HISTORY AND MEMORY IN INTELLIGENCE

USING HISTORY AS A TOOL IN INTELLIGENCE EDUCATION

Lars BAERENTZEN*

Abstract

Using historical events as training material is, I think, more illuminating than using constructed scenarios because history often includes elements that the author of a scenario must reject as being impossible or too unlikely. However, as a tool for understanding current affairs both for the politician and for the intelligence analyst, history has a right use and a wrong use. Therefore so many people believe "that the only thing one can learn from history is that one cannot learn anything from history"? In this respect I will try to answer the following question: How useful is historical knowledge and training as an historian for an intelligence analyst?

Keywords: *history, intelligence, education, useful tool for teaching.*

Introduction

Konrad Adenauer wrote at the beginning of his Memoirs (for 1945-1953) that he had recently asked a German Professor of Modern History how he, as an historian, believed the future would be. The professor said that historians are not prophets. Adenauer replied "I believe that historians, and especially a professor of modern history, must at least make an attempt, through analogies based on what has happened in our time, even in recent days, to understand in what direction developments are likely to go, and they must in their teaching say what developments should be expected and possibly warn about them." (Adenauer, 1965) The professor did not agree with Adenauer.[1]

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* Historian and a former intelligence practitioner for Danish Defense, independent consultant and lecturer.

[1] "Vor kurzem unterhielt ich mich mit einem Historiker, Professor für neuere Geschichte an einer deutschen Universität, über unsere Zeit. Im Laufe des Gespräches fragte ich ihn, wie er als Historiker sich die Entwicklung denke. Er antwortete mir, es

How useful is historical knowledge and training as an historian for an intelligence analyst?

It is very useful indeed, in my view. But if this is true, then why do so many people believe "that the only thing one can learn from history is that one cannot learn anything from history"? Because, as a tool for understanding current affairs, history has a right use and a wrong one both for the politician and for the intelligence analyst. The *wrong use* is to look for parallels in history to what is happening just now and then expect a similar outcome of the current situation. Parallels will only be parallels, situations are never the same, and the outcome of today's crisis can easily be the opposite of what happened in the past. The *right use* is for the politician or the analyst to use historical knowledge as a constant reminder how humans have acted in similar situations in the past, of how often plans and expectations turned out to be different from what *actually* happened – but also as a reminder of modes of action or behaviour that worked as intended and created the results which the actors aimed for.

I think this is what Thucydides meant when he wrote that he would like his book to be useful to future readers who would want to understand events happening to themselves that were "like or similar to" the events he had described.[2] Of course, if historical knowledge is

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sei nicht Aufgabe des Historikers, Entwicklungen im voraus zu sehen. Die Historiker seien eben keine Propheten. Ihre Aufgabe sei es, das, was geschehen sei, möglichst wahrheitsgetreu festzuhalten oder zu ermitteln. Ich erwiderte ihm, ich hätte von der Aufgabe eines Historikers eine andere Meinung. Ich sei der Auffassung, die Historiker, namentlich ein Professor der neueren Geschichte, müssten wenigstens den Versuch machen, auf dem Wege von Analogieschlüssen aus dem Geschehen unserer Zeit, sogar unserer Tage, zu erkennen, wohin der Lauf der Entwicklung wahrscheinlich gehen werde, und sie müssten in ihrer Lehre hinweisen auf zu erwartende Entwicklungen und eventuell warnen. Der Historiker gab mich nicht recht. Er wiederholte nochmals, Historiker seien keine Propheten. Ich verlange natürlich keine Prophezeiungen von einem Historiker, aber ich meine, seine Arbeit, namentlich bei einem Historiker für neuere Geschichte, sei nur wirklich getan, wen er, so gut wie möglich, zukünftige Entwicklungen aus dem jetzigen Geschehen folgere." Konrad Adenauer: Erinnerungen 1945-1953, 1965, p. 13. My translation (abridged).

[2] Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War, I, 22: καὶ ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν ἴσως τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες αὐτῶν ἀτερπέστερον φανεῖται: ὅσοι δὲβουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπ

to be useful in this sense, it must reflect an honest attempt to look at the past.

