the meetings: the occasional references to such interest, Eden's for example, seems proof enough that the topic, as shown in the agenda, was part of Karski's standard presentation. In the April report, Karski mentions that an unnamed 'first secretary of the American embassy' was 'interested in the Jewish problem'.¹⁰ The other, more significant reference to the Jews relates to a party or a social gathering which Karski notes was 'neatly organised' by the prominent London-based Polish artist Feliks Topolski, in which Karski made a 'half-hour presentation about the general character of the underground movement, the terror, the German system and about the living conditions in Poland'. Afterwards, he was approached by Arthur Koestler and Alan Lane about a book they intended to publish together with Victor Gollancz about German terror in Poland and about Polish and Jewish resistance. This approach must have been a response to what Karski said about the fate of Polish Jews in his presentation: we know that Gollancz had been leading an active and desperate campaign trying to mobilise some form of Allied rescue for the Jews of Europe, a campaign so intense that he suffered a nervous breakdown in mid-1943. Koestler met Karski soon after the Topolski party and a few weeks later wrote a report in which a member of the Polish underground gives an eyewitness account of the killings he witnessed at the Belzec extermination camp. Broadcast by the BBC on July 2, it was clearly based on what Karski told Koestler who adapted it so that it could be presented, in the first person, as a report by Karski himself.¹¹

¹⁰ The April report, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹¹ The draft was heavily censored by the BBC but Koestler agreed to have the original published separately a few weeks later as a report by 'a Polish underground worker' in a 15-page pamphlet entitled 'Terror in Europe: the fate of the Jews' which also included articles by Alexei Tolstoy and Thomas Mann. The reference to Karski was removed from the broadcast but not from the pamphlet, in both cases however, Koestler's Karski had to join the perpetrators in order to witness the murder of the victims: 'I was, in fact, one of the executioners'. In letters he wrote to the BBC and Koestler in late September, Karski strongly objected to what he regarded as gross distortions of what he had told

12.2 *Reactions to Karski's presentations*

We can try to assess the effectiveness of Karski's presentations by examining three internal British Foreign Office and American State Department documents which mention Karski. On February 3 Frank Roberts (Central Department of the British Foreign Office) met Karski at lunch and later that day wrote a briefing memo for Anthony Eden who was to meet Karski the next day. The memo summarised Karski's account of the difficulties in Polish-Soviet relations and, assuming that Karski would be returning to Poland, Roberts advised Karski to tell Polish resistance leaders 'about the necessity for the Poles showing political wisdom as well as great gallantry'. Eden added a handwritten note to the memo: 'Good. Dept might consider whether a note on this position might be useful to the War Cabinet'.¹² Eden met Karski on February 4, and on February 17 wrote a memo about the meeting to his colleagues in the War Cabinet. It is worth noting that Karski made a good impression on Eden and his Foreign Office officials and also that Eden understood correctly at least some of the aims of Karski's mission to London:

A representative of the important Polish underground movement, who has been sent to enter into contact with the Polish Government, is at present in this country. He left Warsaw in October. He has been seen by a number of British officials upon whom he made an excellent impression; and at General Sikorski's suggestion I had a talk with him myself on the 4th February. It may be of interest to my colleagues if I circulate the following information regarding conditions in Poland which has been gleaned from this man.¹³

Eden then gives a summary of what Karski told him, in broad outline it corresponds with what Karski wanted to get across at the meeting and covers the items in Karski's agenda dealing with Polish resistance, the resilience of the Polish state and Polish-Soviet relations. However, there is no mention of the agenda items which deal with the suffering of the Poles and the Jews. As we saw, in his report on the meeting, Karski writes that Eden was 'interested in the Jewish problem' and so we can assume that the topic was raised during the meeting. There is an indirect

Koestler. See Jankowski, S. M., 2010. *Karski: Raporty Tajnego Emisariusza*. Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, pp. 411-415. Karski's row with Koestler and the BBC is beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹² NA FO371/34550.

¹³ *ibid.*.

reference to the Jews in Eden's memo and it is the only one, 'The whole Polish population of Warsaw, including the remaining Jews, is united not merely in hatred of the Germans but also in resistance'.¹⁴

We can observe something very similar in a report written by Anthony Biddle, the American ambassador to Poland. On March 3 Biddle sent an internal report to Cordell Hull, the American Secretary of State, outlining the 'strictly confidential disclosures made by a leading officer of the Polish Government-directed Underground Organisation who has recently arrived in London'.¹⁵ The 'leading officer' was clearly Karski and the 'disclosures' mentioned by Biddle focus entirely on Soviet partisans and agents operating inside occupied Poland. The 'worry' of the Polish underground, communicated to Biddle by his 'informant', i.e. Karski, is that any 'measures taken against Russian "subversive activities" might be construed both in London and in Washington as contrary to the spirit of the United Nations' Front'. Biddle's report fits in with Karski's summary (more than anyone else, Biddle 'condemned Soviet methods'), but there was nothing in Biddle's report about the Jews.

Apart from the conversations with Koestler, Lane and Gollancz, it seems that the level of interest about the fate of the Jews at these meetings was very low. We can be fairly sure that Karski raised the topic - it was a part of his presentation - but most of the people he met did not ask him to elaborate on it. We may speculate on the reasons for this: perhaps it was thought that despite the fact that Karski talked about it, the meetings were not about the Jewish tragedy. Or perhaps, in broad terms, when it came to the Jewish tragedy he did not say anything which his listeners did not already know about: the December 17, 1942 Allied declaration clearly stated that Nazi Germany was now 'carrying into effect Hitler's oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe' and that this was now common knowledge. It also stated that Poland 'has been made the principal Nazi slaughterhouse'; Karski's presentation might have added some details but it did not tell his listeners anything new.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ US Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1943. The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe and the Far East (1943)*. p. 338.

The problem with this view is that it does not fully explain the reasons for the apparent lack of interest in the Jewish tragedy. The Allied Declaration was issued just over a month before Karski met Anthony Eden and senior British officials; if December 17, 1942 marked the moment when the Allies officially announced that they knew about the mass murder of the Jews being perpetrated by Nazi Germany, the Karski meetings over a month later marked the time when the Allied response, if any, was a pressing concern because the mass murders – and we can safely assume that Karski reminded his listeners about this – were continuing and, especially after the Allied Declaration of December 17, there was growing public pressure on the British and American governments to do something.¹⁶ The outcome of this pressure, and a response of sorts, was the April 19-23 Anglo-American Conference on Refugees in Bermuda which was first suggested by the Foreign Office on January 20 in a memorandum to the American State Department. It was followed a month later, on February 20, with another memorandum which begins as follows:

The United States Embassy will be aware of the intense public interest shown in the United Kingdom over refugees from German oppression and in particular of the fate of the Jews. This has grown since the Allied declaration of December 17 which revealed the extent of Germany's policy of extermination.¹⁷

The Bermuda Conference on Refugees was being planned at the Foreign Office at about the same time that the meetings with Karski took place, it may be significant to note that the author of the above memorandum was Richard Law, as already noted, an Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Anthony Eden's 'first assistant'. Two months later he was the senior British official heading the British delegation at the Bermuda Conference. This suggests that the British Foreign Office was quite concerned – perhaps 'preoccupied' might be more accurate - about the Jewish tragedy but aimed to dampen down the calls for some meaningful Allied response. Law made this quite clear in his memorandum: 'Responsible British opinion will no doubt accept the position that measures of rescue and relief on any

¹⁶ For an overview of British and American reaction in the weeks and months after the Allied declaration see Richard Breitman, 'The Allied War Effort and the Jews, 1942-1943', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jan., 1985), pp. 135-156.

¹⁷ Foreign Relations of the United States diplomatic papers (FRUS), 1943, vol I, "General", pages 134 and 138. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1943v01>, accessed on March 4, 2018.

great scale are impracticable in the present stage of the war', but since the public wanted the Allied governments to do something, which to Law probably meant 'be seen to be doing something', he suggested a meeting of Allied governments 'to examine the problem and its possible solutions' which would probably involve issuing a limited number of special visas for selected refugees and reassuring neutral countries who are currently receiving refugees 'with increasing difficulty and apprehension (...), that they would not be left alone to carry this burden at the end of the war'. A meeting of the Allies, a limited number of special visas and reassurances for the neutrals would be the Allied response. The conclusion of Law's memorandum leaves very little doubt about the official Foreign Office – and British – position:

It appears to His Majesty's Government that if these three steps could be taken at an early date, this would be an effective reply to the agitation aroused in the conscience of the civilized world; it would also demonstrate the practical limitations to which the Allied Governments with all their intense sympathy for the victims of Germany's policy, must at present be inexorably subjected'.¹⁸

This provides us with the most likely reason why there was so little response to what Karski said about the Jewish tragedy in his meetings, especially with the British officials. Karski met Law, his Foreign Office colleagues and then Anthony Eden at around the time when Law was drafting his memoranda to the American State Department. The memoranda undoubtedly reflected Foreign Office thinking current at the time. There was no longer any doubt about 'Germany's policy of extermination', after the December 17 Allied Declaration it was now common and official knowledge. The problem, as Law put it, was 'the agitation aroused in the conscience of the civilized world' and the challenge facing the British Government was not about finding an effective Allied reply to the extermination, the 'practical limitations' of such a reply were obvious. The challenge was to 'find an effective reply to the agitation', find a way to reduce it.

According to his agenda, when Karski talked about the Jews, in addition to telling his listeners what they already knew ('The Germans are murdering the whole of the Jewish nation'), he also provided eyewitness details ('Examples, observed by

¹⁸ FRUS, *ibid.* p. 139.

me in the Warsaw ghetto, in the camp near Bełżec’). We may assume that the details were harrowing; but this would only serve to ‘arouse the conscience of the civilized world’ even more, it would add fuel to the agitation and increase the calls for some action whose practical effectiveness was regarded by the Foreign Office as minimal. It was thus preferable to remain silent while Karski talked about the suffering of the Jews.

Karski had two meetings with Law and in the March report describes his conversations with him in some detail. They did not talk about the Jews and Law seemed to put a great emphasis on advising the Poles to adopt a realistic approach:

Law stressed that after the war what will be most decisive are *power relations*, and not *principles* and abstract justice. He said that he does not think it would be good if the [underground] leadership in Poland was insufficiently aware about the *realist* direction of English politics. He said that at a certain time this might bring about a whole series of *disappointments*.¹⁹

Karski’s description of his conversations with Law seems to echo the tone of Law’s two memoranda to the State Department. He seemed crushed by Law’s *realpolitik*. Of all the conversations he had in London, he concluded, ‘my two conversations with Law were the most depressing’.²⁰

12.3 The March 15 meeting with Schwarzbart

The two meeting reports are official internal Polish government documents written by a relatively junior member of the government reporting to his superiors. However candid and direct he may appear to be, it is difficult to establish Karski’s own views on the Jewish tragedy from these reports. There is however at least one contemporary document in which Karski’s views about the extermination of the Jews in Poland are reported in a manner that seems ‘off the record’. The document is Ignacy Schwarzbart’s March 15, 1943 diary entry describing a conversation he had with Karski over lunch that day.²¹ As already mentioned, Schwarzbart was the Zionist representative in the Polish National Council. In his diary entry he notes that

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 8

²⁰ Ibid. p. 9: ‘Dwie moje rozmowy z Law’em wywarły na mnie najbardziej przykre wrażenie, że wszystkich moich rozmów’.

²¹ Ignacy Schwarzbart diary entry for March 15, 1943 dated ‘Londyn, dnia 15go marca, 1943’. Yad Vashem Archive, M2 752 (in Polish).

this was his second meeting with Karski, his first was no doubt that on December 2, examined in the previous chapter.

Schwarzbart describes his impression of Karski: ‘A completely rare type of Pole. If he does think what he says and if the majority were to act as he says, things would be better.’²² He notes what Karski told him about his recent meetings with senior British officials and this matches the details Karski gave in the March report we just looked at. In Schwarzbart’s diary entry however, Karski’s brief account of these meetings puts great emphasis on the Jewish topic. Schwarzbart writes:

In London he reported personally to Eden (...). He spent 27 minutes with him, Eden mostly listened. He gave Eden detailed information about the murder of the Jews, about the death trains going to Bełżec. He also informed him about the armed resistance (*o akcji zbrojnej*) and finally about the bolshevik incursions (*o akcji bolszewików*). Eden did not interrupt much.²³

The relative importance of the agenda topics which we noted in the meeting reports seems reversed here and this may of course be because of the way Schwarzbart noted them in his diary, or it may be because Karski emphasised the Jewish topic when talking to a Jewish member of the Polish National Council. Nevertheless, as we follow the diary entry we find clues about Karski’s personal views on the Jewish tragedy. In Schwarzbart’s entry, immediately after the mention of the Eden meeting, Karski continues with an analysis of the intense party politics raging within the Polish underground movement and assesses the relative support they have among the population. He then makes a basic distinction between the fate of the Poles and that of the Jews. Karski told Schwarzbart that

The Jewish problem is completely unique.²⁴ As a Pole and as a human being he believes that there is a fundamental difference (*zasadnicza różnica*) between the suffering of the Poles and the suffering of the Jews. When talking about the Poles you can talk about the biological liquidation of the intelligentsia, when talking about the Jews, about the biological liquidation of the nation.²⁵

²² Ibid. ‘Zupełnie rzadki okaz Polaka. Gdyby tak myślał jak mówi i gdyby większość tak działała jak on mówi byłoby lepiej’.

²³ Schwarzbart diary, *ibid.*

²⁴ ‘Zagadnienie żydowskie jest zupełnie wyjątkowe’.

²⁵ ‘U Polaków można mówić o biologicznej likwidacji inteligencji u Żydów o biologicznej likwidacji narodu’. *Ibid.*

‘Biological liquidation’ (*biologiczna likwidacja*) is another term for ‘extermination’. In making the above distinction, Karski seemed quick to add that an understanding of this is comparatively rare,

He [Karski] is completely surprised that the [Polish] government officials (*czynniki oficjalne*) refuse to understand this. He read the MSZ (*Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych* - Polish Foreign Ministry) note to the [allied] governments about the extermination of the Jews. He told them very clearly at the MSZ that it is pale and weak (*blada i słaba*), that it would be good at times of peace as a protest against common acts of extermination but the exceptional (*wyjatkowe*) character of this extermination requires exceptional measures and exceptional emphases.

The ‘note’ Karski refers to is the Polish government’s December 10 diplomatic note examined in Chapter 9 (Section 9.4). It contained the ‘reliable reports’ which Anthony Eden mentioned in his House of Commons speech on December 17, 1942 when he announced the Allied Declaration. To Karski, the Allied Declaration must also have seemed ‘pale and weak’, the Polish Foreign Ministry’s efforts to persuade the Allied governments to act in some way was a failure; he told Schwarzbart that

If we cannot persuade the [Allied] governments about the necessity of these exceptional reprisal measures, for example dropping leaflets which would clearly tell the Germans that the bombings are reprisals, then the Jews will perish.²⁶

As reported by Schwarzbart, Karski seemed to be saying that in order to make any difference, the ‘exceptional reprisal measures’ must become part of the war effort. The leaflets linking Allied bombings with reprisals for the extermination of the Jews are merely an example,²⁷ the important point is that for Karski – again, as reported by Schwarzbart - unless some reprisals are undertaken as part of the Allied war effort against Germany, the extermination of the Jews in occupied Europe will be complete. The ‘weakness’ of the December 17 Declaration consists in the fact that while it made Allied knowledge of the extermination of the Jews official and public, it also stated that ‘exceptional reprisal measures’ would not be a part of

²⁶ Schwarzbart diary, op. cit. ‘*Jeżeli się nie uda przekonać Rządów o konieczności tych kroków nadzwyczajnych (...) to Żydzi są straceni*’.

