

Winston Churchill and Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War: British Lion Meets Russian Baboon

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When Winston Churchill became Secretary of State for War and Air on January 14, 1919, the First World War had just drawn to a close. "What is the use of being War Secretary if there is no war?" ¹ Winston Churchill grumbled when contemplating whether to accept the position offered to him by Prime Minister Lloyd George. There was, however, a country in which the fighting had not ceased and in whose politics Churchill was soon to find himself embroiled -- Russia. Since the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917, the Red and White Russians had been caught in the grips of a fierce civil war, and the Allied governments had not been able to remain aloof from Russia's internal struggles. Over the next several years, while many wished to see their governments extricate themselves from the Russian situation, Churchill remained Britain's chief proponent of intervention. His efforts in this area were, claims biographer Piers Brendon,

....almost sublime. He was opposed by the Prime Minister, by nearly all his colleagues, by most MPs, by the bulk of the press and by the vast majority of the populace. Yet, he argued, cajoled, exhorted and maneuvered. He threatened resignation. He took his case to the public in newspaper articles. He simply would not give up. ²

Lloyd George, whose noninterventionist tendencies became stronger with time, was less enthusiastic, telling Churchill that Russia had become an obsession which was upsetting his balance. In fact, Churchill's active involvement in the disastrous Russian affair did nothing to improve his already spotted reputation. As an acquaintance told Lloyd George shortly after British intervention in Russia had drawn to a close, "Winston has a reputation of a buccaneer. The country regard him as a bold, badman." ³

Allied intervention in Russia, however, began before Churchill was in power. It was not aimed directly at the Bolsheviks, but rather, was devised as part of the war against the Central Powers ⁴ and was necessitated by the fact that shortly after seizing power, the Bolsheviks proclaimed the cessation of hostilities between Germany and Russia; the Treaty of Brest Litovsk signed by the Bolsheviks on March 3, 1918 confirmed this armistice and ceded to the Germans large portions of Russia, including the Ukraine. From the Allied point of view, this was a military

¹ Winston Churchill, as Cited by Piers Brendon, *Winston Churchill* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984): 91.

² Brendon, 92.

³ Sir William Sutherland, as cited by Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill: The Stricken World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975): 430.

⁴ Lloyd George, for instance wrote that the elements of anti German resistance in Russia were consolidated "without reference to their political, social or economic views. We were not organizing and subsidizing an anti-Bolshevik campaign, but an anti German front." See Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, 316.

disaster. In one swoop, twelve million troops were lost to the Allied cause and more than seventy German divisions were released from duty in the east.⁵ The German General Ludendorff recounts in his memoirs that "from the end of November onwards, troop trains were incessantly passing from East to West. It was no longer a case of replacing tired divisions in the West by fresh ones, but of really adding to the number of the combatants in the West."⁶ In addition, military supplies including more than 600,000 tons of munitions and military equipment at Archangel alone which had been sent to Russia by the United States, Britain and France were in danger of falling into enemy hands. Furthermore, it was feared that the vast agricultural and natural resources of Russia now accessible to Germany would render the Allied blockade ineffective, as would the ostensible German plans to establish a submarine base on Russia's northern coast. Finally, there was a widespread belief that Bolsheviks were German agents and that therefore, a strike against the Bolsheviks was a strike against Germany.⁷ To quote Churchill, "in such circumstances, it would have been criminal negligence to make no effort to reconstruct an anti-German front in the East, and so to deny the vast resources of Russia in food and fuel to the Central Powers."⁸ Thus, troops and supplies were sent to Russia by Britain, Japan, France and the United States to assist those Russians willing to continue the war against Germany, and as early as December 14, 1917, the War Cabinet decided to give the anti-Bolsheviks money as long as they continued to resist the Central Powers.

With the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, intervention in Russia could no longer be considered part of the general front against Germany, and the Allies faced the question of what to do with the more than 180,000 troops still stationed there. The answer to this question was dependent upon their policy towards Soviet Russia. Should peace be made with the Bolsheviks and the Allied troops withdrawn? Or should the Allies attempt to overthrow the Bolshevik regime, either through force or indirectly by sending the anti Bolsheviks munitions and supplies? In a letter to Lloyd George dated February 27, 1919, Churchill expressed dismay at the fact that the,

Allied Powers in Paris have not decided whether they wish to make war upon the Bolsheviks or to make peace with them. They are pausing midway between these two courses with an equal dislike of either.⁹

The task of providing guidance on the Russian problem, however, was by no means easy.

