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Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012. Pp. xxxi, 734. ISBN 978-0-647-06814-8.

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This book is a concise analysis of the complicated story of the nation whose invasion was the immediate cause of World War II in Europe. Its author, British military historian Halik Kochanski,¹ is the child of Polish refugees who settled in Great Britain. She aims here to give a comprehensive, factual introduction to Poland's experience of the war and to the distortions spawned by later political and ideological disagreements. She does not defend any specific government or leader (for example, the Polish Government-in-Exile in London), but attempts to clarify what happened during a savagely fought conflict that confronted Poland with an unsolvable problem: the defeat of the initial aggressor (Germany) by another of Poland's enemies (the USSR) which was allied with Poland's allies the United Kingdom and the United States.

This is a story of a tragedy of Great Power politics and its victims, for which Kochanski astutely exploits many sources published or otherwise made accessible only since the collapse of the Communist government in Poland. These include memoirs, unpublished accounts, and even interviews with participants. A serious limitation is the paucity of available Soviet or Russian sources, now even less accessible than they were in the early 1990s. Given recent events in Ukraine and the reaction to Russia's role there by NATO member countries including Poland, this is not likely to change. Still, it is unlikely that such sources would much alter the conclusions reached in *The Eagle Unbowed*.

As the only English-language study of the whole story of the war from the standpoint of the Poles themselves, the book is a good starting point to learn about Poland's place in Europe and its relations with the West and with Russia from the Second World War to the present day. Even well informed Americans and Britons may be unaware that many Poles have felt a sense of betrayal over the decision of Western powers to consign Poland to the Communist "camp," even though it was a loyal ally in the fight against Nazi Germany. While the United States and Great Britain played a critical role in assisting Poland to escape the Communist empire, both countries had abandoned the Poles to that empire in 1945. Memories are long in Eastern and Central Europe, whose peoples had to live with the consequences of decisions made by earlier leaders of the Great Powers.

The book features a well organized thematic narrative rather than a rigidly chronological structure. Thus, the two chapters on Poles in the USSR are kept together—they concern Poland's situation first before and then after Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. The same is true of the chapters on Poles in the United Kingdom and in the British military. One helpful appendix contains short biographies of principal Polish figures; another gives the Order of Battle of the Polish armed forces in the various theaters of the war. These may facilitate the collection of unpublished sources like private correspondence, diaries, and recorded oral accounts now in the hands of families. Kochanski also makes good use of material from some of her own relatives, who were interned and deported farther into the USSR after the Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939.

The sad situation of the Poles resembled confinement in a small room with no exit. The Warsaw Uprising of August 1944 is emblematic of their plight during the whole Second World War. The Polish Underground, right from the beginning of the German occupation, had planned for an uprising as soon as Germany's defeat seemed imminent. The Poles dearly wanted to be (and to be seen to be) responsible for gaining their own freedom. The author discusses the mistiming of the action that doomed the uprising.

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When Hitler decided to crush the revolt, the Soviets did little to help the Poles, instead allowing the Germans to eliminate independent Polish political leaders and military forces so it would be easier to install Soviet-controlled puppets. And the Western Allies, lacking Soviet cooperation, could not offer effective support or supplies.

So what if anything had been achieved by ... the Warsaw Uprising? By early October 1944, most of the leading AK [Home Army] commanders and their best soldiers had been killed, murdered, arrested or imprisoned in the German prisoner of war camps, in Soviet prisons in Poland or in the Soviet Gulag. The remnants of the AK command and the Underground Government were in a state of total disarray, searching for a new base of operations and a redefined purpose. The Polish Government in London had lost a considerable amount of credibility because it had manifestly failed to keep its representatives in Poland fully informed about the international situation, and then proved unable to support the uprisings either politically through publicity or militarily by ensuring adequate supplies through airdrops. (425–26).

The failed insurrection, however heroic, futilely expended resources and manpower the Underground could have used later. The uprising was simply another in a long line of daring but doomed Polish rebellions extending back to the one led by Tadeusz Kościuszko in 1794. While courageous failures can sometimes inspire greater determination as part of an ultimately successful strategy (“Remember the Alamo!”), they rarely compensate for a lack of the power and resources needed to win real victories. In World War II, as often in Polish history, uprisings only brought stricter repression by neighboring powers.

The author devotes one of the book’s longer chapters to the Holocaust. The extermination of Jews began and was concentrated in Poland, because it had the largest population of Jews in Europe. The Germans hoped to use the Poles as they had some Ukrainians and others against the local Jews. To this end they first incited Polish anti-Semitism in hopes of enlisting collaborators.

There is little doubt that anti-semitism was widespread in Poland before the war, which led to economic boycotts of Jewish shops and a cross-party general agreement on the desirability of encouraging Jewish emigration. The German attacks on the Jews in the early period of the occupation—identification, expropriation, hard labour and concentration into ghettos—aroused no strong demonstration of opposition from the Poles. Indeed, despite the Polish Government ordering Poles not to profit from the German expropriation of Jewish property and shops, there is evidence to suggest that they did.... (313–14)

But, since the German governor decreed a death sentence for those who protected or helped Jews in any way (Poland was unique in this regard), Jews must have been receiving such assistance. The Underground government established *Zegota*, the Council to Aid the Jews, in 1942, to provide financial assistance to Jews in hiding. It tried to save children, especially, from the ghettos, whence they would be sent to extermination camps. Kochanski also cites the approximately five thousand Poles honored as “righteous” by Yad Vashem, Israel’s memorial to Holocaust victims. That figure may seem small, but it should be remembered that Yad Vashem requires that honorees must have received no financial reward. This excluded people too poor to hide Jews who did not contribute to their own upkeep. Others almost certainly helped Jews without being counted, but in the face of such determined evil, no one, including the Allied powers, did enough. One of the Polish “righteous” wrote that only those who died in the process of helping had done “enough” (324).

Though she strives for objectivity in describing the political conflicts and disagreements concerning postwar Poland, Kochanski cannot admit the propriety of its absorption into the Soviet empire almost as a spoil of war. Poles certainly never consented to such a situation. They had learned through bitter experience during the war not to trust the Soviet Union, whatever the attitudes of their British and US allies. Indeed, the book’s main theme, besides the horrors of the war the Poles faced, is British and American disloyalty to their Polish allies. The realist perspective of international politics teaches statesmen not to trust in allies, if they can do without them, and to build the strength of their own country to make it as independent as possible. Yet, there will always be smaller and larger countries. Poland’s geography and the relative power of its neighbors have for over three centuries forced it to seek and rely on allies. Though the Poles chose the better allies, France and the United Kingdom, prior to the war, that did not ensure their freedom after the war.

The author ends the book by noting that Gen. Władysław Anders (commander of the Polish army in the USSR) entitled his memoirs *Without the Final Chapter*, alluding to the lack of an end to the injustices faced by Poland starting with Germany's attack in World War II and continuing under its Communist system. Only since the fall of that system in 1989 has Poland reclaimed its identity by joining the West, becoming a member of NATO in its first round of post-Cold War expansion in 1999 and of the European Union in 2004.

The true final chapter is being written now, as Poland resumes its place politically in Europe, honors at last its genuine World War II heroes, and tells the uncensored story of its wartime suffering. In a persuasive study that integrates the testimony of participants in a non-polemical and easily understood manner, Halik Kochanski has contributed to closing that last chapter of Poland's World War II experience.