²⁷ The British dropped over 2 million ‘Massenmord’ (*Mass Murder*) leaflets over Germany in January-March 1943. These stated that ‘far more than 1,000,000 European Jews have already been exterminated’ but there was no indication that the Allied bombing raids on Germany were a retaliation for the mass murder. See NA FO 371/34550 and 34549, also https://www.psywar.org/product_1942G068.php (accessed 12 June 2020).

the Allied war effort, it merely declared the Allies' 'solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution'. Retribution and punishment will thus need to wait until the tribunals and the Allied justice system are put in place after Germany is defeated, after the war, in the meantime, the crimes will continue and the extermination will run its course.

12.4 What did the London meetings achieve?

By mid-1943, the war effort leading to an Allied victory two years later did not include any immediate 'exceptional reprisal measures' Karski mentioned. In contrast, the problems of Polish-Soviet relations did have a direct bearing on it because of their impact on the unity of the major powers. Once the Soviets made it clear that after the war they do not intend to return the territories they occupied in 1939 to Poland, the major Western powers, Britain and America, seemed to have no alternative to accepting these post-war territorial arrangements in the interests of Allied unity, and indeed they did so by the end of 1943 at the Teheran conference. What remained was a moral obligation to persuade and possibly – but not necessarily - compensate the Poles for the inevitable fact that as a 'medium-sized power' they will have no option but to accept the 'Curzon Line' marking the new border between Poland and the Soviet Union, a border to be imposed by a major power which in the first half of 1943 was carrying the main burden of the war effort against Germany. The Polish response to this situation stressed the robust nature of the Polish state, the capabilities of its underground military organisation in Poland and abroad, and the deep faith Poland had in the alliance along with an uncompromising commitment to the war with Germany. But the mid-April news about the Katyń massacre and the subsequent break in diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union meant that any direct relations, seriously deteriorating for months, were now looking impossible. Soviet denials about Katyń were accepted by the Western powers who treated Polish claims as an inconvenient and obstinate belief in German propaganda. The incursion and parachuting of Soviet partisans into occupied Polish territory as well as the creation in Moscow of an embryonic government loyal to the Soviet Union were the major concerns of a Polish political and diplomatic campaign which hoped to gain Western support in an effort which, in Polish eyes, was aimed at

preventing Poland from becoming the ‘seventeenth republic of the Soviet Union’ after the war.

Looked at in isolation, the issue of Poland’s eastern border was probably not very important to the people Karski met in London in the first months of 1943, its significance stemmed largely, it seems, from the fact that it was clearly a part of the Soviet Union’s post-war plans. We can reasonably assume that an American or British rejection of these plans on grounds of loyalty to a ‘middle-sized power’ like Poland would provoke Soviet annoyance and possibly cause a weakening of the alliance against Nazi Germany. The only option that remained was for Poland to accept these plans by way of ‘compromise’ and this was most clearly indicated to Karski in his meetings with Richard Law, Anthony Eden’s deputy at the Foreign Office. In the March report, Karski wrote that Law was ‘specially interested in the Soviet problem’, Karski ‘had the distinct impression that he [Law] personally believes in the correctness and the necessity of a compromise on the matter of the eastern borders. He asked about the attitudes within [Polish] society about the Curzon line’. When Karski asked him what he meant by ‘compromise’, Law told him that he had not yet thought through this problem.²⁸

In the April report Karski presented his superiors with some concluding remarks about the London meetings. It was, to him, a rather depressing picture: the British have little or no knowledge of Poland while the Polish community in Britain does not speak English and is trapped inside a ‘Polish ghetto’. The British are mostly interested in Polish-Soviet relations of which they have very little understanding. They see Polish society in occupied Poland as suffering under German terror rather than as fighting or resisting. And finally, Soviet propaganda is enormously influential and attractive.²⁹

The view of Poles as ‘suffering... rather than fighting or resisting’ may have stung Karski rather deeply. He wrote these concluding remarks sometime in late April 1943 and we may be sure that he regarded the Polish underground state as illustrating resistance, he might have looked at the Warsaw ghetto uprising, which was still taking place when he wrote the report, as a vivid demonstration of fighting.

²⁸ Karski, March report. *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁹ Karski, April report, p. 8.

But the central problem, as Karski saw it, had to do with Polish-Soviet relations and the erosion of Western support for the Polish cause. His London meetings showed that he was an effective speaker and when we read the internal reports written by the people he spoke to, such as Eden or Biddle, we can see that the message he tried to convey did get across even though it made little or no difference to the course of events. This is probably the reason why in May 1943 the Polish government decided to send Karski to Washington.

13 The Washington meetings: 'All the way to President Roosevelt'

In May 1943 the Polish government issued a diplomatic passport to 'Jan Karski' and on June 10 Karski went to Liverpool where he boarded a freighter which arrived in New York after a stormy and uncomfortable seven-day journey.¹ His mission, once again, was defined by the Polish government and it was set out in a letter Karski took with him. Dated June 8, 1943, the letter was from the deputy prime minister, Mikołajczyk, to the Polish ambassador in the USA, Jan Ciechanowski:

The bearer of this letter, Mr. Jan Karski, has arrived in the United States with an instruction from the Premier [i.e. General Sikorski] and from me to personally meet prominent American and Polish figures and to inform them – as an eyewitness – about the struggle, suffering and the work of the Polish nation.²

13.1 *Ambassador Ciechanowski's plan*

Karski arrived in Washington at the end of June and was accommodated as a guest at the Polish embassy. He quickly impressed the ambassador who began to organise a series of meetings with prominent Washington personalities who were 'close to the president'; the first meeting took place on July 5 and many others followed in quick succession. A month later, in a report he wrote to the Polish foreign minister in London, the ambassador explained that his plan was to arrange something more substantial than a routine courtesy meeting with Roosevelt, he was hoping that Karski would get a 'sufficiently long hearing' (*dostatecznie długie posłuchanie*) from the President and give Karski enough time to present 'a complete report on the situation in Poland and on the way the underground movement organises its work'. He thought that Karski would make a big impression on the people who had access to the President and that they in turn would mention Karski to Roosevelt and thus support the ambassador's request for an audience. In his letter, he writes that the plan worked 'surprisingly well and produced unexpectedly great

¹ Piasecki, *Jan Karski, Jedno życie. Kompletna historia. Tom 2*, Ebook Location 21707.

² Letter from Mikołajczyk to Ciechanowski, 8 June 1943. HIA Box 54 Folder 8.

results for our cause'.³ Karski and the ambassador met Roosevelt in the White House on July 28.

Ambassador Ciechanowski and Karski wrote internal reports about these meetings shortly after they took place. The reports show that the ambassador had extensive contacts with people who had power and influence in America and that he could persuade them to hear what Karski had to say about the situation in occupied Poland. The July 5 meeting, which we will look at closely in a moment, included Felix Frankfurter, a justice of the Supreme court; on July 6 Karski and the ambassador met senior officials of the State Department, including the Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle and Foreign Service diplomats concerned with Eastern European and Soviet affairs, Loy Henderson, Eldridge Durbrow and Charles Bohlen. On July 7 the focus was on military intelligence, the internal reports do not name the 'senior American officers' Karski talked to but ambassador Ciechanowski adds that 'the result of this conversation was a special report for General Marshall and [Secretary of War] Henry Stimson'. The focus on intelligence continued on July 8 when Karski met officials of the Office of Strategic Services, these included John C. Wiley, Assistant Director of the OSS. On July 9 the ambassador organised a select press gathering which included Walter Lippmann, the influential columnist, and George Creel, at the time the Washington correspondent of the mass-circulation American weekly magazine *Collier's*. Subsequent meetings included William Bullitt, once the first American ambassador to the Soviet Union. As a firm critic of Roosevelt's policy on Soviet-American relations, and for other reasons, Bullitt was not 'close to the President' but as Wood and Jankowski put it, he had 'ready access' to Roosevelt. In his August 5 report ambassador Ciechanowski wrote that Karski had a 'long conversation' with Bullitt who then told Roosevelt that he should not delay seeing Karski. An invitation to the White House arrived the next day.⁴

³ Ciechanowski letter to the Polish Foreign Minister, August 5 1942. HIA MSZ Papers, Box 1 Folder 7. 'Przeprowadzenie tej akcji udało się nadspodziewanie dobrze i dało wielkie wyniki dla naszej sprawy'.

⁴ For a more detailed account of the meetings prior to the one with Roosevelt, see Wood & Jankowski, *Karski*, pp. 185-202). For a list and descriptions of the July meetings see Ambassador Ciechanowski's letter to the Polish Foreign Minister, August 5 1942. HIA Karski Papers Box 1 Folder 7. Also Karski's first report on the USA visit, July 24 1942, HIA Karski Papers Box 1 Folder 7, *I Raport Karskiego z Pobytu w USA*, 24 lipca 1942.

13.2 *The story of Justice Frankfurter's disbelief*

The meeting which interests us most in this chapter is the one on July 5, the first one in the series organised by ambassador Ciechanowski. The ambassador held a 'gentlemen's dinner' (*męski obiad*) at the embassy and the guests he lists in his report included Felix Frankfurter, the Supreme Court Justice, Oscar Cox, Assistant Solicitor General and Ben Cohen, Presidential advisor⁵. As we saw, there were other meetings prior to the one with Roosevelt and they are described in the internal meeting reports which Karski, Ciechanowski and others wrote at the time. But the July 5 meeting is significant because it must have been the occasion when Felix Frankfurter, after hearing Karski's account of the Jewish tragedy taking place in occupied Poland, made his famous 'I cannot believe you' remark.

The remark is an important part of the Karski story because it is meant to illustrate the disbelief which Karski encountered in the West when he told people who had power and influence about what was happening to the Jews. As Wood and Jankowski put it, 'Frankfurter was not the first person in Allied circles to react to Karski's atrocity stories with disbelief, but he was the most prominent'.⁶ He was a Supreme Court Justice who was 'close to the president', and he was Jewish.

To reconstruct what was said at this meeting with Frankfurter we need to note that the account of Frankfurter's disbelief originates from Karski's later testimonies. The documents written soon after the 1943 meeting, which we will look at in a moment, present a somewhat different picture and do not mention Frankfurter's disbelief. Karski first talked about Frankfurter's remark in the interview with Claude Lanzmann in 1978 and he mentioned it in correspondence with Walter Laqueur in 1979. Lanzmann did not include it in *Shoah*, (the film was released in 1985) but by then Frankfurter's disbelief became a part of the Karski story. Wood and Jankowski's 1994 authorised biography of Karski contains what might still be regarded as the official version in English. Waldemar Piasecki's 2017

⁵ Wood and Jankowski (Wood & Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 186) suggest that inviting just these three to the first meeting could not have been an accident: 'It cannot have been a coincidence that Ciechanowski brought together three of the administration's most prominent Jews to hear Karski's report in this initial meeting'.

⁶ Ibid. P. 188.

biography provides additional details.⁷ The story seems to have become more ‘polished’ with years, let us therefore take the original transcript of the 1978 interview with Lanzmann as providing Karski’s earliest account of what he said to Frankfurter thirty-five years earlier, Karski has Frankfurter speaking first:

“Young man, do you know that I am a Jew?”

“Yes, Sir. Mr Ambassador told me about this”.

“Well, tell me about the Jews. We have here many reports. What happens to the Jews in your country?”

I become a machine again. (...) The man sits. I remember he looked as if smaller and smaller. (...) Looking at the floor; he listens, he does not interrupt me. I report, as you know from this film. Usually it lasted fifteen, twenty minutes. I told him: the Jewish leaders, the ghetto, Belzec; those fifteen, twenty minutes passed and then stop. Justice Frankfurter sits, looks at me still at this moment.⁸

In 1993 Thomas Wood filmed Karski re-enacting the event in the Polish embassy in Washington, in the same room as the original meeting. Karski describes Frankfurter’s reaction:

... then Frankfurter comes back, takes his seat and says – I remember word-by-word, something you will never forget – ‘Mr Karski, a man like me talking to a man like you must be totally frank, so I say: I am unable to believe what you told me’. Ciechanowski burst out, ‘Felix! – they were personal friends – you don’t mean it, you cannot tell him that he is lying. The authority of my government is behind him.’ Frankfurter: ‘Mr Ambassador, I did not say that this young man is lying, I said that I am unable to believe what he told me. There is a difference, Mr Ambassador’.⁹

We can be fairly certain that in July 1943 Frankfurter knew that Nazi Germany was exterminating Jews in occupied Europe. In September 1942 Stephen Wise showed the Riegner telegram to Frankfurter who advised him to wait for further confirmation from the State Department. We may surely assume that when that confirmation arrived in mid-November, Frankfurter was aware of it. He must have known about Stephen Wise’s November 24 Washington press conference and about the reports from Jerusalem and from the Polish government in London. There

⁷ Karski on the Frankfurter meeting in the 1978 Lanzmann interview, (USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*, pp. 60-61). Among many places, the meeting is discussed in Laqueur’s *Terrible Secret*, (p. 237), in Wood & Jankowski’s *Karski*, (pp. 186-189 and in Piasecki’s, *Jan Karski, Jedno życie. Kompletna historia. Tom 2*, (Chapter CIII ‘Mili Ludzie). An edited version of this part of the Lanzmann interview, ‘Le Rapport Karski’, was shown on the Arte television channel, 2010.

⁸ USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*, p. 60.

⁹ Wood uploaded the interview to YouTube where it is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvw9cEtyEDw>.

was also the December 8 report which American Jewish leaders presented to Roosevelt as well as the December 17 Allied declaration which clearly refers to an ‘extermination’ that is being systematically carried out by Nazi Germany. We can continue the list by mentioning huge protest rallies in Madison Square Gardens on March 1, 1943. Frankfurter kept a diary and in the March 2, 1943 entry he describes a visit he received from Rabbi Berlin,¹⁰ a member of the Jewish Agency in Palestine. It was a conversation which showed Frankfurter’s deep but complex Zionist sympathies, the two men talked about ‘effective and decent consideration of European Jewish problems after the war’ and Frankfurter was asked if he could be ‘the formal spokesman for Palestine when the time comes’. Frankfurter replied that ‘my judicial office precluded that’ but added that he would support governments ‘carrying out Balfour Declaration policies after this holocaust is over’.¹¹ The Frankfurter diaries might have provided an invaluable source on the July 5 1943 meeting with Karski, but unfortunately portions of them have been lost or stolen from the Library of Congress, and that includes entries written after June 1943.¹²

13.3 Laqueur and the riddle of disbelief

At the time of the meeting with Karski in July 1943, therefore, Frankfurter must have been fully informed about Nazi Germany’s systematic extermination of Jews. It is why his apparent disbelief is so puzzling. It could not have meant that he regarded Karski’s account of ‘the Jewish leaders, the ghetto, Belzec’ as false or exaggerated and in stating that Karski was not lying he was surely trying to emphasise this. In his 1980 classic work *The Terrible Secret*, Walter Laqueur used Frankfurter to illustrate his central, two-part question: “‘What was known?’ and “‘Why was it not believed?’”. For Laqueur, it is ‘one of the riddles making the understanding of the [Jewish] catastrophe so difficult (...) the psychological rejection of information which for one reason or another is not acceptable’. What

¹⁰ Frankfurter must have been referring to Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, a leader of Religious Zionism and of the Mizrachi movement in Palestine who was visiting the United States at the time.