⁵ George Stewart, *The White Armies of Russia* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1933): 82.

⁶ John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967):39.

⁷ William Henry Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution, Vol. II*. (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1952): 150 For instance, the British General Maynard who commanded troops at Murmansk wrote that Lenin's policy was clearly dictated by Berlin and thought that the Russian Revolution was the fruit of German intrigue, while David Francis, the American Ambassador in Moscow, believed that Lenin was in the pay of the German government.

⁸ Winston S. Churchill, *The Aftermath* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929): 284.

⁹ Gilbert, ed., *Companion Volume IV*, Part 1, 555.

On the one hand, there was acute war weariness in both the victorious and the vanquished countries. "No French soldier who saved his life after the Marne and Verdun would want to lose it on the fields of Russia" ¹⁰ said one army officer to another, while the Daily Express stated that the frozen plains of Eastern Europe are not worth the bones of a single British grenadier. ¹¹ Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, In the mutinous atmosphere that prevailed, intervention with troops was rendered impossible because no large number of reliable troops were willing to embark on such a mission.

The Labor party and trade unions were also wholeheartedly opposed to intervention. In short, as Churchill had noted in a memorandum,

Nobody wants to intervene in Russian affairs. Russia is a very large country, a very old country, a very disagreeable country inhabited by immense numbers of ignorant people largely possessed of lethal weapons and in a state of extreme disorder. Also Russia is a long way off. ¹²

As a result, many people felt that she should be left to stew in her own juice.

Yet the Allies were loath to sanction the Bolsheviks, whom they regarded as "unscrupulous brigands, thieves, cutthroats and murderers who had seized power by force and retained it by terror;" ¹³ the French government, for one, refused "to make any pact with this criminal regime." ¹⁴ Many had an aversion to the Bolshevik doctrines and feared that Bolshevism, with its goal of international revolution, might spread beyond the borders of Russia and infect other countries with revolutionary ideas. Therefore, any attempt by the British government to halt the spread of Bolshevism's deliberately aggressive doctrine could be construed as an act of self defense; after all, "it was one thing to let the Russians stew in their own juice, but quite another to submit to being stewed in it with them." ¹⁵ Others, like Lord Curzon, felt it would be morally irresponsible of the Allies to desert the White Russians who had assisted them during the war and leave them helpless against the fury of Bolshevik revenge, while Balfour, although opposed to any major military intervention in Russia, stated that those governments set up under British protection, such as Kolchak's White government in Siberia, had to be maintained and supported. Finally, there was considerable resentment in Britain and France over the Bolshevik repudiation of Russia's pre-war debts and war loans, which in 1917 totalled approximately six billion dollars, ¹⁶ and over their "shameful" betrayal of the Allied cause during World War I. Churchill shared this sentiment,

¹⁰ Chamberlin, p. 166.

¹¹ Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 231.

¹² Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 228.

¹³ Peter Rowland, *David Lloyd George* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1975):496.

¹⁴ Richard H. Ullman, *Britain and the Russian Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968):100.

¹⁵ Ullman, *ibid*, 91.

¹⁶ George A. Brinkley, *The Volunteer Army and Allied Intervention in South Russia, 1917-1921* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966):305.

declaring that ,

...every British and French soldier killed last year was really done to death by Lenin and Trotsky, not in fair war, but by the treacherous desertion of an ally without parallel in the history of the world. ¹⁷

The result of these conflicting forces was drift and indecision. William Chamberlin, a prominent historian on the Russian Revolution states that "one searches in vain in the records of the time not only for a consistent Allied policy, but even for a steadfast policy on the part of the individual Allied powers. ¹⁸ Indeed, the lack of concrete policy is a constant refrain throughout the period of intervention. "Absolutely no policy", ¹⁹ wrote the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, in his diary after a War Council meeting on January 10, 1919, and again, on February 17, following a meeting of the Imperial Cabinet in Paris, "Much talk about Russia and of course nothing settled. ²⁰ On July 4 the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff asked the Cabinet, "Both the Admiralty and the Naval Officers on the spot are really in ignorance as to the exact position: are we, or are not, at war with the Bolsheviks?" ²¹ Lord Curzon complained,