Using historical "parallels" that are just propaganda is worse than knowing no history at all. The following is a good example of using history badly: "In 2004, when the expansion of NATO towards the East was big news, a Texas newspaper published a triumphalist account of Poland's NATO accession, under a photo of Polish soldiers and the headline "No more Yaltas, No more Munichs". "Yalta" and "Munich" are here reduced to catchwords meant to add historical prestige to the idea that giving in to force" is wrong and humiliating." But no more examples of how *not* to use history.

Now a good example for the positive way: The study of history gives the analyst a wide knowledge of what *can happen* and *may happen* in human affairs[3] and teaches him or her that:

εῖν καὶ τῶνμελλόντων ποτὲ αὖθις κατὰ τὸάνθρώπινον τοιούτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσ εθαι, ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκούντως ἕξει. κτῆμά τε ές αίεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ές τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται. (Translation of the author): "And perhaps my history will seem less amusing to listen to because of the absence of good stories. It will be enough for me, however, if this work of mine will be judged useful by those who will want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and those which (in accordance with human nature) will probably happen in the same or similar ways in the future. My book is a possession for eternity rather than something to attract immediate admiration. Among the vast number of comments on the meaning of this passage perhaps that made by A.W. Gomme is most useful: "It should not be necessary, but it is, to explain that will probably happen… in the future is future to Thucydides, not to his readers: the latter will not find his work useful in order to divine what will happen in the future, as though it were a sort of horoscope, but for the understanding of other events besides the Peloponnesian war, future to Thucydides, but past or contemporary to the reader … That is why it is to be a possession for eternity> and the events of the last twenty-five years in Europe only prove that Thucydides' hopes for his History were to be fulfilled much more completely than even he ever expected." A.W. Gomme, *An Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol I, p. 149, Oxford 1956 (first published 1944).

[3] The historian J.C. Masterman (who was secretary of the "XX Committee" during the Second World War, which ran the "Double-Cross system") has written on the value of history in general: "For ordinary men and women the prime value of the study of history is that it vastly enlarges human experience. The true student forms his judgements, not upon the few and uncertain precedents of his lifetime, but upon the accumulated experience of the past. He learns the all-important habit of discriminating between the important and the trivial; he establishes for himself a true

- the result of a plan or an action is rarely (if ever) *exactly* what was expected by those who launched the initiative.
- the careful planning and preparations increase the odds for success, but offer no guarantee for it;
- the factors which seem distant and irrelevant to the issue at hand may yet have decisive influence on the outcome.

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Also, in history, the analyst benefits from learning how military and political actions have often been based on considerations or information (for instance from intelligence) known to very few people when they happened. The history of The Second World War is filled with such examples which have only become available to historians decades after the war ended. Indeed, for thirty years after 1945 the British Government prevented historians – including the "official historians" – from telling the truth about the most important achievements of British intelligence. Generals and politicians in their memoirs had to attribute important decisions to their own foresight or wisdom, and to hide knowledge derived from code-breaking.[5] (Some did not seem to mind that).

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standard of values; he is not to be stampeded into magnifying unfortunate episodes into catastrophes. In short he gains judgement and balance and wisdom, all based not on the brief experience of a single lifetime but on the truths culled from many generations. If this is true of the study of history, how much more is it true of that of Universal history? And what task could be finer or nobler than that of the Universal Historian?" (Masterman, 1961, p. 83)

[4] I venture this observation based on 25 years of experience of designing "crisis management games".

[5] On 31 July 1945, the Joint Intelligence Committee approved a general directive to heads of the Official History programs that the existence of such intelligence <meaning: Ultra and Bletchley Park> "should NEVER be disclosed". Historians on their staffs who were not privy to the Ultra secret should be instructed "not to probe too deeply into the reasons for apparently unaccountable orders being issued". The underlying justifications for secrecy were twofold: first, and more obvious, not to arouse the suspicions of future enemies about British skill in signals decryption, which would encourage them to take countermeasures. Second, and more interesting, was

The First World War is also of great use for training future intelligence analysts because of the historical disagreements about many fundamental issues which are still vivid and unresolved now, a hundred years later, after generations of historians have studied them. If a particular great event has been studied by many authors over a long time, details are known that could not have been known to contemporary observers, again a useful lesson to an analyst.[6] *What* history, then, should be included in a curriculum presented to the coming intelligence analyst? Ideally, *the whole history*! Since this is not possible, I will now present a sketch of five lectures, each under a headline indicating what specific "mode of thinking" which that history lecture will, I hope, teach the student of intelligence analysis.