¹¹ Lash, J. P., 1980. *From the Diaries of Felix Frankfurter*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company. March 2, 1943 entry, p. 173. It must be assumed that his 1943 use of the term ‘holocaust’ is quite different to ours, but it is not clear how different.

¹² Lepore, J., 2014. The Great Paper Caper: Someone swiped Justice Frankfurter's papers. What else has gone missing? *The New Yorker*, December issue.

Karski said was received by Frankfurter as true, as ‘information’ – Karski was not a liar – but in the Karski story it is rejected as unacceptable and this, to Laqueur, might help to explain Frankfurter’s remark that he was ‘unable to believe’ it. Note the emphasis here on the ‘psychological’; in his discussion of Laqueur Tony Kushner refers to a ‘psychological mechanism’.¹³ We may perhaps regard it as a blocking mechanism, one which takes the information as true but, ‘for one reason or another’ does not allow anything to follow on from it. Breitman sees it as a ‘psychological gap between receiving information and absorbing knowledge that might serve as a basis for action’.¹⁴ Applying this to Frankfurter: Karski was not a liar because what he received from Karski was ‘information’ that was not false, but he rejected it as ‘knowledge’ – he was ‘unable to believe it’ - because he would need to do something if he did so. This is likely to be the kernel of the reproach levelled against Frankfurter: his ‘disbelief’ was a means for avoiding action, and as a Supreme Court Justice and a Jew he had a deep moral obligation to do something that might have made a difference. In 1996 Karski visited Israel and met Shevah Weiss who was then the Speaker of the Knesset and later the Israeli ambassador to Poland, when the subject of Frankfurter’s disbelief came up Weiss is reported to have made a remark which echoes Breitman’s but emphasises the pretence, ‘they preferred not to believe, because if they believed actions would have to follow’.¹⁵

This distinction between information and knowledge raises questions about the degree to which such a reproach can be justified. A brief list may suffice here. Information was received but, as Laqueur put it, knowledge was rejected ‘for one reason or another’. For the Jews in Poland, after the Warsaw deportations ‘the psychological pressures militated against rational analysis’ and the disbelief can be explained as a means of dealing with trauma, ‘wishful thinking seemed to offer the only antidote to utter despair’.¹⁶ With Frankfurter the reason for the disbelief, as Breitman and Weiss suggest, was quite different, it could be seen as a means of

¹³ Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, p. 3. Kushner, T., 2004. Different Worlds : British Perceptions of the Final Solution during the Second World War. In: D. Cesarani & S. Kavanagh, eds. *Holocaust: Responses to the persecution and mass murder of the Jews*. London: Psychology Press, p. 257.

¹⁴ Breitman, R., 1989. Auschwitz and the Archives. In: *The Nazi Holocaust. Part 8: Bystanders to the Holocaust*. Westport, London: Meckler, pp. 80-98, p. 83.

¹⁵ Piasecki, W., 2017. *Jan Karski, Jedno życie. Kompletna historia. Tom 2*. Chapter CIII, ‘Mili Ludzie’. Ebook Location 22162.

¹⁶ Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*, p. 199.

avoiding action, possibly because no effective action could be found at the time and it was better to claim disbelief rather than resign oneself to inaction. Frankfurter's background might provide another explanation: he was born in Vienna in 1882 and emigrated to New York in 1894 when he was twelve. We may assume that his childhood and family connections in what is often called Vienna's 'Golden Age' implanted a deeply-rooted admiration for Viennese, Austrian and more generally, German culture. He thus could not believe that such a culture could produce the Holocaust.¹⁷

Another possible reason relies on the notion of the 'unimaginable' or the 'unthinkable'. Once again, Laqueur puts this succinctly, when the *Einsatzgruppen* began murdering Jews most Jewish leaders in the East saw this as yet another instance of the pogroms and atrocities suffered by Jews for centuries. They 'did not yet realize that this was the beginning of a systematic campaign of destruction. The whole scheme was beyond human imagination'.¹⁸ In their case, the 'unimaginable' may be linked to the 'wishful thinking' of Jews who could not believe that the wave of mass murder was systematic and getting near. A rather different case of the 'unimaginable' or 'unthinkable', as it may apply to Frankfurter, was suggested by Lanzmann in 2010 in a robustly critical review of Yannick Haenel's novel *Jan Karski*,

Justice Frankfurter was not equipped [to understand] the horror, but there is depth in his pathetic denial. What can Treblinka or the Warsaw Ghetto mean when viewed from a warm and comfortable office in Washington? What is knowing? That is the central question.¹⁹

For Lanzmann, Karski the eyewitness told Frankfurter about the horror that is taking place far away, somewhere far beyond what Frankfurter, here in Washington, could conceive as meaningful. Frankfurter belonged to his place and time, he was bound by the concepts which made sense to a Supreme Court Justice in 1943 Washington and which set the limits to what can be known. Lanzmann is claiming that for Frankfurter, 'Treblinka and the Warsaw Ghetto' lie beyond what can be known.

¹⁷ I am grateful to Professor Michael Berkowitz for suggesting this point.

¹⁸ Laqueur, *Terrible Secret*, p. 198.

¹⁹ Lanzmann, C., 2010. "Jan Karski" de Yannick Haenel: un faux roman. *Marianne*, 23 January. French original in Appendix.

13.4 *Believing the unbelievable*

Something very similar was said nearly seventy years earlier in the 1942 ‘Liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto’ (*Likwidacja getta warszawskiego*) report examined in Chapter 8. Near the end of what is a harrowing account of the Warsaw ghetto deportations, the report issues a desperate appeal to people living in the West:

The attempt to describe this historically unprecedented murder must begin with a call to someone living in England or America: believe in things that are unbelievable. Know that what you read here is above all else the truth about where we happen to live and die. The facts which we present are neither selected nor altered. They are everyday facts.²⁰

The point of the appeal is obviously to persuade ‘someone living in England or America’ that the unfamiliar, horrific and ‘unbelievable’ Warsaw ghetto events described in the report are facts. The success of this appeal would mean that on hearing it someone has come to accept them as facts, has come to ‘believe the unbelievable’. Note that by July 1943 Karski already had numerous meetings in London at which an account of the mass murder of the Jews and the attempt to persuade people to ‘believe the unbelievable’ was part of the agenda. As we saw in Chapter 12 it made an impact on some – but decidedly not all - of the people he met: Gollancz, Koestler, Lane. A few months later in Washington Frankfurter listened to Karski’s account of ‘the Jewish leaders, the ghetto, Belzec’ and from contemporary reports and later testimonies we may conclude that there too he made an impact. It therefore seems plausible to argue that on hearing Karski, Frankfurter saw the horror of what was happening to the Jews in occupied Poland, although the facts were not new to him, this was the moment when he came to ‘believe the unbelievable’.

This somewhat contrarian view of Frankfurter’s disbelief can be supported by noting, once again, that in July 1943 he clearly knew the facts about Nazi Germany’s systematic extermination of the Jews taking place in Poland and elsewhere in occupied Europe. The problem, as Laqueur and others pointed out, is that the facts, while known, were rejected or disbelieved, and Frankfurter is presented as a vivid example of this. But there are documents which raise serious questions about this interpretation. They contain what looks like good evidence that

²⁰ SPP A 3.1.1.13.5/76, *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego*, p. 6. Polish original in Appendix.

it was Frankfurter who persuaded Roosevelt to meet Karski. The key point is that if, for whatever reason, Frankfurter did not believe Karski, he would not want Roosevelt to meet him.

The date of the meeting with Frankfurter is important here partly because in the 1978 interview Karski told Lanzmann that it occurred *after* he saw Roosevelt on July 28, 1943 and that it was Roosevelt who suggested that he should meet Frankfurter. According to the transcript of that interview, very soon after the Roosevelt meeting, the ambassador said to Karski, 'I have got a message from the White House. Apparently the President would like you to see the following individuals, and he wants you to pass to them all your reports'. Frankfurter's name was on the list and a few days later the ambassador told him, 'you are going to see Justice Frankfurter'.²¹ In 1978, thirty-five years after the event, Karski seemed convinced that the meeting with Frankfurter was initiated by Roosevelt, he told Lanzmann, 'Justice Frankfurter I saw on the recommendation of President Roosevelt'.²²

This may have been a lapse of memory. The internal documents written at the time clearly show that the meeting with Frankfurter occurred on July 5, 1943. Wood and Jankowski's 1994 biography, authorised by Karski, refers to the documents which show that the meeting with Roosevelt took place just over three weeks later.²³ This includes the ambassador's August 5, 1943 report to the Polish Foreign Minister cited at the beginning of this chapter.²⁴ Among other documents, it is this report which offers a clue about the impact which Karski had on Frankfurter. Recall that the ambassador wanted to receive an invitation directly from the President and he was hoping that his high-level American contacts would be so impressed by what Karski has to say in a series of meetings that they will ask the president to see Karski in the White House. The ambassador was delighted to

²¹ USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*. P. 60.

²² *Ibid.* p. 58.

²³ Wood & Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 186.

²⁴ On July 24, four days before meeting Roosevelt, Karski wrote the first of four internal reports on meetings in America. The first meeting was on July 5 and it mentions Frankfurter (HIA Karski Papers, Box 1 Folder 7 'Report no. 1 of Jan Karski's activities during his first trip to the United States', p. 1). The ambassador's report refers to the same date.

inform his minister that this plan ‘worked surprisingly well and produced excellent results for our cause’.²⁵

Let us look more closely at the way ambassador described the first such meeting, on July 5 with Frankfurter, Cox and Cohen at a ‘gentlemen’s dinner’ which started at 8pm at the Polish Embassy: Karski talked about the situation in occupied Poland which made such a great impact on the guests, and especially on Frankfurter, that they left at 1am. The ambassador emphasises this in his report:

Justice Frankfurter was so overwhelmed by what he had heard from Karski that he asked me, unprompted, whether I think it would be appropriate for him to let the President know that Karski is in Washington and make the President aware of the significance and genuineness of the information Karski brought with him, and persuade him that he should see Karski.²⁶

The ambassador eagerly agreed (*‘skwapliwie się zgodziłem’*) and reports that events then proceeded according to plan:

The next day Justice Frankfurter, who delayed his vacation departure by two days especially to hear Karski, saw the President to make him aware of Karski. Apart from that, Justice Frankfurter wrote to the Commerce Secretary, Morgenthau, asking him to help persuade the President to see Karski.²⁷

It is quite possible that Ambassador Ciechanowski may have been exaggerating his skills in discreet diplomacy, and it is possible also that his description of Frankfurter’s reaction was mistaken. But other internal reports written at the time tell us that the July 5 meeting with Frankfurter, Cox and Cohen did take place and that it was the first in a series of meetings leading up to an invitation from the White House which arrived at the Polish Embassy in the morning of July 28. If this was the ambassador’s original plan then it worked. There is also independent evidence, which seems more than merely circumstantial, supporting Ciechanowski’s account. A day after the July 5 dinner at the Polish Embassy Oscar Cox wrote two letters which mentioned Karski and the horrific stories he told about the situation in Poland. The first letter was to Harry Hopkins, the President’s special assistant and, as

²⁵ Ambassador Ciechanowski’s letter to the Polish Foreign Minister, August 5 1942. HIA Box 1 Folder 7, p. 2 *‘Przeprowadzenie tej akcji udało się nadspodziewanie dobrze i dało wielkie wyniki dla naszej sprawy’*.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 2-3.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 3.

described by a recent biographer of Hopkins, Roosevelt's 'most valuable advisor and closest companion'.²⁸ Cox wrote:

If you can find time, you may possibly want to arrange to talk to a man named Karski who has just arrived in town. (...) His story will make your hair stand on end but it is well worth hearing.²⁹

The second letter was to Walter Lippmann, perhaps the most prominent and influential journalist in America at the time. It was similar to the Hopkins letter:

Dear Walter,
If you have the time, you may want to get Jan Ciechanowski to arrange for you to see a man named Karski. (...) His story is bloodcurdling but worth hearing.³⁰

It seems fairly certain that at the July 5 dinner at the Polish embassy, Cox, Cohen and Frankfurter all listened to Karski's account of what is happening in Poland. As he states in his later testimonies, Karski was aware of Frankfurter's Jewish background, and probably of Cox's and Cohen's, so he emphasised the Jewish tragedy and suffering in occupied Poland. The letters show that this clearly made an impact on Cox, it 'would make your hair stand on end', it was 'bloodcurdling'. And it must have made an impact on Frankfurter; in his August 5 report Ciechanowski wrote that Frankfurter was 'overwhelmed' by it. But note also that in his letters Cox was suggesting that Hopkins and Lippmann should meet Karski to hear what he has to say. Cox was a Yale-educated lawyer and, at the time, the Assistant Solicitor General in the Roosevelt administration, it is reasonable to expect that he had a good sense of what constitutes sound evidence. His letters to Hopkins and Lippmann would be pointless if he believed that what Karski was saying was mere propaganda or simply untrue.

The Cox letters lend credence to the claim made by ambassador Ciechanowski in his August 5 report that Frankfurter sent a similar letter about Karski to Henry Morgenthau Jr.³¹ It is reasonable to suppose that just like Cox,

²⁸ Roll, D. L., 2013. *The Hopkins Touch: Harry Hopkins and the Forging of the Alliance to Defeat Hitler*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 3.

²⁹ Cox memorandum to Hopkins, July 6 1943. Copy in HIA Karski Papers, Box 9 Folder 5. Original in the FDRL Cox papers. Fragment cited in Wood & Jankowski, *Karski*, p. 187 and 294).

³⁰ Cox letter to Walter Lippmann. Copy in HIA Karski Papers, Box 9 Folder 5. Original in the FDRL Cox papers. Fragment cited in Wood & Jankowski, *Karski*, pp. 187 and 294.

³¹ The letter has not been found but perhaps historians have not yet looked for it. In June 2020 I sent a request to the FDR library to search for it in the correspondence files of the Morgenthau Papers collection.