It cannot be said that an altogether consistent policy has been pursued. The situation is so complex, and the difficulties of arriving at a decision which is acceptable to all are so great that, in some instances, it would be no exaggeration to admit that there is no policy at all. ²²

If "the concentrated wisdom of the statesmen gathered at Versailles was not equal to the task of giving guidance on Russia, Britain's Secretary of State for War certainly could. ²³ In a letter to Lloyd George written on March 24, 1920, Churchill stated that his policy would have been "peace with the German people, war on the Bolshevik tyranny", ²⁴ Rephrased more picturesquely as "Kill the Bolshie, Kiss the Hun". ²⁵ This was indeed the policy that Churchill tried to implement throughout his tenure at the War Office. In an era of post war patriotism when slogans like "Hang the Kaiser" and "Make Germany Pay" were popular. ²⁶ Churchill advocated a policy

¹⁷ Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, *The Stricken World* , 278.

¹⁸ Chamberlin, 151.

¹⁹ Gilbert, ed., *Companion Volume, Volume IV, Part 1*, 450.

²⁰ Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 255.

²¹ Rear Admiral J. A. Ferguson, as cited by Robert Rhodes James, *Churchill: A Study in Failure* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970):131.

²² Lord Curzon, as cited by Lewis Broad, *Winston Churchill, The Years of Preparation* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1958):292.

²³ Broad, 291.

²⁴ Martin Gilbert, ed., *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume IV, Part 2* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978): 1053.

²⁵ Gilbert, *The Stricken World* , 278.

²⁶ Lloyd George echoed the sentiments of the time, declaring that "the Kaiser must be prosecuted! The war was a crime .the men responsible for it must not be left off because their heads were crowned when they perpetrated the deed. Also Germany should pay to the utmost farthing: Said Lloyd George, "We will search their pockets for it." Rowland, 468,470.

of tolerance toward the defeated Fatherland. He wanted to see "Germany treated humanely and adequately fed, and her industries re-started.", ²⁷ stating that it was urgent to do so in order to prevent her from turning to Bolshevism out of desperation. His goal was the creation of "a strong but peaceful Germany which will not attack our French allies, but will at the same time act as a bulwark against the Bolshevism of Russia." ²⁸ In other words, "feed Germany, fight Bolshevism, make Germany fight Bolshevism".²⁹

Churchill's hatred of Bolshevism was unequivocal. Lloyd George claimed that it originated from the fact that "his ducal blood revolted against the wholesale elimination of the Grand Dukes in Russia", ³⁰ but Churchill's loathing was inspired by something deeper than this, although he, like many, was appalled by Bolshevik atrocities. Churchill feared an alliance between Japan, Bolshevik Russia, and a vengeful Germany that could, he predicted, result in "a great combination from Yokohama to Cologne in hostility to France, Britain and America."³¹ Indeed, he felt no lasting peace could be formed as long as Bolshevism was allowed to exist. He was angered by the international claims of the Bolsheviks and opposed their goal of world-wide revolution which, he prophesied would lead to the destruction of the civilized world. Bolshevism, said Churchill, "is not a policy; it is a disease. It is not a creed; it is a pestilence", ³² and later he compared it to "a virulent contagion that threatened to destroy civilization." ³³ Churchill often likened Bolshevism to disease. As early as November 26, 1918, Churchill stated in a speech to his constituents at Dundee that

Russia is being rapidly reduced by the Bolsheviks to an animal form of Barbarism ... Civilization is being completely extinguished over gigantic areas, while Bolsheviks hop and caper like troops of ferocious baboons amid the ruins of cities and the corpses of their victims. ³⁴

In view of these fierce opinions, it is not surprising that Churchill wanted to see joint military action by the Allies and a positive British commitment to destroy Bolshevism. The Allied armies, he urged, ought to march on Moscow and stomp out this foul disease before it could spread any further. ³⁵ He proposed to replace the Bolshevik tyranny, not with a restoration of the Tsarist autocracy, but rather with a democratic government friendly to the Entente. Russia, he

²⁷ Gilbert, ed., *Companion Volume, Volume IV, Part 1*, 557.

²⁸ Ullman, 153.

²⁹ Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 276. Churchill even went so far as to suggest that "we might have to build up the German Army, as it was important to get Germany on her legs again for fear of the spread of Bolshevism." See Ullman, 301.