History lessons for intelligence analysts

History on a grand scale: The analyst should know about the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire, about the Ottoman expansion to the walls of Vienna and the subsequent contraction, about the Thirty-Years' war, about the wars of the French Revolution, about the first and second World Wars of the 20th century, and about the Cold War. He or she must know that when the Mongols were overrunning Europe in 1241, the Europeans were only saved because the great Khan suddenly died and the attack was called off. Moreover, when King Frederick the

the fear that if the Germans and Japanese became aware of the part played by special intelligence, they might claim they had not been fairly defeated – an echo of the "stab in the back" myth about the German collapse in 1918. ... These arguments justified a major program of censorship. The official histories of the war carefully concealed all traces of Ultra, becoming what has been called "the last deception operation of the Second World War," and would-be memoir writers in the know were pressured to keep silence. Remarkably, it was not until 1974 that the wartime Head of Air Intelligence, Frederick Winterbotham, with reluctant official approval, published his personal account, *The Ultra Secret* in David Reynolds: In Command of History. Churchill fighting and writing the Second World War, New York, 2005, p. 161-2.

[6] My use of old historical examples is open to this critical question (posed by my friend Lt.Col. L.T. Larsen): *It is all very well for understanding the world we knew! But how can they relate to modern issues like e.g. Cyber Warfare? How can history illuminate a type of war that as yet has no history?* I think the question is natural, but that it is not valid: The teaching of history deals with the way humans behave in conflict, not with the specific tools or methods of war.

Great of Prussia was being crushed by his enemies in 1762, the Russian Tsarina died suddenly – and Prussia was saved. When Hitler in 1945 believed that he and the remnants of Germany could be saved by similar luck, Roosevelt in fact died on April 12, 1945, but Nazi Germany was not saved from its enemies.

He or she must know how European statesmen feared a general war sparked by the Balkan wars of 1912-13; how that war was avoided, but broke out in 1914 after the murders in Sarajevo. How leaders and peoples in all the warring states in 1914 expected a short war leading to decisive results and how the war instead dragged on and on – and created a new world order with Europe in a less central role.

Everyone will draw their own conclusions from studying history on a grand scale.[7] Some may agree with Lloyd George who summed up his view of World War One in these words: *"Chance is the supreme judge in war and not Right. There are other judges on the bench but Chance presides. If Germany had been led by Bismarck and Moltke instead of by von Bethmann-Hollweg and Falkenhayn, the event of the great struggle between a military autocracy and democracy would in all human probability have been different. The blunders of Germany saved us from the consequences of our own. But let all who trust justice to the arbitrement of war bear in mind that the issue may depend less on the righteousness of the cause than on the cunning and craft of the contestants. It is the teaching of history, and this war enforces the lesson. And the cost is prohibitive. It cripples all the litigants."* (Lloyd George, 1936, p. xv)

History that teaches to expect the unexpected: In mid-January 1991, when Iraqi forces were still entrenched in Kuwait, but an attack by the forces under American command poised in Saudi-Arabia to drive the Iraqi army out could be expected any moment, intelligence observers were generally in agreement that the smart thing for Saddam Hussein to do would be to withdraw his forces voluntarily – or just to begin doing so – or just to say that he intended to begin withdrawing

[7] Obviously these short paragraphs represent my own interpretation and understanding of these complex historical events.

them.[8] It seemed obvious that an Allied attack would not, in that case, have been politically possible. But Saddam did not act as many observers expected. History often demonstrates that what one side expects the opponent to do is not what he does. The German attack in November 1944 through the Ardennes was a surprise that proved very costly to the Allies, especially to the Americans.