Frankfurter also sent letters or a letter about Karski to people who were close to Roosevelt. And just like in Cox's case, sending a letter about Karski to Morgenthau, and especially one suggesting that Roosevelt should meet Karski, would not make any sense if Frankfurter did not believe that what Karski said about the Jewish tragedy that evening on July 5 was true, or if he treated it as information which he refused to accept. If we accept Ciechanowski's account, sending such a letter would demonstrate that Frankfurter tried to do something after he heard Karski, he acted in a way which could be construed as the most effective means he had of getting the key message to the centre of American power, to the President.

We can now try once again to understand Frankfurter's 'disbelief' in terms of Laqueur's 'central question' discussed at the beginning of this chapter, 'what was known and why was it not believed?'. The various 'psychological mechanisms' which might provide an answer do not seem to apply to Frankfurter. His letter to Morgenthau shows that he did not reject as unacceptable Karski's eyewitness account of the Jewish tragedy. His 'disbelief' was not a ploy to avoid action, by sending the letter he chose to act, in Breitman's terms, he 'absorbed knowledge that might serve as a basis for action'. The notion of the 'unimaginable' or 'unthinkable' also does not apply to Frankfurter, it would not make sense for him to suggest that the President should spend time on hearing about events that cannot be imagined or thought as taking place. How then can we understand Frankfurter's 'disbelief'?

One possible way of tackling this question is to consider the lived experience of someone witnessing horrible events which might have been described previously through vast numbers and statistics, or through rumours of things happening elsewhere but difficult to imagine happening here. The immediacy of such experience sets a moment in which events which were previously remote are now perceived as full of horrific details occurring here and now. An eyewitness of such events may have the skill or talent to convey this immediacy to listeners or viewers so that they too may experience it to some degree. On July 5, 1942 Karski was the eyewitness who told Frankfurter, Cox and Cohen about the horrific fate of the Jews in occupied Poland. Cox's use of the word 'bloodcurdling' in his letter to Hopkins clearly suggests that Karski succeeded in conveying some sense of the horror which he witnessed taking place in occupied Poland. It seems reasonable to conclude that

he also conveyed it to Frankfurter and that ambassador Ciechanowski's comment about Frankfurter being 'overwhelmed' by what Karski had to say is accurate. This strongly suggests that Frankfurter's 'disbelief' was not a rejection, as Karski saw it thirty-five years later, of what he had just heard. It was rather the expression of a painful acceptance of what he had previously thought was unbelievable. The phrase used in the *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* report, 'believe in what is unbelievable' (*uwierzcie w rzeczy nie do wiary*) quoted earlier in this chapter, may be used to describe the meaning of Frankfurter's 'disbelief': it marked the moment when Frankfurter came to believe the unbelievable.

14 The FDR meeting: later testimonies and original documents

Karski met Franklin Roosevelt on July 28, 1943. It was a meeting at which Karski, as he would put it some years later, personally met the ‘leader of humanity’,¹ it was probably the most important single event of his wartime mission. Because of this importance, it is a key episode in the many accounts we have of Karski’s life; it is central to the Karski story. As described in Chapter 2, on May 29, 2012, when Barack Obama presented a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom award to Karski, the medal citation read at the award ceremony referred to this important meeting, ‘A witness to atrocity in the Warsaw Ghetto and the Nazi Izbica transit camp, he repeatedly crossed enemy line to document the face of genocide, and courageously voiced tragic truths all the way to President Roosevelt’.²

What did Karski and Roosevelt talk about? We have the accounts and testimonies Karski gave thirty-five or more years after the event; Lanzmann’s *Karski Report* is one example of a film which presents one filmmaker’s edited version of what Karski said in 1978. But are there any original documents created soon after the meeting which tell us anything about what was said in 1943? In fact, there is such a document, written by Karski himself a few days after he met Roosevelt. It is a 30-page typewritten report which we cannot regard as a neutral stenographic record but, with some reservations, it is as close to a verbatim account of the meeting as we can hope to get. It records the questions asked by Roosevelt and the answers given by Karski. It is an internal, confidential document written by Karski, reviewed by the Polish ambassador, Jan Ciechanowski, who was also at the meeting, and sent to the various ministries of the exiled Polish government in London. It is a document discussed by historians who have studied Karski: David Engel, Andrzej Żbikowski, Wood and Jankowski, and others; what will be examined here is not in any sense an archival discovery. Yet it is worth studying this

¹ Karski refers to FDR as the ‘leader of humanity’ in Claude Lanzmann’s *Le Rapport Karski*, (first released on the Arte Channel, France, in 2010). It is based on the outtakes of the Karski interview shown in Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985). See note 9 of the Introduction.

² Transcript and video of the Medal of Freedom Ceremony – May 29 2012. C-Span, 2012. *Presidential Medal of Freedom Ceremony*.

report in detail to see if it can help answer questions which are central in this thesis: Did Roosevelt ask Karski about what is happening to the Jews in Poland? What, if anything, did Karski tell Roosevelt about the fate of Polish Jews? If Karski did say anything about the Jews, what was Roosevelt's response to what he had just heard?

Karski's 30-page report on the meeting with Roosevelt is dated about a week after the event which means that the details of what was said must have remained fresh in Karski's memory as he wrote it. On July 28, 1943 Karski, accompanied by ambassador Ciechanowski, met Franklin Roosevelt in the White House. The meeting lasted for over an hour, Roosevelt asked relatively brief questions and Karski replied; the ambassador added a few comments but did not take much part in the conversation. They talked about Poland during and after the war, about Polish resistance, post-war prospects, Soviet plans for Poland. A very small part of the meeting was about the tragic fate of the Jews.

Some key elements of Karski's report can be confirmed by other sources: Roosevelt's White House stenographer's diary and the White House Usher's Log for July 28, 1943.³ The stenographer's diary for that day has a handwritten entry saying that at the White House on 10:50 in the morning Franklin Roosevelt had an appointment with 'The Polish Ambassador' and 'Mr. Karsky'.

³ Franklin Delano Roosevelt Day by Day. <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/daylog/july-28th-1943/> Both the Stenographer's Diary and the White House Usher's Log come from this online service, accessed on March 9, 2015.

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JULY 28 *Wed.*

APPOINTMENTS		APPOINTMENTS	
8.00		2.15	(Mr. Irving J. Loen)
8.15		2.30	
8.30		2.45	
8.45		3.00	
9.00		3.15	
9.15		3.30	
9.30		3.45	
9.45		4.00	
10.00		4.15	
10.15		4.30	
10.30	<i>At White House</i>	4.45	
10.45	(The Polish Ambassador)	5.00	
11.00	Mr. Karsky <i>At office</i>	5.15	
11.15	(Adm. William D. Leahy)	5.30	
11.30	Govr. Matthew M. Neely	5.45	
11.45	Hon. James M. Landis	6.00	
12.00		6.15	
12.15		6.30	
12.30		6.45	
12.45		7.00	
1.00	(Lunch) Hon. Basil O'Connor	7.15	
1.15		7.30	
1.30		7.45	
1.45		8.00	
2.00		8.15	
<i>9.30 P.M. - Radio Address</i>			

Figure 8 - White House Stenographer's diary, July 28 1943

In the Diary, the bracketed entry most likely indicates the time for which the appointment was set and in this case, Karski and the ambassador were to meet Roosevelt in the White House at 10:45 in the morning. We can see that the next meeting, with Admiral Leahy, Governor Neely and James Landis, a Roosevelt

advisor, was set for 11:15. This means that Karski and the ambassador had been allocated half an hour with Roosevelt, which seems like reasonable time for the kind of substantial conversation ambassador Ciechanowski was hoping Karski would have with the American president. There are two additional details worth noting here: the '10.45' start time was changed to '10.50' which we can assume means that the meeting started five minutes late, and also, later that evening, at 9.30pm, Roosevelt had one of his regular Radio Addresses or Fireside Chat broadcasts to the American people.

Let us now look at the other item, the White House Usher's Log:

10⁵⁰ The Polish Ambass. +
 Mr. Karsky (Spell?) 11⁵⁰
 11⁵⁵ To Office, 5⁴⁵ returning from
 off. to Navy Yard, 9c by Admex.
 - Mr. Intire + Brown + Gen. Watson
 6⁴⁵ Retd. to Pres. Office 7³⁰
 7⁴⁵ Dinner - Miss Jolly
 9²⁵ To Slip. Rec. Rm. for broadcast -
 stills + movies 10⁴⁰
 12³⁰ Retired

 Mrs. Roosevelt
 Hyde Park

Figure 9 - White House Usher's Log, July 28 1943

In the Usher's Log the uncertainty about the exact spelling of 'Karski' adds a small touch of authenticity to this routine entry. But more importantly, it confirms that Roosevelt's meeting with Karski and Ciechanowski on July 28, 1943 started at 10:50 and finished at 11:50. Which means that it overran by half an hour and lasted for one hour. At 11:55 Roosevelt went to the (Oval?) Office where he was forty

minutes late for his next meeting with Admiral Leahy, Governor Neely and James Landis who had been kept waiting while the President talked to Karski and the Polish ambassador.

We can conclude from this, I think, that Roosevelt was very interested in what Karski had to say and that this was the reason why the meeting went longer than scheduled. Was there anybody else at that meeting other than Roosevelt, Karski and ambassador Ciechanowski? Leahy, Neely and Landis were in another part of the White House. It might be tempting to suppose that if we have a Stenographer's Diary there may also have been a stenographer taking shorthand notes of all that was said, leaving a stenographic record of the conversation for the benefit of future historians. Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the case. It is fairly certain that there was no stenographer present, and as a general rule, Roosevelt did not allow his guests to take notes during meetings.⁴

It would thus appear that the report written by Karski is the only account we have of what was said at the July 28 meeting. As already mentioned, it is an internal report which Karski wrote in the days after the meeting, a 30-page, mostly double-spaced typescript entitled 'Notes from a Conversation with President F. D. Roosevelt on Wednesday, 28.VII.1943'.⁵ The document was an attachment to a report sent on August 5, 1943 by ambassador Ciechanowski to his superior, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Tadeusz Romer, who had succeeded Raczynski on July 14, 1943 and who was based in London with the Polish government-in-exile. There are two slightly different versions of the document, both in the Hoover Institution's Karski Papers collection. The first version appears to be Karski's original draft with handwritten editing mark-up almost certainly added by Ciechanowski. The second version is the final one and it incorporates the marked changes but not the original. Ciechanowski was Karski's superior and we may ask whether Karski wrote the report with the feeling that the ambassador was looking

⁴ I am grateful to Virginia Lewick, Archivist at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park, NY, for the following information: 'President Roosevelt did not permit note-taking during his meetings, so one is dependent on what, if anything, an attendee may have written in a diary or in other correspondence.'. Email to the author dated September 12, 2013.

⁵ 'Notatki z Rozmowy z Prezydentem F. D. ROOSEVELT'em w srode, 28.VIII.1943r'. Hoover Institution, Karski Papers, Box 1, Folder 7. Note that the typist made a pagination error: there are three consecutive pages numbered '14'. The last page is numbered '28'.

over his shoulder. However, the Ciechanowski edits are either stylistic (more “diplomatic”) or they serve to embellish statements about the dangers posed by the Soviet Union. In the section on the Jews, which interests us the most here, there is one such mark-up which may be regarded as trivial. In a few places, none of which concern Jewish issues, Ciechanowski adds a sentence which seems intended to be a discreet enhancement of his role before the minister. In any event, we have the original draft which clearly shows Ciechanowski’s mark-up and hence gives us Karski’s original version.

A significant feature of the report is that it seems intended to be an exact record of what was said at the meeting. It gives us Roosevelt’s questions and Karski’s answers, with occasional comments by the ambassador. There is minimal ‘narratorial’ comment. And so in the absence of a possible stenogram based on notes taken at the meeting by a neutral stenographer, Karski’s report appears as close as we can get to a recording of what was said. This may be the reason why at the end of the report, Karski, who was renowned for his excellent memory, ends with a sort of signature which suggests that the conversation described in the report was ‘recalled’ or ‘played back’ by Jan Karski,⁶ that it was a transcript rather than a report, a transcript which is signed by ambassador Ciechanowski who refers to it as an attachment to a report which bears his signature. It is important, however, to note two other features of the report: first, even if the report was a fairly accurate transcript, it is a transcript in Polish of a conversation that was conducted in English. Secondly, we cannot be certain that the typescript is a complete report of everything that was said, something may have been omitted.

Although we can never be certain and even if we allow that it might be incomplete, it seems difficult to accept this report as anything other than an attempt at a verbatim account of what was said at the meeting. Many years later Karski recalled that immediately after they saw Roosevelt, the ambassador told him to write a report which recorded everything:

After we left the White House, of course we returned to the Embassy. The Ambassador gave me a typist, he went to another room with another typist, and his instructions: ‘You write your report and I write my report. Johnny, be careful.

⁶ ‘*Odtworzył – JAN KARSKI*’. A literal English translation of ‘*odtworzył*’ is ‘recreated’. ‘Notatki z rozmowy...’, op. cit., p. 30.

Everything counted. If you noticed his smile, put it in the report. We just saw the centre of power of humanity'.⁷

The fact that the ambassador was present at the meeting suggests that there was no need to aim the report at any specific internal audience. It also seems that any additional commentary or editorialising was unnecessary – it was the ambassador who would do that. The format clearly distinguishes Roosevelt's questions from Karski's replies: the questions are indented and single-spaced, Karski's replies are double-spaced; there seem to be few tell-tale signs of summary or paraphrase. Of the 30 pages, the first two serve as an introduction and in the remaining 28 Roosevelt asks a question or makes a brief comment and Karski gives an answer. The ambassador occasionally says something but then some of Roosevelt's comments suggest that he would prefer to hear Karski. A reproduction of a typical page, shown below, will illustrate the format of the report.

The two-page introduction begins by explaining that it was Ambassador Ciechanowski who 'organised' the meeting in such a way that it was finally arranged through the 'President's initiative'. The presidential invitation came by phone at 8am on the 28th when the ambassador was informed that the President will be waiting for Karski and him at 10.30am that day. The White House stenographer's diary shows that the appointment was set for 10:45. This means that Karski and the ambassador had just over two hours to prepare before the meeting with Roosevelt.

At this introductory section of the report, Karski describes the advice and instruction which ambassador Ciechanowski, the experienced diplomat, gave the 29-year-old Karski who wrote that 'before the meeting I received detailed instructions from the Ambassador about what to emphasise (*uwypuklić*), and also tips on presentation. (...) He advised me not to exaggerate, tell only what is true'. Since Karski had been making similar presentations to prominent personalities in Britain for half a year, the ambassador's advice was perhaps of the pointless type which experienced but concerned fathers give to their talented sons. Then came a list of topics which the ambassador 'would prefer' (*życzył sobie*) that Karski emphasise for the President. It is a list which Karski does not number in his report but being a list

⁷ USHMM, 1978. *Shoah interview, Lanzmann's original transcript*. p. 58.

it has a sequence and an implied order of importance and so it will be numbered here:⁸

1. The relationship of the Poles to the President personally
2. The disloyal and destructive activity of communist agents
3. The scope and legitimacy (*oficjalność*) of the underground authorities
4. The efficient functioning of the communication links [between Poland] and the [exiled] government
5. The general relationship of the country to the [exiled] government
6. The preparatory work for the time of the uprising
7. The underground contacts with the Czechs, the Slovaks and the Lithuanians; the views on the concept of a [central European] federation
8. The nature and the scope of German terror and Polish losses
9. The extermination of the Jews (*eksterminacja Żydów*)

If the sequence of the list reflects order of importance then clearly the mass murder of the Jews in occupied Poland, while not omitted, comes last in the agenda and thus appears to be the least important topic. But this is ambassador Ciechanowski's preferred or suggested list which Karski is dutifully noting here in the introduction of his report. We will see whether in his conversation with Roosevelt, as he reports it, Karski succeeds in distributing the relative weight of these topics in accordance to the ambassador's preference. And it will become obvious that while Karski has some control over the agenda, the conversation is clearly led by Roosevelt: he is the President and he is in charge, it is his preferences that dictate the agenda and the importance of topics. His questions do not follow a sequence, he jumps from one topic to another in a way that seems to reflect his interests and not Karski's or the ambassador's.