³⁰ Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties, Volume 1*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938): 325.

³¹ Churchill, as cited by Pelling, 258

³² Churchill, as cited by William Manchester, *The Last Lion* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983): 680.

³³ Churchill, as cited by Brendon, 92. Churchill often likened Bolshevism to disease. For example, he compared Lenin to a "plague bacillus" and referred to the "Bolshevik cancer" as a "monstrous growth swelling and thriving upon the emaciated body of its victim." See Manchester, 680 and Gilbert, 441.

³⁴ Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 227.

³⁵ Rowland, 496.

said, should be made "a living partner in the League of Nations and a friend of the Allied Powers or there would be neither peace nor victory." ³⁶ A constituent assembly based on democratic franchise should be implemented, and in fact, when it appeared that General Denikin, leader of the anti Bolshevik forces in southern Russia, might reach Moscow and oust the Bolsheviks, Churchill was enthused enough to declare that he could travel to Moscow "as a sort of ambassador" to "help Denikin mould the new constitution."³⁷ In addition, Churchill wanted to see anti-Semitism suppressed and recognition of the independence of Poland, Finland and the Baltic states.

Aid to the anti-Bolsheviks should only be given if they promised to adhere to all these demands. In spite of his strong opinions, Churchill was not in a position to implement whatever policy he saw fit. Rather, he had to implement the policy decided upon by Lloyd George and the Cabinet. This was rendered somewhat difficult by the fact that, as has been mentioned there was no Russian policy. Therefore, one of Churchill's first moves upon becoming War Secretary was an attempt to get Allied policy toward Soviet Russia defined. On February 12, he asked the War Cabinet for a decision on the issue, stating that, "if we were going to withdraw troops, it should be done at once. "If we were going to intervene, we should send larger forces there;" he then added that he favored the latter course ³⁸. A day later he said that

If we were unable to support the Russians effectively, it would be better to take a decision now to quit and face the consequences, and tell these people to make the best terms they could with the Bolsheviks, than to leave our troops there and continue without a policy.³⁹

The War Cabinet, however, had concluded on January 10, 1919, that the Russian dilemma would have to await the formulation of a general policy by the peacemakers at Versailles, and now, a month later, Lloyd George repeated that questions of this nature could only be decided in Paris with the personal involvement of President Wilson. Thus, on February 14, 1919, Churchill traveled to Paris in an attempt to unearth Allied policy. He also had an idea of his own to promote. He hoped to persuade the Allies to establish an Inter Allied Commission whose express purpose would be to examine the Russian question and "to assemble possible means and resources for action in a comprehensive form and to submit this report to the Supreme War Council." ⁴⁰ This was not intended as a prelude to war, but rather, as an effort to evaluate the situation so that resources could be pooled in an efficient manner and an informed decision could be made as to whether to "fight or quit; get on or get out". ⁴¹ Churchill's proposal met with doom. The United

³⁶ Churchill, as cited by John Albert White, *The Siberian Intervention*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950): 332.

³⁷ Churchill, as cited by Henry Pelling, *Winston Churchill* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970): 118. Lloyd George was not supportive of this plan and strongly discouraged Churchill from entertaining such thoughts.

³⁸ Gilbert, ed., *Companion Volume IV, Part 1*, 521.

³⁹ Churchill, as cited by Rhodes James, 119.

⁴⁰ Churchill, as cited by Pelling (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970): 2556.

⁴¹ Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 254.

States declared that it could not possibly send troops or supplies to Russia, while back in London Lloyd George was, in his own words, "very alarmed," ⁴² saying that if the British people knew Churchill had traveled to Paris to instigate a plan of attack against the Bolsheviks, there would be a revolution in England. As a result, the only decision made was that each country's military advisors would examine the problem individually and might then make an informal and unofficial report to their respective representatives at the Conference. Thus, Churchill returned to London with his mission unfulfilled.