Moreover, Stalin had certainly been warned by the British, the Americans and by the Swedes about the German operation Barbarossa on June 22, 1941, but he chose to think – apparently – that the warnings were "provocations" intended to involve Russia in war with Germany.[9]

In August and September 1944 there were frequent secret contacts or "feelers" between the British and German enemies in occupied Greece. Some very high-ranking German officers (among them Field-Marshal von Weichs and the German political chief in the Balkans, Neubacher) saw these clandestine contacts as a chance to come to an "understanding" with the British against the Russians. In the German military headquarters, this was the miracle that nearly everyone was hoping for. The idea was presented to Hitler and in September he vetoed any further contact. Why? No one knows – ? (Bærentzen, 1980, pp. 23-62)

In History, the list of surprises is perhaps without end. In more recent times, American intelligence in the late 1970s knew very well that the Shah of Iran was under pressure from religious Iranian leaders, and it was also known that a certain Ayatollah named Khomeini, in exile in Iraq, was a source of much worry and even fear in the ranks of the Shah's own secret police. However, US analysts remained convinced

[8] This statement is based on the author's personal recollection.

[9] For example, the British Government on 11 June 1941 told Russia in detail about the German military preparations against the Soviet Union. But Stalin disbelieved this and many other warnings: "Stalin's chief GRU (military) adviser, F.I. Golikov, the officer personally responsible for passing the bulk of the intelligence to him – as Menzies was to Churchill – was as a survivor of the purges all too aware of Stalin's pathological paranoia. Reports that confirmed his master's suspicions he carefully classified as 'reliable'; the others he described as 'doubtful'. And while punctiliously passing to Stalin the German operational plan for Barbarossa, he noted that it was 'merely the work of agents provocateurs aiming to embroil Germany and the Soviet Union in war'." David Stafford: Churchill and Secret Service. London, 1997, p. 222.

that the Shah's pro-western regime was secure, almost to the day it fell. President Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinsky, wrote in his memoirs that he was sorry he had not engineered a coup in time to stop Khomeini.[10]

The historian has the luxury of being able to admit that something quite unexpected did happen, and he may then proceed to explain why this was, surprisingly, what took place. Sometimes, but not always, the reasons become clear in hindsight. It takes a brave intelligence analyst to maintain that the unlikely is what will happen.

History of intelligence successes and failures: Some intelligence successes achieved in the Second World War which can now be studied are fantastic. For example, the ability of the British and the Americans to read the encrypted messages of their enemies surely had an impact on the course of the war. The ability, in addition, to make use of the deciphered information in military operations disguised in such a way that the Germans never realized that their communications were compromised was an equally remarkable success. Knowing what the enemy believes and what orders he sends out enabled the British to build up a series of deception schemes. The most famous was surely "Operation Fortitude" intended to convince the Germans that the invasion in Normandy on June 6, 1944, was only a forerunner to a larger invasion that would soon after land at Calais. (Hesketh, 2002) The "German agent" who convinced the Germans of this deception received a German decoration, although he was in fact a Spaniard working for the British. His codename was *Garbo*. (Harris, 2000)

[10] "Perhaps that disaster <the fall of the Shah> was historically inevitable, the Islamic fundamentalist wave too overpowering, and perhaps the Shah could never have been saved from either his own megalomania or, in the end, his paralysis of will. But my pained belief is that more could have been done by us on the American side. Historical determinism is only true after the fact." Zbigniew Brzezinski: Power and Principle, p. 354. Later in the book, Brzezinsky quoted his own diary for 20 February 1979 for this statement about Iran: "A depressing story of chaos and confusion. The more I hear of what is going on, the more depressed I am over the fact that I did not succeed in getting the U.S. Government to approve and, if necessary, to initiate an Iranian military coup." Zbigniew Brzezinski: Power and Principle, p. 393.

The historian can easily be dazzled by these successes and naturally analysts must learn about them during their education. The wealth of secrets now open must not, however, overshadow the fact that not all the secrets of the Second World War have yet been disclosed. One example: Which side deceived the other during the so-called "*Englandspiel*" in 1942-43? (Wolters, 2003)

The successes are fascinating, but it is more useful for analysts to study the reasons that led the enemy to be fooled or taken in. Why did the German side continue to believe that their encrypted messages were safe – in spite of many episodes that could – and perhaps should – have alerted them to discover the truth? In my view, the many reasons which in the aggregate led some very competent German cryptology experts to believe in the security of their communications are easy to understand – and they are probably similar to factors that today's analysts need to worry about.