A reproduction of Page 5 of Karski's report may illustrate not only the general format of the report but also the character of the meeting: it is clearly Roosevelt who is asking the questions and leading the discussion. At the top of this page Roosevelt asks about the fate of the large landowners in occupied Poland: 'What have the Germans done with large property holdings? (He turns to the Ambassador). For example, what is happening with your property?'.⁹ Ambassador

⁸ In the report, Karski presents Ciechanowski's preferred topics as a comma-separated list. 'Notatki z rozmowy...', pp. 1-2.

⁹ Ambassador Jan Ciechanowski (1887- 1973) was a *ziemianin* (landowner) who came from an established land-owning family in Upper Silesia. In 1929 he bought a stately home and land in

Ciechanowski replies, 'I don't have the details. All I know is that it is in German hands'. Karski then follows with a brief account of the fate of large property holders in Poland, saying that those who have not been forced to leave remain on their property under the control of German managers ('*Treuhändlerzy*') who can often be bribed. Roosevelt picks up the bribery thread and asks: 'Is there much bribery among the Germans?'. Karski's reply is now more detailed: The SS, the Wehrmacht officers and the Gestapo cannot be bribed but the other Germans can be and the Polish underground makes full use of them. Roosevelt then asks about the demoralisation of the German army and administration (page 6 – not shown).

Szczekociny in Upper Silesia (cf. image on http://wikizaglebie.pl/wiki/Plik:Szczekociny_zesp%C3%B3%C5%82_pa%C5%82acowo_parkowy_03_RZ.jpg, (accessed August 4, 2015). For a general discussion on the aristocrats and landowner class in the Foreign Ministry in inter-war Poland see Wojciech Skóra, 'Czy resort spraw zagranicznych II Rzeczypospolitej był zdominowany przez arystokrację i ziemiaństwo?' [*Was the ministry of foreign affairs of the II Republic dominated by the aristocracy and landowners?*] in *Polacy i sąsiedzi – dystanse i przenikanie kultur, cz. III*, ed. R. Wapiński, Gdańsk 2002, p. 150-175.

- 5 -

mieckin.

PREZ.: Co Niemcy zrobili z większą własnością?
(zwraca się do Ambasadora). Co się np.
dzieje w Pana majątku?

AMBASADOR: Nie mam szczegółów. Wiem tylko, że
jest w rękach niemieckich.

Wielka własność przechodziła w Polsce w czasie tej wojny
rozmaite koleje. Na ziemiach anektowanych wszystkich Polaków
wyrzucono z wielkiej własności. Obsadzili ją Niemcy. Na zie-
niach okupowanych w swoim czasie przez bolszewików, Niemcy
teoretycznie zwrócili całą własność prawnym właścicielom. Prak-
tycznie jednak - właścicieli tych wyrzucono albo sami musieli
uciekać. Nieliczne tylko wyjątki gospodarują. W G. G. i teore-
tycznie i praktycznie w zarządzie prawni właściciele, Polacy, gos-
podarują, mając jednak zawsze Treuhänderów, którzy osuwają nad
tem, a żeby właściciel wszystkie zbiory oddawał skrupulatnie.
Treuhändlerzy ci robią jednak często nadużycia, właściciele czę-
sto ich przekupują, zdobywając możliwości w ten sposób do omija-
nia zarządzeń niemieckich.

PREZ.: Czy wśród Niemców jest duże przekupstwo?

Bardzo duże. Z wyjątkiem S.S.man'ów, oficerów i sporej
części Gestapo - ci Niemcy, którzy są w Polsce chcą przede-
wszystkiem wzbogacić się. Wykorzystujemy to. Większość lek-
kiej broni, papier na prasę tajną, drukarnie, mundury niemieckie,
dokumentację niemiecką uzyskujemy od Niemców drogą przekupstwa,
zastraszenia albo wręcz szantażu. Jeśli Niemiec raz nam zrobi
usługę - musi służyć nam i w przyszłości. Mamy dowody, mogące
go skompromitować. Charakterystyczne jest, iż wszyscy ci
Niemcy, których my wykorzystujemy, nie są to ludzie, którzy za-
wiedli się do regime'u, są w politycznej opozycji itp., ale są

'PREZ'
- The President

'AMBASADOR'
- Ciechanowski

Karski

'PREZ'
- The President

Karski

Figure 10 - Reproduction of Page 5 of Karski's report on the FDR meeting

It seems clear that while it is the President who determines the main thread of the conversation, Karski is given time to answer. And indeed some of Karski's answers are quite long, which may suggest that he has some control over the length of time he wants to spend on them. On page 9, for example, Karski begins a lengthy 5-page description of the Polish wartime state system, with its legitimate government functioning openly in what is expected to be a temporary wartime exile in London, and an underground civilian and military organisation operating under conditions of German terror in occupied Poland. He describes the five main segments of the

Polish underground and their main functions. At the end of this long answer, Roosevelt is impressed: 'I never thought that it was possible to create such a carefully designed organisation under such conditions'.¹⁰ There are questions and answers about Soviet partisan incursions, about East Prussia, communist infiltration, corruption and low morale in the German army, and so on. The basic pattern of the discussion is that with one important exception, it is Roosevelt who asks the questions and Karski who answers them. The one exception is the Jewish topic.

Karski begins to talk about the tragic fate of the Jews in Poland on page 8 of the report and continues until page 9, this is just over a page of the 30-page report. This may help to estimate how long they spent talking about the Jews: it must have been just over two minutes in the sixty minute conversation. The point can be made more clearly through a graphic showing the 30 pages of the complete report¹¹ with the Jewish section indicated in red:

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 14.

¹¹ The images show a directory of JPG images of the report downloaded from the online service of the Polish National Archives. Hoover Collection, MSZ archives. Scan of first image of the report is 635.jpg at https://szukajwarchiwach.pl/800/42/0/-/54/str/1/7/100/WSMbNCF5tX9GLf3I3_jlg/#tabSkany (Accessed on September 20, 2020).

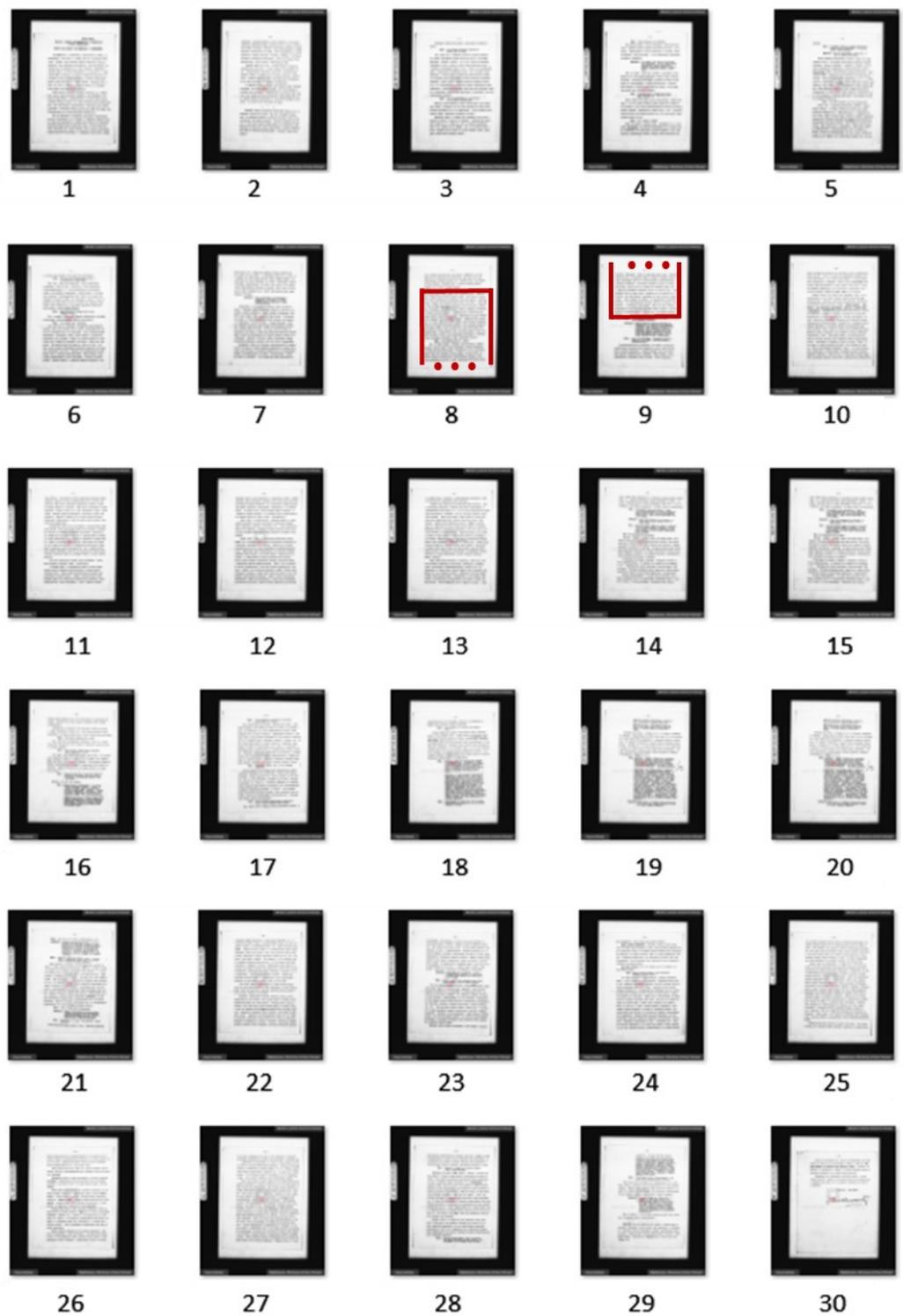


Figure 11 – Pages of Karski's FDR meeting report, Jewish topic highlighted

No doubt our first impression may be that this is not very much, that Jewish matters could not have been regarded as very important if they were dealt with in so short a time. However, a significant aspect of what Karski says to Roosevelt about

the Jews is that in this one instance he is not replying to a direct question asked by the President. Roosevelt did not ask Karski about the Jews, it was Karski himself who introduced the topic. Timothy Snyder is correct in stating that what Karski told Roosevelt about the Jews was ‘unbidden’,¹² all the other topics which Karski talked about were replies to Roosevelt’s questions, the Jewish topic was raised by Karski. Let us take a closer look at this.

These images are reproductions of Page 8 and 9 of Karski’s meeting report. The red lines mark the boundaries of the Jewish topic:

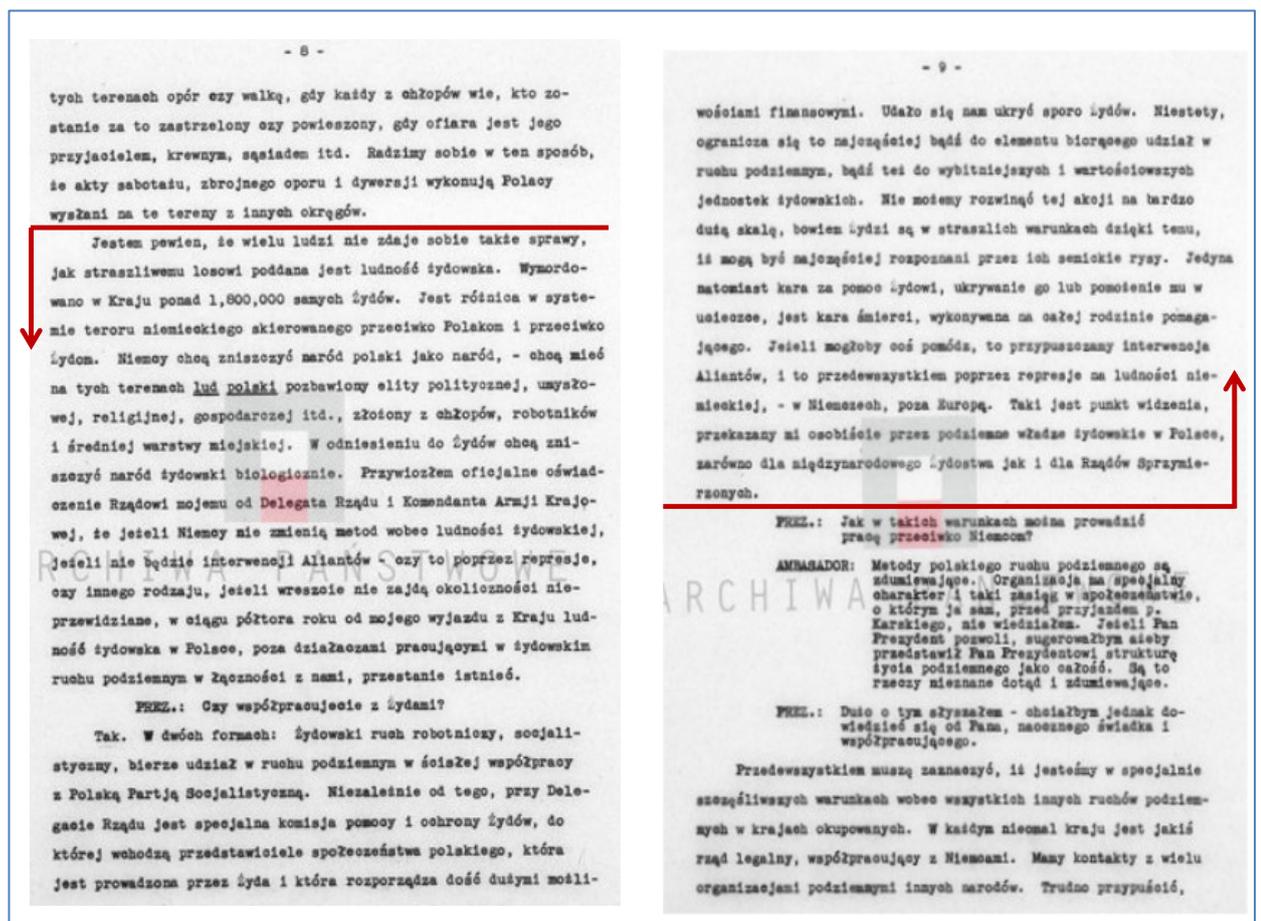


Figure 12 - Karski's FDR meeting report, Jewish topic, pages 8-9

We can see here that Karski is not raising the Jewish topic in response to a question by Roosevelt. What he tells Roosevelt about the mass murder of the Jews is a part of a reply to the President’s question ‘What does German terror look like?’.