On January 27, 1919, Churchill had written to Lloyd George that,

....it seems to me most urgent for us to frame and declare our policy. Evacuate at once at all is a policy; it is not a very pleasant one from the point of view of history. Reinforce and put the job through is a policy; but unhappily we have not the power our orders would not be obeyed, I regret to say. ⁴³

Under these circumstances, and with the Allies at Versailles unable or unwilling to take action against the Bolsheviks, Churchill was forced to modify any undisguised plan for the complete extermination of the Bolshevik regime to the more subtle "we must act up to the full limits of the authority which has been granted to us, ⁴⁴ and he approached this task with his usual indomitability, saying that "after conquering all the huns -- tigers of the world -- I will not submit to be beaten by the baboons." ⁴⁵ In attempting to persuade his colleagues of the necessity of action against the Bolsheviks he used the following arguments. First of all, British reputation was at stake. All civilized forces in Russia, he claimed, "realized that we alone (with the doubtful exception of the Japanese), had really befriended and assisted them; and if we turned round now and cleared off our reputation would suffer irretrievably." ⁴⁶ This was important since he wanted to create a Russia friendly to the Entente, thereby forestalling the dreaded linkup of Germany, Japan and Bolshevik Russia. In addition, he declared "it was idle to think that we should escape by sitting still and doing nothing. Bolshevism was not sitting still. It was advancing." Every effort must be made to stop it before it engulfed other countries with its revolutionary ideas. It was therefore

....a delusion to suppose that all this year we have been fighting the battles of the anti-Bolshevik Russians. On the contrary, they have been fighting ours; and this truth will become painfully apparent from the moment that the Bolshevik armies are supreme over whole vast territories in the Russian Empire. ⁴⁷

⁴² Lloyd George, as cited by Rowland, 499.

⁴³ Gilbert, ed., *Companion Volume IV, Part 1*, 487.

⁴⁴ Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 289.

⁴⁵ Churchill, *ibid*, 275-6.

⁴⁶ Gilbert, ed. *Companion Volume IV, Part 1*, 717.

⁴⁷ Churchill, 270.

Churchill constantly bemoaned the opportunities for action which he saw slipping away and predicted woeful results:

No doubt, when all the resources friendly to us had been scattered, and when India was threatened, the Western Powers would bestir themselves and would be prepared to put forth ten times the effort that at an earlier stage would have sufficed to save the situation. Churchill could only express the profound apprehension with which he awaited what was coming. ⁴⁸

If Churchill was the "most formidable and irrepressible protagonist of the anti Bolshevik war," ⁴⁹ the attitude of the Prime Minister was more ambivalent. In the words of a biographer, "Lloyd George ... was very much in two minds about the desirability of more active intervention, and he remained in this undecided state for almost a year." ⁵⁰ Said Lloyd George, "we are at war with Bolshevik Russia, but have decided not to make war on it." ⁵¹ The ambiguity of this statement sums up not only the unfocused Allied policy, but Lloyd George's indecisiveness as well. As early as December 31, 1918, he stated that he was "definitely opposed to military intervention in any shape", ⁵² and two weeks later, at a time when British troops and White Russians armed with British supplies were fighting the Bolsheviks, he remarked that "it is hardly the business of the Great Powers to intervene either in lending financial support to one side or the other, or sending munitions to either side." ⁵³ Nevertheless, he did not urge complete abandonment of the White Russians, stating in the House of Commons on April 18, 1919 that :

....bolshevism threatened to impose by force of arms its domination on those populations that had revolted against it and that were organized at our request. If we, as soon as they had taken all the risks, had said, Thank you, we are exceedingly obliged to you, you have served your purpose. We need you no longer. Now let the Bolsheviks cut your throats, we should have been mean, we should have been thoroughly unworthy. ⁵⁴

Like President Wilson, Lloyd George was eager to call a truce between the warring factions and to arrange a meeting at which members of both sides would meet with Allied representatives to see if a peaceable solution could be attained. This resulted in the Prinkipo Island scheme, of which Churchill did not approve, and which came to naught since the Whites were insulted by the invitation to meet with the Soviets, declaring that "moral considerations do not permit us to confer on an equal basis with traitors, murderers and robbers", ⁵⁵ while the Soviets, who seemed

⁴⁸ Churchill, as cited by Rhodes James, 127.

⁴⁹ Lloyd George, 324.

⁵⁰ Rowland, 497.

⁵¹ Lloyd George, as cited by Manchester, 682.

⁵² Lloyd George, as cited by Rhodes James, 118.

⁵³ Lloyd George, *ibid*, 495.

⁵⁴ Lloyd George, as cited by Rowland, 496.

⁵⁵ Chamberlin, 158.

amenable, made no mention of halting the advance of the Red Army, which was one of the conditions required by the Allies.