Why did the U.S. Government for a long time believe in the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and continue to use some false information as part of the justification for the attack against Saddam Hussein in 2003 – in spite of the fact that doubts about the credibility of its source (known by the codename *Curveball*) should have made them more careful? Today, almost twenty years later, there is a great debate about the whole issue. Perhaps we are too close in time to call it "history", but its study will undoubtedly benefit future analysts.

Back to World War II: Sometimes one and the same event is an intelligence success but a military disaster. Before the German parachutists attacked the British forces which had fled to Crete from mainland Greece, the codebreakers at Bletchley Park had produced almost complete information about the German attack plan. Even more notable, this information was in the hands of the British commander on the island, the New Zealand General Freyberg, who remarked, when the German planes appeared on the horizon: "They are on

time".[11]Moreover, in spite of the fantastic intelligence the British lost Crete and were evacuated to Egypt. This episode of the war brings to mind the historian John Keegan who ended his book on "Intelligence in War" with this warning: *Knowledge of what the enemy can do and of what he intends is never enough to ensure security, unless there are also the power and the will to resist and preferably to forestall him. .... Foreknowledge is no protection against disaster. Even real-time intelligence is never real enough. Only force finally counts.* [12]

How the Balkans was divided one evening in Moscow: It is now a famous story – Churchill and Stalin met in Moscow on October 9, 1944, and agreed about their respective spheres of influence in the Balkans. It is about the so-called "Percentages Agreement", because Britain's and Russia's respective degree of influence in each Balkan country was expressed as a "percentage". What did the percentages mean? No one knew precisely.[13] Nevertheless, the military and political events in the Balkans during the rest of the war, and the subsequent partition of the whole area during the Cold War, took place in near perfect agreement with this "scrap of paper". Britain, and later the U.S., had a "free hand" in Greece: Stalin did not interfere with their defeat of the Greek communists, similarly the Western Allies did not try to prevent Russia from doing what she wanted in Romania. Indeed, Stalin's blue tick on the paper was placed precisely over the word "Romania", *perhaps* indicating that here was his principal interest.

It took a long time before the existence of this "agreement" became known outside a very narrow circle. Its effect, however, was

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[11] Freyberg's remark was heard by a British officer who was nearby: "Shortly after dawn on 20 May I had to take a message to Freyberg at his headquarters in Khania (Canea): why, or what about, I cannot recall. He invited me to stay for breakfast on the veranda of his villa. The sky was exquisitely blue – a perfect early summer day; but momentarily looking up, I was startled to see the sky full of gliders and parachutists. Freyberg did not let it spoil his breakfast. He looked up, grunted, and remarked: 'Well, they're on time!'". (Woodhouse, 1982, p. 13)

[12] John Keegan: *Intelligence in War. Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to al-Qaeda. New York*, 2003, p. 348-349.

[13] Churchill's account of this meeting was published in 1954 in vol. VI of his The Second World War, p. 197-98.

soon visible on the ground. The Soviet military attaché in Athens, Col. Popov, stayed in his room in the Grande Bretagne Hotel, reading, or in the bar, drinking, while British forces in Athens were fighting and defeating the Greek partisans in the streets around the hotel. Churchill and his government were violently criticized, *but in the House of Commons and not by Stalin*, for making war again the Greek guerrilla fighters, "who had so recently fought against the Germans".

Can it be of any use to intelligence analysts in a later age to know about an historical episode that is so obviously tied to a particular time and place, dependent on a unique set of circumstances, and enacted by two unusual actors (to put it mildly): Churchill and Stalin? No, of course not, or not directly! But knowing about those "percentages" might inspire ideas about how to understand situations where the visible actors seem to act quite differently from what one would expect them to.

It is, of course, a basic condition of intelligence analysis that not all the relevant facts are known to the analyst. The object of his or her understanding is often a moving target. Both the actions and the words that have to be interpreted and understood may change with no warning. Both the historian and the analyst experience gaps in the knowledge which they would want to have, but with important differences. The historian may spend years writing a book or an article and look for new sources at leisure. The analyst is often under pressure of time, but, on the other hand, the analyst may sometimes ask for, or even instigate, the interception of new sources.

