



US intervention in the Russian Civil War 1918-1920

Some misguided historians believe the US intervention in the Russian Civil War was an imperialistic adventure. Not true. These phony historians pick out certain facts and ignore others to give you an inaccurate view of what really happened. Here is the whole story.

Three years after the start of World War One and with millions dead, the Russian government was overthrown by the Bolsheviks (Communists) in November, 1917. The Bolsheviks decided to abandon their allies and quit the war with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On March 3, 1918, the Communists signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany which was a disaster for the Allied war effort.

The Bolshevik's surrender drastically changed the military/political situation, putting the western Alliance in near panic. The treaty gave Germany control of agricultural and mineral resources in the Ukraine and oil from the Caucasus - which they quickly began shipping to Germany. Germany had one million men in Russia and they were now free to transfer a large number of its troops to France to fight the British, French and newly arriving American forces.

The US declared war on Germany in April 1917 but US forces had only begun arriving. Several German divisions had already been transferred to France by the end of 1917, before the treaty had even been signed. An offensive by Germany in France in March 1918, produced impressive gains - gains blamed on Russia for allowing Germany to shift troops to France. In April 1918, a division of German troops had landed in Finland, creating fears they might try to capture the strategic ports of Murmansk, Archangel or capture the Murmansk-Petrograd railroad.

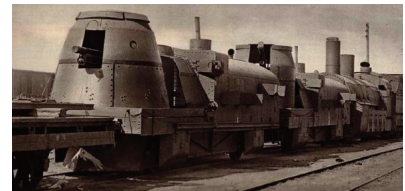
In addition, the Bolsheviks went out of their way to make enemies of the rest of the free world. Indeed, the Bolsheviks were not even considered the legitimate government of Russia. On Jan 19, 1918, Lenin sent in armed Bolshevik troops and forcibly dispersed the popularly elected Constituent Assembly after communist candidates won less than 25% of the seats. A month later the Bolsheviks informed the rest of the world they would not pay back the money loaned to Russia. They owed the US \$187 million and other countries millions more.

In July 1918, the Bolsheviks executed the Tsar and his wife - and then their 5 children. The Bolsheviks were viewed by the Western democracies as a bunch of thugs and murderers - which is what they were. Also in July, 1918, the last independent newspaper was shut down by Lenin. (A) From here on, only propaganda from the Bolsheviks was allowed to be printed.

The Bolsheviks then turned on their faithful allies, the Czech Legion. This 60,000 man Army was made up of Czech and Slovak nationals who were fighting the Germans and Austro-Hungarian Empire alongside the Russian Army. The Russian government had promised that they would support the creation of a national homeland for them out of the Austro-Hungarian Empire when the allies won the war. After Russia surrendered, the Czech Legion was promised safe passage out of Russia, but Leon Trotsky, under pressure from the Germans, ordered the disarming and arrest of the Czech Legion.



Over 3 million Russian soldiers were captured by Germany.



The Czech Legion captured this armored train from the Bolsheviks.



Trans Siberian Railway.

The Czechs vowed to resist all attempts to arrest them. Stalin then agreed to allow the Czechs to leave Russia via Vladivostok. In May 1918 the Bolsheviks initiated a confrontation with the Czechs which turned into full scale war. The Czech Army quickly conquered all major cities in Siberia east of the Ural Mountains all the way to Vladivostok, often with the help of thousands of Russians who feared Communism.

The success of the Czech Legion energized the Allies and allowed them to consider new strategies to defeat Germany. The Bolsheviks were now considered the enemy of the allies and intervention in Russia was now considered necessary for 2 reasons: 1) Help the Czech Legion and other anti-communist forces to overthrow the Bolsheviks and rebuild the Russian Front. This would keep one MILLION German troops tied down in Russia long enough so the US Army could get 4 million soldiers to France and win the war for the Allies. 2) Prevent huge quantities of war material stockpiled in Russian ports from falling into German or Bolshevik hands. Since Russia surrendered, they no longer needed these supplies.

The allies feared the Bolsheviks would use this material against their own people or else the Germans would end up getting it. This had to be prevented at all costs. Britain and France had lost over 2 MILLION men in the war and the allies were not going to allow the Bolshevik surrender to Germany to jeopardize the outcome of the war. Some way had to be found to keep German troops in Russia. They took matters into their own hands.