Sir Henry Wilson's diary entry on January 20, 1919, contains the jotted statement "Winston all against Bolshevism, and therefore in this, against Lloyd George."⁵⁶ The difference in the views of these two men can be summarized as that between a massive coordinated effort to destroy "that foul combination of criminality and animalism which constitutes the Bolshevik regime"⁵⁷ and a leaning to negotiations and recognition of the Bolsheviks as personified by the Prinkipo Island plan. In fact, Lloyd George later wrote that "personally I would have dealt with the Soviets as the de facto Government of Russia."⁵⁸ Lloyd George's arguments against intervention provide an interesting foil to Churchill's views and can be summarized as follows. Intervention, he argued might arouse national sentiments in the White Russians, thereby driving them into the ranks of the Bolsheviks.⁵⁹ Furthermore, he was not convinced that the White Russians were heralds of a democratic regime many seemed reactionary, and therefore unworthy of British support. In any case, the grave labor position forbade an offensive action in Russia, as did the exorbitant cost such a mission would entail at a time when the exchequer was in severe financial difficulties. It was clear that "the British public will not tolerate the throwing away of more millions on foolish military enterprises ... Let us therefore attend to our own business and leave Russia to look after hers;"⁶⁰ and, along the same lines, Britain could not take the "terrible responsibility of restoring order in a country which is a continent, which is part of two continents, which no country has ever intervened in without landing itself in disaster."⁶¹ It was therefore up to Russia to save herself.

Lloyd George's attitude was a hindrance to Churchill; it undermined his attempts for more active intervention but it nevertheless did not bring these attempts to a complete stop or render them entirely ineffective. First of all, the Prime Minister as well as a large part of the Foreign Office had moved to Paris for the first six months of 1919 and were almost completely absorbed in the peace negotiations. Furthermore, other members of the Cabinet gave Churchill somewhat halfhearted support, while there was much sympathy for the anti-Bolshevik cause in the House, especially among the Conservatives, who regarded with anxiety Lloyd George's apparent readiness to fraternize with the Bolsheviks.⁶² This allowed Churchill to pursue his anti-Bolshevik

⁵⁶ Callwell, Field-Marshal, *Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries, Vol. II*, (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd, 1927): 165. Wilson went on to say, "I can't understand Lloyd George being such a fool."

⁵⁷ Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 268.

⁵⁸ Lloyd George, 331.

⁵⁹ In his own words, Lloyd George felt there was a danger that "military intervention would only strengthen the very force which we set out to destroy....The one sure method of establishing the power of Bolshevism in Russia was to attempt to suppress it by foreign troops. To send our soldiers to shoot down Bolsheviks would be to create more Bolsheviks here. The best thing was to let Bolshevism fail of itself, as it might, and probably would if it did not represent Russian sentiment." Rowland, 407.

⁶⁰ Lloyd George, as cited by Manchester, 682.

⁶¹ Lloyd George, as cited by Ullman, 308.

⁶² Rowland, 498.

policy with more freedom, and he did so consistently. For example, the Cabinet had decided that the British troops in Murmansk and Archangel should be withdrawn as soon as the White Sea thawed to the point where such an evacuation would be feasible. Churchill, however, devised the scheme of protecting the withdrawal with an advance, justifying this maneuver on the grounds that if,

....we attempted to clear out without striking a blow first and establishing touch with the troops in the south, we would have a whole pack of Bolsheviks at our heels and would be risking possible military disaster.⁶³