¹² See note 9.

This appears on page 6 of the report. Karski replies that it is different than Bolshevik terror, German terror is aimed at the extermination of the Polish intelligentsia, it uses broadly-targeted mass reprisals, torture and mass executions while pursuing a small number of suspects. He then mentions the concentration camps, Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka, Belżec (but does not refer to them as death camps for Jews) and talks briefly about the German practice of ‘collective responsibility’ which uses hostages to terrorize people living in the countryside. We are now on page 8 of the report where Karski begins by contrasting the fate of the Jews and that of the Poles in occupied Poland:

I am certain that many people have no idea about the terrible fate of the Jewish population. Over 1,800,000 Jews have already been murdered in the country. There is a difference between the way German terror works against the Poles and against the Jews. The Germans want to destroy the Polish nation as a nation, they want to have a Polish people (*lud polski*) that is deprived of its political, religious, economic, etc. elite, and is composed of peasants, workers and a middle layer of townfolk. As far as the Jews are concerned, they want to destroy the Jewish nation biologically.¹³

Karski is still responding to Roosevelt’s question, ‘What does German terror look like?’. Having just described how German terror is affecting the Poles, Karski is now telling Roosevelt about the fundamental distinction between the suffering of the Poles and that of the Jews. He is informing the American president that the suffering of the Jews is fundamentally different to that of the Poles, it is unique, it is a ‘biological destruction’ of *all* Jewish life rather than only of its elite. And because of this, there is an urgency to any rescue action which the Allies may bring to save those Jews who still remain alive. Here Karski tells Roosevelt about a message he brought in his last mission from the Polish underground forces to the Polish government in London:

I delivered an official statement to my government [in London] from the [civilian] Delegate of the Government and the Commander of the Home Army [in occupied Poland], that if Germany does not change its method of persecuting the Jewish

¹³ ‘*W odniesieniu do Żydów chcą zniszczyć naród żydowski biologicznie*’. A less literal translation would be: ‘With reference to the Jews, they want to exterminate the Jewish people completely’. ‘destroy biologically’ means here the extermination of any form of life, anywhere and at any time, which might be regarded as ‘Jewish’. ‘Notatka z rozmów’, op. cit., p. 8.

population, if there will be no Allied intervention – either through reprisals¹⁴ or some other kind, or if finally there will not be some unforeseen circumstances, within a year and a half of my departure, the Jewish population of Poland, apart from the activists working in the Jewish underground movement who are in contact with us, will cease to exist.¹⁵

At this point Roosevelt asks a question that is the only one which refers explicitly to the Jews. He asks Karski: ‘Are you working together with the Jews?’. Karski responds by mentioning the links between the Bundists and the Polish Socialist Party, the establishment of the Jewish Aid Council as an official agency of the Polish underground state which helps Jews in hiding. He explains that this rescue action can only help a few, it cannot be expanded on a large scale because the German penalty for offering such help is the death penalty. He then tells Roosevelt about another message from Poland:

We believe that if anything could help it would be reprisals against the German population – in Germany, beyond Europe. This is the point of view passed on to me personally by the leaders of the Jewish underground in Poland, to be conveyed to international Jewry as well as to the Allied Governments.¹⁶

The significance of this message becomes evident when we note how it differs from the other one. In the first message, Karski is informing Roosevelt about the fact that the civilian and military wings of the underground resistance in Poland have conveyed, through him, a message to the government in London warning that, bar the unforeseen, unless the Allies mount some rescue action, within about a year ‘the Jewish population of Poland, (...) will cease to exist’. The second message, by contrast, is a direct appeal to Roosevelt himself from the Jewish underground leadership in Poland, conveyed by Karski. It is clearly an appeal urging Roosevelt to launch military reprisals against the Germans, civilian or not, wherever they may be.

It is important to recall that eleven months earlier, probably in early September 1942, Karski personally witnessed the horrors of the Warsaw ghetto in the final stages of the deportations to Treblinka and visited a death camp transit

¹⁴ I am translating the report’s ‘*represje*’ as ‘reprisals’ rather than ‘repressions’. We need to remember that Karski’s report was written in Polish about a meeting that was conducted in English. It is unlikely that at the meeting with Roosevelt Karski would have used the word ‘repressions’ rather than ‘reprisals’ when talking about an Allied intervention intended to punish Nazi Germany for its extermination of the Jews.

¹⁵ ‘Notatka z rozmowy...’, p. 8.

¹⁶ Ibid.

facility near Bełżec. He talked to the Jewish underground leaders in Warsaw who seemed to have charged him with what looks like a personal mission to convey their rescue appeal directly to ‘international Jewry as well as to the Allied Governments’. Eleven months later Karski was in the White house passing on that appeal to the American president. As Timothy Snyder put it, Karski was ‘the only man in the history of the Holocaust with direct access to both the lowest of the horrors and the highest of the powers’.¹⁷

14.1 The impact of the meeting on Roosevelt

The two messages Karski delivered to Roosevelt make it quite clear that the only effective means of stopping the extermination of the Jews is through some additional or special Allied act of war against Germany. The message from the Polish underground state to the Polish government talks about some form of Allied reprisals, the one from the Jewish underground about reprisals against the ‘German population’. How did Roosevelt respond, especially to the second message which is a direct appeal for help from the Jewish underground leadership?

In Karski’s meeting report we can see that there is no direct response to this from Roosevelt. After Karski had conveyed the messages, Roosevelt asks the next question: ‘Under such conditions, how is it possible to work against the Germans?’. Karski takes up this question and replies with what in the report is the five-page description of the structure of the Polish underground state. Roosevelt then guides the conversation with further questions which are fairly close to the topics which Karski prepared with the ambassador prior to the meeting: communication links between the government and the underground forces, the inclusion of East Prussia in post-war Polish territory, communist incursion, Soviet partisans, relations with the Soviet Union etc. The meeting ends with the American president noticing that they have talked for half an hour longer than expected. He thanks Karski and the ambassador for the ‘important information’ which they passed on to him. Karski shakes his hand and tells him that this conversation was very important for ‘all of us fighting in Poland’. The meeting with Roosevelt was over.

¹⁷ Snyder, T., *Black Earth*, p. 265.

We can be fairly certain that none of the information about the mass murder of the Jews was new to Roosevelt on July 28, 1943; he obviously knew about Nazi Germany's 'bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination' which the United States and its Allies condemned in the December 17, 1942 Allied declaration. At a December 8, 1942 meeting, when a delegation of American Jewish leaders presented a report detailing the mass murder of Jews, he reassured them that the US government 'is very well acquainted with most of the facts you are now bringing to our attention' and added that 'representatives of the United States government in Switzerland (...) have given us proof that confirm the horrors discussed by you'.¹⁸ The reference to Switzerland strongly suggests that Roosevelt was kept informed about the reports received in late 1942 from the American consulate in Bern. According to Richard Breitman, 'Roosevelt must have learned of Riegner's horrific information and of the State Department's investigation, perhaps in conversations with Felix Frankfurter or Henry Morgenthau Jr.'.¹⁹ If we include the events in the first half of 1943, such as the mass rallies in Madison Square Gardens on March 1, we can safely conclude that Karski did not tell Roosevelt anything he did not already know. Any claim about Roosevelt's disbelief, therefore, is entirely without basis.

This leaves us with the arguments about Roosevelt's apparent indifference to the Jewish tragedy and claims that he turned a deaf ear to the desperate calls for help Karski brought from the Jewish resistance leaders in Warsaw. An examination of these arguments goes beyond the scope of this thesis but the issues raised must be placed within the broad context of the war in mid-1943, they must take into account Roosevelt's views on America's war effort in Europe and the support he needed for that effort in America. We may try to get a glimpse of these views by noting what he said to the American public in the evening after the morning meeting he had with Karski. If we look again at the Stenographer's Diary shown on page 254 we can see that the July 28 meeting with Karski ended at 11:15am and at 9:30pm that evening

¹⁸ Held Report, 1942. *Report on Meeting of Jewish Leaders with Roosevelt (December 8, 1942)*. [Online]

Available at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/report-on-meeting-of-jewish-leaders-with-roosevelt-december-1942>. [Accessed 17 September 2020].

¹⁹ Breitman and Lichtman also describe other sources of news which reached Roosevelt, for example his envoy to the Vatican, Myron C. Taylor. Breitman, R. & Lichtman, A. J., 2013. *FDR and the Jews*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. pp. 201-204.

Roosevelt gave one of his regular Fireside Chat radio broadcasts to the American people. The text of what he said, and in fact the recording itself, has been preserved in the archives and so it seems reasonable to ask if there is anything in what he said that evening which might suggest a reference to what he had heard in the morning from Karski.

The Fireside Chat, as expected, was about the current state of the American war effort, Roosevelt talked about the fall of Mussolini three days earlier and about the ongoing American and British invasion of Sicily, Operation 'Husky'. Begun on July 10, the military historian Carlo D'Este described it as 'one of the most important campaigns fought by Anglo-American forces during the war (...) the first assault on "Fortress Europa" by any Allied force'. American forces numbered around 100,000 men, the battles raged across Sicily until August 17 when the Allies achieved a 'bitter victory' with nearly 10,000 Americans killed or wounded and with the German forces managing to flee across the Strait of Messina to the Italian mainland where they would offer stiff resistance to the Allied advance for nearly a year. As D'Este put it, 'For thirty-eight days during the summer of 1943 the attention of the world centred upon Sicily'.²⁰ We may add that almost exactly at the middle of this period, on the morning of July 28, 1943, Karski met Roosevelt.

When we look at Roosevelt's apparent 'indifference' towards the messages which Karski delivered to him from the Jewish resistance leaders in Warsaw, we also need to examine what some historians regard as his concern that public support for the war against Nazi Germany might be eroded by American anti-Semites. This attitude is neatly summarised by Richard Breitman:

FDR feared that his involvement in publicity about what we call the Holocaust would divide the American people and add to the widespread perceptions at home and abroad that Jews manipulated his policies.²¹

On the other hand, Jewish political support for Roosevelt during the war years seems almost total, 90% of Jews voted for Roosevelt in the 1940 and 1944 elections²². By

²⁰ D'Este, C., 2008. *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily July-August 1943*. London: Arum Press, p. 19 and Appendix E.

²¹ R. Breitman, *Official Secrets*, p. 207.

²² Jewish Virtual Library, 2001. *U.S Presidential Elections: Jewish Voting Record (1916 - Present)*. [Online]

contrast, in his Fireside Chat Roosevelt spends much time praising the Italian people, especially the Sicilians: ‘We are already helping the Italian people in Sicily (...) we are providing them with the necessities of life’. Italians formed one of the largest ethnic groups in America, many had roots in the impoverished south, especially in Sicily. Roosevelt had to address the problem of divided loyalty, attachment to Italy could turn into resentment toward the United States government. A Sicilian-American captain called the invasion of Sicily ‘a traumatic experience (...) I knew that I had cousins that I had never seen (...) Whenever we had prisoners I was always looking for names to see if any were my relatives’.²³

In his radio broadcast, Roosevelt talked also about the preparations for what would later become the GI Bill.²⁴ On the post-war arrangements which might have been of special interest to the Polish government and which were mentioned during the meeting, he was deliberately and, possibly, prudently evasive:

The United Nations (...) agreed that this is not the time to engage in an international discussion of all the terms of peace and all the details of the future. Let us win the war first. We must not relax our pressure on the enemy by taking time out to define every boundary and settle every political controversy in every part of the world. The important thing – the all-important thing now is to get on with the war – and win it.²⁵

There is no mention of the Jews or of the destruction of European Jewry taking place in German occupied Europe. We can assume that for Roosevelt this would count as a ‘crime against humanity’ and the criminals responsible would be punished through an Allied justice system implemented after an Allied victory. We get a hint of this in what he had to say about the fall and “resignation” of Mussolini three days earlier:

And so Mussolini came to the reluctant conclusion that the “jig was up”; he could see the shadow of the long arm of justice.

Available at: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-voting-record-in-u-s-presidential-elections> [Accessed 9 October 2020]. I am grateful to Professor Michael Berkowitz for making this point.

²³ Quoted in Luconi, S., Summer 2012. Contested Loyalties: World War II and Italian-Americans’ Ethnic Identity. *Italian Americana*, 30(2), pp. 151-167, p. 161.

²⁴ UVA, Miller Center, 1943. *July 28, 1943: Fireside Chat 25: On the Fall of Mussolini*. [Online] Available at: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-28-1943-fireside-chat-25-fall-mussolini> [Accessed 17 September 2020].

²⁵ Ibid.

But he and his Fascist gang will be brought to book, and punished for their crimes against humanity. No criminal will be allowed to escape by the expedient of “resignation”.²⁶

There is an echo here of the December 17, 1942 Allied Declaration condemning Nazi Germany for its ‘bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination’ of the Jews and announcing the Allies’ ‘solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution’. The Allied war effort will not include any reprisals which would punish Nazi Germany for its extermination of the Jews. Justice would need to wait until final victory.

Breitman points out that Roosevelt preferred to talk about saving ‘humanity’ rather than the Jews, his attitude towards the Jewish tragedy was ‘sympathetic but essentially noncommittal’, he ‘did not see the plight of European Jews as one that compelled decisive presidential engagement, or he continued to worry that whatever he might do or say would backfire, impairing the war effort’.²⁷ His silence about what he heard from Karski may be taken as an illustration of this.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Breitman, *FDR and the Jews*, p. 210.

15 Conclusion

The Jan Karski story tells us about a Polish underground courier who in late 1942 left Warsaw and risked his life in a mission to bring news about the extermination of the Jews to the West. It is a tragic story in which Karski is the tragic hero: when he managed to reach the West and talk to Western leaders Karski found that his news was met with scepticism, disbelief and disinterest. As he said many years later, ‘the Jews were left alone to perish’.

When we first hear the Karski story we assume that it is not a piece of fiction, we can accept that some of it may have been embroidered for narrative effect but we accept it as a story about a real person, time and place. In this thesis, ‘story’ is preferred to ‘myth’ or ‘legend’, the intent is to begin by not pre-judging the story’s truth-value because that is what is to be examined.

There is a central and rather obvious theme of the story: Karski’s profound concern for the fate of the Jews, it is what drove his wartime mission and determined its central purpose. But there is another theme, less obvious but equally important, which presents Karski as an active member of the Polish underground state in occupied Poland and as a representative of the Polish government in the West. He was not on a solo mission, his clandestine and risky journey through occupied Europe and his meetings with Western leaders were all managed and arranged by the Polish state. These two themes raise questions about evidence and coherence. What evidence do we have that concern about the Jewish tragedy was central to his mission? If it was and if it was carried out on behalf of the Polish wartime state then was this not a mission through which the Polish state expressed a deep concern about the fate of its Jewish citizens? Was not Karski therefore simply the agent through which it did so?