Two examples of this latter practice are well known, the first one is even famous. When U.S. intelligence in May 1942 believed, but were not sure, that the two letters "AF" in Japanese decrypted signals meant "Midway", they engineered the sending of an unencrypted signal from Midway saying that their fresh water machine had broken down – and soon after, a Japanese signal reported that "AF is short of fresh water".(Kahn, 1996, p. 569) Moreover, British codebreakers found that German signals about Allied mine-laying could be used as an important tool for breaking new Enigma settings – so aircraft were sometimes sent out to lay mines for the sole purpose of inducing the sending of these useful signals. (Noskwith, 1993, p. 122)

How should history be taught to intelligence analysts?

A source of inspiration for the teaching of history to students who are going to be intelligence analysts is the way work is done by those committees charged with investigation of accidents. Whether they are single events with many victims (in the air) or frequent, but smaller events (on the roads), the investigators make strenuous efforts to uncover and understand the causes. The causes are always complex and typically include factors like technical defects and local conditions at a particular accident and human factors like the physical and mental condition of the driver or the pilot.

The idea of comparing wars and road accidents is of course not my own. A.J.P. Taylor (1965, p. 135-136) put it in these words: *"Wars are much like road accidents. They have a general cause and particular causes at the same time. Every road accident is caused, in the last resort, by the invention of the internal combustion engine and by men's desire to get from one place to another. In this sense, the 'cure' for road accidents is to forbid motor-cars. But a motorist, charged with dangerous driving, would be ill-advised if he pleaded the existence of motor-cars as his sole defence. The police and the courts do not weigh profound causes. They seek a specific cause for each accident – error on the part of the driver; excessive speed; drunkenness; faulty brakes; bad road surface. So it is with wars. 'International anarchy' makes war possible; it does not make war certain."*

If a particular type of aircraft is suspected of being too risky to fly, it can be ordered to stay on the ground. If an intelligence analyst in a current crisis sees historical parallels that once led to catastrophe, he can only warn and try to dissuade from the course of action wanted by his boss, the statesman. Unlike the accident investigator who can sometimes enforce changes in rules or conditions that really prevent future accidents from happening, history and politics are more complicated and both leave margins of doubt that allow the actors of today to ignore the lessons of experience – if tempting gains speak for action anyway.

For example, on 28 February this year, 2019, a sudden and dangerous crisis erupted between India and Pakistan. Apparently that crisis was defused after the Prime Minister of Pakistan acted in a

conciliatory way, allowing a captured Indian pilot to go free, and on television he said: *"All wars are miscalculated, and no one knows where they lead to. World War I was supposed to end in weeks, it took six years. Similarly, the US never expected the war on terrorism to last 17 years".* Moreover, the crisis which began the Second World War was not defused, although Prime Minister Chamberlain in a letter to Hitler on August 23, 1939, used an historical argument: "*It has been alleged that, if His Majesty's Government had made their position more clear in 1914, the great catastrophe would have been avoided. Whether or not there is any force in that allegation, His Majesty's Government are resolved that on this occasion there shall be no such tragic misunderstanding."*[14]

Conclusion

So the historian must admit to his analyst students that although history as well as intelligence analysis may, in a specific situation, seem to warn of great danger, such warnings will never, or very rarely, prevent the statesman from going to war if he wants to do so. This pessimistic conclusion is probably true of any age, but risks are likely increased when rulers are particularly disrespectful of facts. In September 2016, Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson proposed that The White House needed a Council of Historical Advisers. They also suggested that the charter for this council *"begin with Thucydides's observation that "the events of future history … will be of the same nature — or nearly so — as the history of the past, so long as men are men."* (Graham and Ferguson, September 2016) As far as I know nothing has been heard about this idea since 2016.

[14] Miscellaneous no. 9 (1939) Documents concerning German-Polish Relations and the Outbreak of Hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939. Presented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament by Command of His Majesty. London, 1939. Cmd. 6106. (Letter 56, p. 96-97)

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