The goal of the advance was to deal the enemy a "blow so severe that before he could recover not a British soldier, nor a loyal Russian who claimed asylum, would remain on shore." ⁶⁴ It was also hoped that the British troops would be able to link up with those of the anti-Bolshevik General Kolchak at Kotlas, thus enabling the White Russians to establish themselves in a better position before the withdrawal of the British troops left them without assistance against the Bolsheviks. Churchill managed to round up 8,000 volunteers to render this blow, and the retreat was executed without incident, although, much to Churchill's dismay, conditions in Kolchak's army had deteriorated to the point that a link up of forces was rendered impossible. Churchill also advocated that the White Russians be supplied with all resources available, including arms,ammunition, advisors, clothing and food. In this, he was relatively successful. Between March, 1919 and 1920, British aid to Denikin alone included more than 1,200 guns and almost 2 million shells, 6,100 machine guns, 200,000 rifles, 500 million rounds of small arms ammunition, more than half a million uniforms, 629 trucks and ambulances, 279 motorcycles, 74 tanks, 6 armored cars, 100 aircraft, 12 500 bed general hospitals, 25 field hospitals, and large amounts of communication equipment. ⁶⁵ These supplies were often not used to the best advantage and theft, waste, spoilage, and non- maintenance were common. Equipment rotted on the quays, officers and officials took hospital beds and bedding for use in their homes, troops on the front often wore rags while officers took a double issue of clothing and turned a profit by selling them. In the war effort as a whole, however, Churchill met with less success. By the middle of October, 1919, the Whites led by Denikin had come within 200 miles of Moscow while Yudenitch had succeeded in entering the suburbs of Petrograd and even Kolchak seemed to be making a recovery. This was the height of their advance. Within three weeks, all the anti-Bolshevik forces suffered catastrophic defeats which led to the rapid disintegration of their armies, and by the spring of 1920, Denikin, who had once controlled vast areas of Southern Russia, was now confined to the Crimea, Kolchak had been executed by the Bolsheviks in early February and Yudenitch had slithered off into exile. Faced with the collapse of the White armies, Churchill declared that "the question which

⁶³ Churchill, as cited by Rhodes James, 129.

⁶⁴ Churchill, 251.

⁶⁵ Ullman, 212.

must now be faced is how to save as much as possible from the wreck." ⁶⁶ Along these lines, Churchill hoped to establish a place of refuge in the Crimea, fearing that unless this were done, the Whites would face indiscriminate slaughter by the Bolsheviks. Churchill also fought against the Cabinet decision to evacuate only British citizens from the Crimea, again fearing that those unable to escape would be left to the mercy of the Bolsheviks. In both of these efforts Churchill was unsuccessful. His last gasp in the anti-Bolshevik struggle occurred over the issue of trading with the "hairy baboons." A Soviet trade delegation had arrived in Britain and lengthy negotiations began, culminating in the Anglo/Russian Trade Agreement of March, 1921. Churchill fought this act of "giving special countenance to this criminal regime," ⁶⁷ saying, among other things, that the gold and jewels with which the Bolsheviks would pay for the goods they wished to purchase was bloodstained, having been stolen from its rightful owners and in many cases, from their corpses. He even considered resigning over the issue. When the Cabinet approved the principal of concluding an agreement with Bolsheviks, Churchill was "so upset by the decision that he declared himself unequal to discussing other items on the Agenda affecting the army. He was quite pale and did not speak again during the meeting." ⁶⁸

This was the end of Churchill's active involvement in the Russian fiasco. British intervention had ended in disaster. It had been implemented too halfheartedly and lacked what Churchill described as the will to win. This was not due to Churchill, for the policy implemented was not the one that he had advocated. His policy of "intervening more effectively with large forces abundantly supplied with mechanical devices" ⁶⁹ had never been tried. Could it have succeeded? It is possible. The condition of the Red Army in early 1918 was pitiful. Some troops were near starvation, they lacked proper clothing and rifles, and ammunition was in short supply, while sources of fuel, steel and iron were in the hands of the Whites. ⁷⁰ Had they been forced to fight during the winter of 1917-1918, they would have been doomed, but at this point, the Allies were still pinned down on the Western front and the Whites were in the process of gathering their forces; it took Kolchak more than a year to organize his troops, and Denikin even longer. In fact, organization was one of the chief problems plaguing the Whites. In contrast to the dedication, unswerving purpose and unity evidenced by Lenin and his cohorts, the Whites were united only by their dislike of Bolshevism. Some were monarchists in favor of the restoration of the Tsar, others were parliamentarians, and still others were socialists. As a result, no one program was acceptable to all anti-Bolshevik factions and they often squabbled among themselves. Unity of command was lacking, troops were widely dispersed and disorganization prevailed. One historian writes that:

had all the hatreds which the Bolsheviks inspired throughout Russia and in certain leaders of

⁶⁶ Churchill, 271.

⁶⁷ Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 436.

⁶⁸ Maurice Hankey, as cited by Gilbert, 440.

⁶⁹ Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, *The Stricken World*, 254.