This thesis has addressed these questions by examining the historical evidence provided by the original wartime documents, many written by Karski himself, rather than by his late testimonies. The documents are about Karski during the war while the late testimonies tell us much about Karski decades later. The wartime documents have therefore been given precedence and they show that

concern about the Jewish tragedy, though important, was not central to Karski's wartime mission which was mainly about the precarious nature of the Polish state in 1942-1943 and about the coming danger of post-war Soviet domination. Karski took a large volume of materials from Warsaw and these included documents on the extermination of the Jews which arrived in London in mid-November 1942, but there is no evidence to suggest that he knew he was carrying them. This thesis identifies these documents and shows why they were important in the campaign which led to the December 17, 1942 Allied Declaration condemning Nazi Germany for its 'bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination' of the Jews.

The launch of that campaign was partly the result of a report made public by the Polish government on November 24, 1942; it stated that new information had recently arrived from Poland and it provided a summary in English. A reference to 'recently arrived news' was also made in an important diplomatic note about the extermination of the Jews issued by the Polish Foreign Minister on December 10. The coherence of the Karski story depends on the claim that just prior to November 24, 1942 the Polish government received new information whose credibility confirmed news which up till now had been held in doubt or was waiting to be confirmed. It was Karski who brought this new information from Warsaw, although it arrived separately from him, and the Polish government made it public within days of receiving it in London.

A striking feature of the November 24 announcement and the December 10 diplomatic note is the almost exclusive focus on the Warsaw ghetto deportations which ended over two months earlier. Claims about 'recently arrived news' clearly suggest that the Polish government had not known about the deportations until the arrival sometime in mid-November of the materials carried by Karski. Historians have disputed this by presenting evidence that Polish underground radio dispatches about the deportations were received by the Polish government in London in July and August. The dispatch from Warsaw from the Commander in Chief of the Home Army, General Rowecki, which arrived in London on August 25, contained the essential details about the 150,000 ghetto inhabitants who had already been transported to death camps by August 19. The annotations on the dispatch note clearly suggest that it was read and fully understood by the top echelons of the Polish

government. Why then did the government remain silent about the Warsaw ghetto deportations until the November 24 announcement?

The coherence of the Karski story would be seriously undermined by the possibility that the Polish government concealed its knowledge about the Warsaw ghetto deportations for three months and then made an announcement in late November claiming that it had just received credible news, taken from Warsaw by Karski, about the mass murder of 300,000 ghetto inhabitants. As the historian David Engel put it, such concealment would mean that when it arrived in London, the information which Karski took from Warsaw ‘added only minor details to what was already known’.¹

The problem with the August 25 Rowecki dispatch is that over the subsequent three months none of the Polish government reports and dispatches make any clear reference to it. As the historian Dariusz Stola put it, the dispatch ‘has left no trace in other sources and played no role in history’.² This thesis has attempted to solve the puzzle of the Rowecki dispatch but the evidence reviewed here seems to confirm that it simply had no impact. If there was a policy of concealment then it would have been revealed in the confidential internal documents such as the October 16 report on Polish and Jewish war victims by the Polish deputy prime minister Mikołajczyk to the prime minister and commander in chief General Sikorski. Yet that document makes no reference to the Warsaw ghetto deportations, the Jewish victim numbers given in the report, 200,000, are those given in early July, before the start of the deportations. Just over a month later, on November 27, Mikołajczyk stated that the number of Jews murdered in occupied Poland was over a million.

This thesis has also examined the possible reasons why the Polish government decided to make its official announcement on November 24. If it had been concealing what it already knew then there must have been a reason why it decided to break its ‘official silence’, as David Engel has called it, just then. News originating from other sources at about the same time may appear to offer an explanation but when examined closely, this does not seem to be the case. The press conference in Washington given by Rabbi Stephen Wise who reported that the State

¹ Engel D., ‘Readings and Misreadings. p. 370.

² Stola D., *Nadzieja i Zagłada*, p. 166.

Department had confirmed information contained in the Riegner telegram took place after the Polish announcement. The report from Jerusalem on the testimonies of Palestinian Jews who returned from Poland after an extraordinary exchange with German citizens was released almost simultaneously with the Polish announcement.

What this thesis has tried to make clear is that a large volume of materials couriered from Poland was received by the Polish government in London on November 13, 1942. These included the key reports about the extermination of Jews which the November 24 report, various press releases and the December 10 diplomatic note are based on. An analysis and comparison of the Polish and English texts clearly shows that the English summaries are directly based on those Polish originals.

There is evidence that the key reports on the extermination of the Jews made a great impact on at least some of the officials of the Polish government. A November 16 diary entry by the Jewish representative of the Polish National Council, Ignacy Schwarzbart, who was visiting the Interior Ministry a few days after they arrived seems to confirm this. We can assume that these reports were carried from Warsaw by Karski although recent research has suggested that the most important one, *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego* [Liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto] was taken from Warsaw not by Karski but by a different courier. This claim is based on a mixture of solid documentary evidence and some reasonable conjecture, but it remains to be verified.

Before he left Warsaw in late September Karski met Jewish resistance leaders and conveyed verbal reports to their political counterparts in London. These Warsaw meetings, which probably occurred in late August during a pause in the Warsaw ghetto deportations, were initially outside the official scope of his mission as defined by the four main and non-Jewish political parties making up the civilian wing of the Polish underground state. They were arranged almost by chance thanks to personal connections. Karski was asked if he would agree to meet Jewish leaders and carry their materials to the West. To his eternal credit, he agreed, but another courier might not have done so.

When he met them, the Jewish leaders suggested that Karski should become an eyewitness of Jewish suffering. Once again, he agreed and was taken twice into

the Warsaw ghetto and into a transit camp near the Belzec death camp. When he arrived in the West he gave eyewitness accounts of what he saw and these made an impact on some of his listeners but there were many who did not respond. This thesis has examined Karski's meeting reports which describe in some detail the 1943 meetings he had in London and Washington with prominent politicians, officials and journalists. Karski prepared an agenda for each meeting and the Jewish tragedy, although the last on the list, was one of the topics he spoke about and it included his eyewitness accounts. He recorded the reactions of his listeners and the reports show that with very few but notable exceptions, the Jewish topic attracted very little interest. In London it was the writers and publishers Arthur Koestler, Victor Gollancz and Allan Lane who were the exceptions. However, in Washington it was the July 5, 1943 meeting with Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter which was significant because in later testimonies Karski states that after hearing Karski's eyewitness account of Jewish suffering in occupied Poland, Frankfurter remarks that while he does not consider Karski a liar, he cannot believe a word he said. Frankfurter's disbelief has often been used to illustrate how people with power and influence in the West could not accept or refused to believe reports of the Jewish tragedy. Walter Laqueur referred to Frankfurter's remark as an example of a riddle in which people had sufficient information about what was happening to the Jews but for various reasons could not accept it. They had the facts but refused to believe them.

This thesis offers a dissenting view on the Frankfurter remark. There is no mention of his disbelief in the various contemporary reports and records we have of the July 5 meeting at the Polish embassy in Washington. These confirm that Karski made a powerful presentation to Frankfurter and the other listeners, one of whom described it as 'bloodcurdling'. Significantly, in a report written by the Polish ambassador soon after the meeting there is reference to Frankfurter being overwhelmed by what Karski had to say and offering to help arrange a meeting with Roosevelt. There would surely be no reason for him to do that if he could not believe what Karski had to say about the Jews. A more plausible explanation of Frankfurter's remark is that it was a painful reaction to what he had just heard from

an eyewitness, it expressed the shock of someone struggling to ‘believe the unbelievable’.

The meeting with Frankfurter and others on July 5 was the first of a series in which Karski talked about the situation in occupied Poland to powerful and influential people in Washington. The reports which Karski wrote about these meetings show that the Jewish tragedy was on the agenda but unlike in London his listeners seemed to be more interested in it. The meetings were arranged by the Polish ambassador who hoped that news about Karski would reach the White House and produce an invitation to an audience with Roosevelt. This arrived on the morning of July 28 and a few hours later Karski, accompanied by the Polish ambassador, met Franklin Roosevelt.

In the days that followed, the ambassador and Karski wrote confidential internal reports about the meeting with Roosevelt, the one written by Karski – which has been closely examined in this thesis - has the appearance of a verbatim transcript. Internal White House records provide additional evidence about the time of the meeting: it was scheduled for thirty minutes but lasted an hour. The transcript shows that although Karski and the ambassador had prepared an agenda it was Roosevelt who directed the flow of the conversation, he asked questions and Karski answered. This is important because it was Karski who introduced the Jewish topic when answering a general question from Roosevelt about German terror. According to the transcript, Karski answered by making a clear distinction between the suffering of the Poles and that of the Jews: Nazi Germany wants to turn the Poles into a race of slaves but it aims to destroy all Jewish life. He told Roosevelt that over a million Jews had already been murdered and the massacres are continuing, that unless there is an Allied intervention, except for a few activists, ‘within a year and a half of my departure, the Jewish population of Poland (...) will cease to exist’. Karski had delivered the message which the Jewish resistance leaders he met in Warsaw eleven months earlier had asked him to take to the West.

The Roosevelt meeting can be taken as the final point of Karski’s wartime mission such as it is described in the Karski story. It is summarised well in the Presidential Medal of Freedom citation read by President Obama in 2012. It was quoted at the beginning of this thesis and it may be used to mark its end:

A witness to atrocity in the Warsaw Ghetto and the Nazi Izbica transit camp, he repeatedly crossed enemy lines to document the face of genocide, and courageously voiced tragic truths all the way to President Roosevelt.³

³ Transcript and video of the Medal of Freedom. C-Span, 2012. *Presidential Medal of Freedom Ceremony*.

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Appendix – Original Polish (and French) version of sources cited in English

An English translation was used to cite Polish (and French) source documents in this thesis. The following table gives the original version. ‘Chapter.section (footnote)’ column refers to a location within the thesis.

Chapter.section (footnote)	Source document	Polish (and French) source text
2.4(21)	HIA Mikołajczyk Papers, Box 152, Folder 25	<i>Milionom obywateli polskich narodowości żydowskiej grozi natychmiastowa zagłada. Zwracamy się przeto do R.P. (Rządu Polskiego), jako do opiekuna i reprezentanta całej ludności, zamieszkającej ziemie polskie, aby niezwłocznie podjął niezbędne kroki, celem niedopuszczenia do zglądzenia żydostwa polskiego</i>
4.1(2)	YVA Schwarzbart Diary M2/751. 27 Nov 1942	<i>To co czytałem przekraczało najstraszniejszą gehennę, najpotworniejsze zbydlęcenie człowieka. Ostateczna wymowa tych informacji: dwa miliony Żydów do połowy września b.r. znikło z Polski.</i>
4.1(3)	PISM, A5.2/47a	<i>Rząd Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej podał do wiadomości rządów alianckich i opinii publicznej ostatnie wiadomości o masowych mordach ludności żydowskiej w Polsce, dokonanych i systematycznie dokonywanych przez niemieckich okupantów. Liczba Żydów zamordowanych dotąd przez Niemców w Polsce od września 1939 wynosi ponad 1 milion.</i>
4.6(32)	SPP A.3.1.1.2	<i>Od 22 lipca trwa likwidacja ghetta w Warszawie (400 tys. mieszkańców) z wielkim okrucieństwem przez policję niemiecką i pomocniczą lotewską. Na razie wywożono 5-6, obecnie do 15 tys. dziennie. Większość jest podobno mordowana w Bełżcu i Treblince, część zdaje się przeznaczona do prac przyfrontowych. Przy wywożeniu masowe zabójstwa i grabieże. W ghetcie mają pozostać wykwalifikowani</i>

Chapter.section (footnote)	Source document	Polish (and French) source text
		<i>rzemieślnicy i ich rodziny – kilkadziesiąt tysięcy. Dokąd wywieziono ponad 150 tys.</i>
5.4 (40)	(YVA), M2/751 Schwarzbart diary, 16 Nov 1942	<i>Szerer doniósł mi, że od dyrektora Nagórskiego dowiedział się o straszliwych wiadomościach, które przysły z Kraju co do mordów w ghetcie warszawskim. Powiadomił mnie, że wedle tych wiadomości na razie poufnych tylko 140,000 Żydów zostało w getcie warszawskim, a resztę wywieziono i wymordowano. Tylko dla 100,000 rozdaje się kartki żywnościowe.</i>
5.4 (41)	Schwarzbart diary Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), M2/751	<i>odwiedziłem referenta spraw krajowych p. Siudaka, celem zasięgnięcia informacji o wiadomościach z Kraju w związku z wiadomością podaną mi przez Agencję Żydowską</i>
5.4 (42)	Schwarzbart diary Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), M2/751	<i>Zatelefonowałem natychmiast do Nagórskiego i od niego otrzymałem potwierdzenie tej wiadomości. Źródła podać mi nie chciał: twierdził, że musi najprzód uzyskać na to zezwolenie. Wobec tego udałem się do Siudaka.</i>
5.4 (43)	Schwarzbart diary Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), M2/751	<i>Siudak potwierdził mi powyższą wiadomość, domyślił się, że mam ją od Szerera i dodał: że wiadomość pochodzi z początku września i pochodzi od delegatów. Materiały są obecnie odszyfrowywane, za dwa dni będzie mi mógł dać odnośne protokoły. Potwierdził, że koszmarnie opisy są w raporcie, że przekraczają one wszystko co dotąd było</i>
5.4 (44)	Schwarzbart diary Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), M2/751	<i>Mikołajczyk potwierdził mi informacje Siudaka i zawiadomił, że szczegóły będzie miał za kilka dni'</i>
6.2 (9)	Karski's Nov 30 1942 Note. PISM, PRM 105	<i>Przed zaczęciem jakichkolwiek rozmów i prac pragnę dla ścisłości na piśmie dokładnie określić charakter, w jakim przyjechałem do Londynu, pełnomocnictwa, jakie posiadam, i zadania, jakie otrzymałem do spełnienia.</i>
6.2 (13)	Karski's Nov 30 1942 Note. PISM, PRM 105	<i>Delegatura Rządu zaproponowała mi wyjazd do Londynu. Zgodziłem się na to. Wyjazd mój został przez Delegata Rządu notyfikowany oficjalnie u Komendanta Głównego (osobiście) oficjalnie u Porozumienia Stronnictw.</i>