The Allies landed in Russia at three locations: Siberia (Vladivostok) and North Russia - Archangel and Murmansk. **This was a multinational deployment.**

Britain took the lead, landing small forces in Murmansk in April 1918 with the bulk of the allied troops arriving in Murmansk and Archangel in August. Britain had 18,400 troops, the US 5,100, Canada and France about 1,000 each with small units from Australia and Serbia. All forces were under British command. This force immediately engaged the Bolshevik army and advanced rapidly. This advance played a definite role in keeping the bulk of German forces in Russia - the objective of the mission.



Bolshevik prisoners under the custody of US troops in Archangel.

After advancing hundreds of miles, lines were stretched too thin and the force went into defensive positions in October 1918. It's ironic that the Germans and Russians were at peace with each other, even though Germany still controlled parts of Russia and over 2 MILLION Russian troops had been killed by Germany during the war. Yet the Bolsheviks were eager to attack their former allies in the war.



American Engineers built many block houses for US troops in North Russia.

Thanks to the US Army, Germany was forced to surrender on November 11, 1918, and there was no longer a need to be in Russia. But due to the brutal Russian winter, troops could not be withdrawn til spring. The Bolsheviks launched winter counterattacks against the allies with heavy casualties on both sides. The allies tried to turn the war over to the anti-Bolshevik forces, but they were plagued by mutinies and desertion. The US withdrew its troops by the end of June 1919. Hundreds of Russians wept and said "God bless You" in Russian as the troop transports pulled away.(B) The British withdrew on Sep 20, 1919. About 17,000 Russian civilians - fearful of communism - were also evacuated on British ships.



The Canadians made heroic efforts to get their artillery where it was needed.

Allied forces began landing in Siberia in August 1918. Japan was to send 12,000 troops, while the US sent 8,000. There were also about 2,000 British, French, Italian and Chinese troops there. The US Army guarded the eastern part of the Trans Siberian Railroad so the Czechs and anti-Bolshevik forces could get armaments and supplies sent from the US. US forces only engaged in combat when attacked. Japan, intent on conquering parts of Siberia, sent in 72,000 troops. Only strong political pressure from the US prevented Japan from carrying out their imperialistic plans. By late September, the Czech Legion began to withdraw to Vladivostok when attacked by the much larger Bolshevik Army.(C) The Czechs no longer wanted to help the anti-Bolshevik forces because of their brutality against the Russian people. The Czechs just wanted out of Russia.

The US decided to withdraw its troops on Dec 1919 and the withdrawal was completed by April, 1920. British troops left in Nov 1919. The US and Britain evacuated about 60,000 Czech soldiers and civilians between February and September 1920. Japan refused to leave until 1922. The Far Eastern Republic, a communist buffer state controlled by the USSR, publicly thanked the US for its efforts to force Japan's withdrawal.(D)

All the challengers to the Bolsheviks failed because there was no good alternative to the Bolsheviks. The troops fighting the Bolsheviks did not know what they were fighting FOR, only that they were fighting against the Bolsheviks. The anti-Bolshevik forces often were more brutal to the Russian people than the Bolsheviks were. To the Russian people the Bolsheviks appeared to be the least evil of all the evil people vying for power. This assessment would prove fatal to MILLIONS of Russians in the years to come. There are NO checks and balances in a dictatorship.



Soldiers of the Czech Legion killed by Communist forces while fighting their way out of Russia.

For most Russians, foreign troops were not an issue - most never met one. The greatest worry for most Russians was not getting shot when one side or the other came looking for "volunteers" for their army.

In conclusion, if there had been no war in Europe, there would have been no intervention in Russia. Had the Bolsheviks (Communists) not quit the war, putting the outcome in mortal peril, there would have been no need to go into Russia. This intervention was caused by the actions of the Bolsheviks.

Many historians have wondered what history would have been like if the Western democracies had taken out the Bolsheviks in 1918 - which Winston Churchill urged the world to do. Would the world have been spared the 70 year sickness of communism? Would millions of farmers killed by Stalin been saved? Could the Cold War have been avoided? We will never know.

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