⁷⁰ Manchester, 674.

the West ever found outlet in the coordinated expression under single leadership at any one time, the Soviet regime could not have survived and would have been swept away. But leadership was never forthcoming. The salvation of the Bolsheviks lay not so much in their own strength though what they had was unified and strongly disciplined but in the hopeless disunity of their opponents.⁷¹

Churchill pointed to the failing of Allied intervention in *The Aftermath* when he wrote that "everything was partial, disjointed, halfhearted, inconsistent, and sometimes actually contradictory,"⁷² and again, "the large sums of money and considerable forces employed by the Allies against the Bolsheviks during the year were dissipated by the complete absence of any definite decided policy among the victorious Allies."⁷³

On December 3, 1919, Churchill penned a note to Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Curzon in which he stated that,

....the last chances of saving the situation are passing away....Very soon there will be nothing left, but Lenin and Trotsky, our vanished 100 millions pounds, and mutual reproaches.⁷⁴

It was on Winston Churchill, the political figure most strongly identified with intervention, that the bulk of these reproaches fell. Henry Wilson wrote in his diary "so ends in practical disaster another of Winston's military attempts. Antwerp, Dardanelles, Denikin. His judgement is always at fault, and he is hopeless when in power."⁷⁵ The strongly pacifistic labor movement was especially alienated, its candidate charging that:

Mr Churchill did all he could to maintain militarism in Europe and to march armies against Russia. He wasted L100,000,000 of the taxpayers' money of this country money sorely needed to deal with unemployment, housing, etc. in mad, stupid, wicked and suicidal adventures.⁷⁶

Churchill did speak out in his own defense. Most of the troops had been stationed in Russia before he came to office and in fact, he had only been responsible for sending volunteers there. Furthermore, in providing aid to the anti-Bolsheviks, he was only implementing a policy that had been decided upon before he became War Secretary. Finally, of the estimated L100,000,000 that had been spent by Britain on the anti-Bolshevik cause after the armistice, more than L60,000,000 was nonmarketable surplus munitions which would have been discarded or destroyed had Denikin not taken them. But in the public's mind the "Gambler of Gallipoli" had

⁷¹ Swettenham, 276.

⁷² Churchill, 265.

⁷³ Churchill, 267.

⁷⁴ Churchill, as cited by Gilbert, 360.

⁷⁵ Sir Henry Wilson, as cited by Manchester, 686.

⁷⁶ Manchester, 751.

proved once again that he could not be trusted. The ominous prophecy uttered by the conservative Morning Post upon Churchill's appointment as Secretary of State for War and Air seemed to have been fulfilled:

Mr. Churchill began in the Army; but he found early occasion to leave it, and his departure, we have heard, was not regretted. Since then he has wandered far, but we have watched his brilliant and erratic course in the confident expectation that sooner or later he would make a mess of anything he undertook. Character is destiny; there is some tragic flaw in Mr. Churchill which determines him on every occasion in the wrong course.⁷⁷

The effect of intervention on Churchill's career was therefore not a happy one. The effect of intervention on the Bolshevik regime, however, can be regarded in two lights. As an attempt to overthrow the Bolsheviks, it was a complete failure which brought neither territorial nor economic advantage to any of the participants.⁷⁸ However, claimed Churchill, intervention had achieved at least two beneficial results. The first, he said, was moral:

....we can at any rate say that the Russian forces who were loyal to the Allies were not left without the means of self-defence. There were placed in their hands weapons which, had they been a society of higher quality and with great comprehension of their own cause and of their own countrymen, might have enabled them to conquer.⁷⁹

The second benefit arose from the fact that during 1919, the Bolsheviks had to concentrate on the internal struggle against the White Russians and were effectively prevented from turning their attention elsewhere. Thus, a:

....breathing space of inestimable importance was afforded to the whole line of newly liberated countries which stood along the western borders of Russia. Kolchak and Denikin, and those who followed them, are dead or scattered. Russia has been frozen in an indefinite winter of subhuman doctrine and superhuman tyranny. But Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and above all Poland, were able during 1919 to establish the structure of civilized States and to organize the strength of patriotic armies.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Gilbert, 180.

⁷⁸ Chamberlin, 170.

⁷⁹ Churchill, 287.

⁸⁰ Churchill, 288. William Chamberlin agrees with Churchill's assessment, saying that "while intervention did not overthrow the Soviet government, it did in all probability push the frontier of Bolshevism considerably farther to the east." See Chamberlin, 172.