Chapter.section (footnote)	Source document	Polish (and French) source text
6.2 (14)	Karski's Nov 30 1942 Note. PISM, PRM 105	<i>Formalnie jestem wysłannikiem Porozumienia Stronnictw i koszta mej podróży (37,000 zł) opłacili Cztery Stronnictwa z funduszków przyznanych im na ten cel przez Delegata Rządu'</i>
6.3 (20)	Karski's Nov 30 1942 Note. PISM, PRM 105	<i>1) Wiozę dwa rodzaje materiałów: materiały piśmienne, oficjalnie zlecone mi przez Delegaturę, Stronnictwa lub Komendę Główną, i materiały ustne, do ustnego przekazania ich wskazanym mi organizacjom i osobom w Londynie. Niezależnie od powyższego wiozę cały szereg wyciągów, raportów, notatek, przejętych z archiwum mojego referatu dla mojego prywatnego użytku, w celu tym ściślejszego i wierniejszego informowania wskazanych mi osób'.</i>
6.3 (21)	Karski's Nov 30 1942 Note. PISM, PRM 105	<i>2) Mam za zadanie przewieźć do Rządu materiały (piśmienne) i oświetlenia polityczne Delegata Rządu i jego pięciu najważniejszych dyrektorów Departamentów (Spraw Wewnętrznych, Propagandy, Odbudowy, Oświaty i Opieki Społecznej oraz Dyrektora Biura). W tym celu ze wszystkimi tymi panami odbyłem staranne rozmowy przed wyjazdem.</i>
6.3 (23)	Karski's Nov 30 1942 Note. PISM, PRM 105	<i>'5) Posiadam oświetlenia sytuacji w kraju i oświadczenia całego szeregu wybitniejszych osób życia konspiracyjnego i poważniejszych ośrodków politycznych, niezwiązanych organizacyjnie ani z aparatem DR, ani z Porozumieniem Stronnictw, ani z Komendą Główną. Rozmowy z tymi osobami czy przedstawicielami tych ośrodków odbyłem bądź na polecenie, bądź za wiedzą Delegata Rządu, i wykaz ich poniżej podaję'</i>
6.3 (28)	Karski's Nov 30 1942 Note. PISM, PRM 105	<i>Powyższe materiały jestem zobowiązany przysięgą przekazać z całą wiernością, ścisłością i najlepszą wolą, całkowicie kierując się zasadami bestronności. Nie mam prawa oficjalnie tłumaczyć, oświetlać czy analizować prace i osoby powyższych ośrodków. Charakter mój tutaj jest charakterem kurierskim. Oświetlenia, które złożę zarówno dla Wodza Naczelnego, jak i dla Rządu,</i>

Chapter.section (footnote)	Source document	Polish (and French) source text
		<i>poszczególnych stronnictw i poszczególnych osób – będą oświadczeniami oficjalnymi.</i>
6.3 (30)	Karski's Nov 30 1942 Note. PISM, PRM 105	<i>:Otrzymałem mandat od następujących ośrodków w Kraju (nazwiska ustnie): 1. Delegat Rządu, 2. 5-ciu jego dyrektorów Departamentu i dyrektor Biura, 3. Komendant Główny, 4. Stronnictwo Ludowe, 5. Str[onnictwo] Narodowe, 6. PPS--WRN, 7. PPS-Polscy Socjaliści, 8. Str[onnictwo] Pracy, 9. Str[onnictwo] Demokratyczne, 10. Front Odrodzenia Polski, 11. Bund (w imieniu całego żydostwa), 12. Towarzystwo Patriotyczne, 13. Biuro Prac Społecznych, 14. Kler warszawski, i 15. osób niezwiązanych organizacyjnie z żadnym z ośrodków politycznych tajnych.</i>
6.3 (33)	Karski's Nov 30 1942 Note. PISM, PRM 105	<i>Mam polecenie rozmawiania w charakterze oficjalnym z następującymi osobami: 1. Gen. Sikorski, 2. Prezes Mikołajczyk, 3. Min[ister] Seyda, 4. Min[ister] Popiel, 5. Min[ister] Stańczyk, 6. Min[ister] Kwapiński, 7. Min[ister] Stroński, pp. 8. Ciołkosz, 9. Zygielbojm, 10. Dr Schwarzbart, 11. Bielecki, 12. Folkierski, 13. ks. bisk[up] Gawlina, 14. Tabaczyński, 15. Olszewski, 16. Z[ofia] Zaleska.</i>
7.1(1)	PISM A.5.2/47a, p. 29	<i>Dyspozycja Hitlera, że rok 1942 musi być rokiem wykończenia conajmniej połowy Żydów polskich, jest wykonywana z całą bezwzględnością i barbarzyństwem, jakiego nie znają dzieje świata. Znają [panowie] szczegóły, więc nie będę ich powtarzał. Cyfry mówią same za siebie: Z liczby prawie 400 tys. osób w ghecie warszawskim zlikwidowano ponad 260 tys. od 17-go lipca począwszy, a więc w ciągu niecałych trzech miesięcy.</i>
7.1(4)	Schwarzbart diary Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), M2/751	<i>O 4ej u Raczyńskiego z Barou I Eastermanem. W tej samej sprawie. Easterman udawał reprezentanta państwa żydowskiego, Barou zachował się bardzo rozsądnie i należycie. Wynik: prawdopodobnie zero, jak zwykle w tych wypadkach, gdy serce nie chce a mózg szuka drogi aby oszukać.</i>

Chapter.section (footnote)	Source document	Polish (and French) source text
8.1 (7)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/76, <i>Likwidacja ghetta warszawskiego</i> , p. 1	<i>Przeszło miesiąc już trwa i zmierza ku końcowi likwidacja ghetta warszawskiego, która liczbą ofiar i natężeniem okrucieństwa staje się jedną z najboleśniejszych kart historii</i>
8.1 (10)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/76, <i>Likwidacja ghetta warszawskiego</i> , p. 1	<i>Obraz wynikający z tych materiałów jest jednostronny (...). Nie przekraczają one progu wagonu "wysiedleńczego", brak im ostatniego, najgorszego aktu, którego udało się autorom uniknąć</i>
8.5 (19)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/23 p. 1	<i>Dzisiaj mija tydzień od dnia, w którym dzięki pomocy przyjaciół mych Polaków, cudem nieledwie wydostałam się z Ghetta Warsz.[awskiego]. No prośbę tychże przyjaciół spisuję to, co widziałam, słyszałam od innych i przeżyłam w ostatnim strasznym okresie mojego życia w dzielnicy żydowskiej.</i>
8.5 (20)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/23 p. 3	<i>Jeżeli policja żydowska nie zdołała dostarczyć kontyngentu, który Niemcy podwyższali dowolnie z dnia na dzień (czasem dochodzili do 10- a nawet 15 i 20 tys[ięcy]), Niemcy przystępowali do akcji sami, towarzyszyli im Ukraińcy, Litwini i Łotysze.</i>
8.5 (21)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/23 p. 3	<i>Blokada z reguły zaczynała się od strzelaniny w podwórku, co było sygnałem dla mieszkańców do opuszczenia mieszkań. Kto był w mieszkaniu, na strychu lub piwnicy był zabijany na miejscu. (...) Tysięczne rzesze ludzkie spędzano na plac. Zdarzało się, że całą drogę ludzie musieli biec, do tych co nie mogli zdążyć, strzelano.</i>
8.5 (22)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/23 p. 4	<i>Spędzani (...) na plac przeladunkowy na Stawki, stąd w zaplombowanych wagonach bydlęcych minimum po 100 osób – wywożeni byli w nieznanym kierunku.</i>
8.6 (24)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/24 p. 3	<i>Tymczasem Niemcy zaczęli podnosić wymagania. Żądali już teraz 5-6 tys. Ofiar dziennie, potem nawet 10,000. Były dni, kiedy wysiedlono ol. 15,000 osób</i>
8.6 (25)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/24 p. 3	<i>/Autor relacji ma lat 34, znany naukowiec, gdy był zamknięty w fabryce, z domu wzięto mu na „wysiedlenie” żonę/.</i>

Chapter.section (footnote)	Source document	Polish (and French) source text
8.7 (27)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/20 p. 1	4. Żandarm niemiecki przychwycił na ulicy w dzielnicy aryjskiej matkę – Żydówkę z niemowlęciem na ręku, którym udało się wymknąć z ghetta. Matkę zastrzelił, niemowlę cisnął o bruk, rozdeptał, otworzył klapę kanału i kwilące jeszcze dziecko wrzucił do otworu. Miało to miejsce 24 lipca 1942 r. na ul. Okopowej w pobliżu cmentarza żydowskiego
8.9 (37)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 10	PS. Treść interviewu udzielonego oddawcy niniejszego pisma może być zakomunikowana przezeń czytelnikom oficjalnym dopiero po zapoznaniu się Waszym i CK. z nią i oddaniu jej temu..
8.9(39)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 5	W końcu świadomość braku rezonansu u zagranicznych sprzymierzonych w pierwszym rządzie, oraz brak nadziei na pomoc z zewnątrz murów ghetta w ewentualnym wystąpieniu czynnym ludności żydowskiej, dopełnia tę czarę masowego odchodzenia z tego świata – bez masowego oporu.
8.9 (40)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 5	'Ludność żydowska (...) Zmaltretowana, zgnębiona, zmiażdżona różnymi od trzech lat działaniami okrutnych zarządzeń niemieckich, zamknięta w w więziennych murach ghatt, obstawiona policją, wojskiem i żandarmerią, otoczona karabinami maszynowymi, otoczona atmosferą bezprawia, grozy i śmierci, bez nadziei pomocy skądkolwiek – w tak tragiczny sposób ginie całkowicie'
8.9 (41)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 1	Jednym z celów wojennych reżimu hitlerowskiego, który z najwyższego tronu nazistowskiego, niejednokrotnie przez samego Fuhrera i Goebbelsa był ogłaszany – to zupełne wyniszczenie fizyczne żydowskiej ludności (...). Podczas gdy wszystkie inne cele wojenne przemieniają się ostatecznie w ich przeciwieństwo i klęska faszystwu niemieckiego jest nieuchronna – to ten cel, zagłada zupełna – ludności żydowskiej – jest już w całej pełni urzeczywistniona. Na tym odcinku okrutny reżim hitl[erowski] odnosi zupełne i łatwe zwycięstwo, i mimo swej

Chapter.section (footnote)	Source document	Polish (and French) source text
		<i>klęski nikt już tego zwycięstwa, temu już nawet zmiądzonemu reżimowi wydrzeć nie zdoła.</i>
8.9 (42)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 8	<i>Chodzi o ratowanie 1 do 1 i pół miliona żyjących jeszcze Żydów.</i>
8.9 (43)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 9	<i>Spółczesność żydowska jako jeden z drobnych członków wielkiej rodziny sprzymierzonych ma prawo żądania od reszty sprzymierzonych bezzwłocznej i skutecznej pomocy w tej nierównej wojnie</i>
8.9 (45)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/25, p. 8	<i>Bez skutku i znaczenia są powzięte uchwały i postanowienia ukarania morderców hitlerowskich po wojnie, bo zanim to się stanie, cała pozostała jeszcze przy życiu część żydowskiego społeczeństwa, (...) zostanie bez śladu wytępiona i pozostanie tylko jedno cmentarzysko gigantyczne, w którym spoczywać będzie kilkumilionowa społeczność żydowska.</i>
9.3 (27)	PISM A.5.2/47a, p. 32	<i>jednocześnie z raportem, jaki otrzymał Rząd, tą samą drogą nadszedł raport z samego ghetta organizacji podziemnej</i>
9.3 (28)	PISM A.5.2/47a, p. 32	<i>Na pierwszy plan wysuwa się sprawa najpilniejsza, najbardziej piekąca, najistotniejsza. (...) Chodzi o ratowanie 1 – 1,500 000 żyjących jeszcze Żydów, o ratowanie ich od niechybnej śmierci. Zmarłych, zamordowanych, na śmierć storturowanych już się wskrzesi. Trzeba ratować żywych.</i>
9.3 (30)	PISM A.5.2/47a, p. 34	<i>1/ Konieczność natychmiastowych retorsyj wobec obywateli państw niemieckich, żyjących na terenach wszystkich państw sprzymierzonych z zagrożeniem natychmiastowych dalszych odwetów w razie kontynuacji rzezi ludności żydowskiej</i>
9.3 (32)	PISM A.5.2/47a, p. 34	<i>'Rada Narodowa wyraża opinię, że Rząd R.P. powinien natychmiast wystąpić do rządów Stanów Zjednoczonych, Wielkiej Brytanii i innych państw Sprzymierzonych z żądaniem natychmiastowego opracowania planu retorsji przeciwko Niemcom, w celu zmuszenia ich do zaprzestania masowych mordów ludności cywilnej i planowego</i>

Chapter.section (footnote)	Source document	Polish (and French) source text
		<i>wyćpienia całej narodowości żydowskiej’.</i>
9.4 (43)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/76, p. 1	<i>Niemcy otworzyli ghetto warszawskie a październiku 1940. r. Do 1.XI.40. wszyscy Żydzi musieli przesiedlić się do wyznaczonej im dzielnicy, a aryjczycy ją opuścić.’</i>
9.4 (45)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/76, p. 2	<i>Po zamknięciu ghetta, obrót oficjalny z dzielnicą aryjską odbywał się za pośrednictwem specjalnego urzędu niemieckiego – Transferstelle [...]. Od pierwszej chwili obrót z ghettem opierał się na przemycie, prowadzonym na wielką skalę, przy udziale Niemców, ciągnących stąd olbrzymie dochody w formie zysku handlowego i łapówek.</i>
9.4 (47)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/76, p. 3	<i>W marcu rb. po wizycie Himmlera w G.G i wydany przez niego zarządzeniu, nakazującym likwidację 50% Żydów do końca 1942 r., nie mogło już ulegać wątpliwości, że to wielkie masowe morderstwo mogą przerwać jedynie wydarzenia wielkiej wagi militarnej i politycznej, których do dziś dnia wszyscy oczekują na próżno.</i>
9.4 (50)	SPP 3.1.1.13.5/76, p. 5	<i>Wozy się plombuje i pociąg rusza... Wywozi się do rzech obozów kaźni: do Treblinki, Bełżca i Sobiboru, gdzie transporty są wyladowywane, skazańcy rozbierani do naga i traceni, prawdopodobnie gazami. Na ćwierć miliona wywiezionych tylko 2 małe transporty, razem 4 tys. Skerowano do robót przyfrontowych /w kierunku na Brześć i Małachowicze/.</i>
11.1 (17)	SPP 3.1.1.134	<i>Czy przedstawiciel Żydów w Kraju Berezowski zgłaszał się do Was o wydanie Żydom w Kraju broni dla samoobrony. Miał rzekomo spotkać się z odmową.</i>
13.3 (19)	(Lanzmann, 2010)	<i>Justice Frankfurter n'était pas outillé pour l'horreur, mais il y avait de la profondeur dans sa pathétique dénégation. Que peuvent signifier Treblinka ou le Ghetto de Varsovie vus d'un chaud et confortable bureau de Washington ? Qu'est-ce que savoir?, c'est la question centrale.</i>

Chapter.section (footnote)	Source document	Polish (and French) source text
13.3 (20)	SPP A 3.1.1.13.5/76, Likwidacja ghetta warszawskiego, p. 6	<i>Próbe przedstawienia akcji tego niespotykanego w dziejach mordu musi się rozpocząć od wezwania do człowieka w Anglii czy w Ameryce: Uwierzcie w rzeczy nie do wiary. Wiedźcie, że to, co dojdzie do waszej świadomości, jest przede wszystkim prawdą, wśród której przyszło nam żyć i umierać. Fakty, które wam podajemy, nie są wybrane ani dobrane. Są to fakty codzienne.</i>