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US Intervention in Russia 1918-1920: the Forgotten Mutiny

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After Russia withdrew from WWI, the Allied nations worried about Germany relocating its eastern front forces to the western front. Britain and France both urged the United States to militarily intervene in Russia to reopen the eastern front. Although President Wilson initially ignored this proposition of the Allied nations, he reconsidered in 1918 and ordered troops to Russia. Many scholars have examined the US intervention in Russia and debated why Wilson decided to use American troops in Russia. The preoccupation among historians as to why these troops were sent to Russia has caused them to overlook the underlying reasons the intervention failed. Sparked by the alleged 1919 mutiny in North Russia, Wilson was forced to consider withdrawing troops from Russia, which eventually occurred in 1920. With the withdrawal of U.S. troops, the intervention in North Russia proved to be unsuccessful because Wilson gave British commanders control over U.S. troops, he refused to send reinforcements to north Russia, and he refused to define the ultimate goal of the expeditionary force, which ultimately crippled American troop morale.

US Intervention in Russia 1918-1920: the Forgotten Mutiny

Austin Lee

Senior Seminar: U.S. Foreign Relations 495

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President Ronald Reagan announced in 1984, "To the people of the Soviet Union, it's true that our governments have had serious differences. But our sons and daughters have never fought each other in war. And if we Americans have our way, they never will."¹ The president had ignored the history of the Polar Bear Mission where United States soldiers indeed fought and died on the battlefield in North Russia against the Soviets between the years 1918 and 1919. A small army of 5000 US soldiers landed in the ports of Archangel and Murmansk in fall of 1918. In a New York Times poll in 1985, only 14 percent of Americans knew that troops landed in Russia. These facts show that over the past 90 years, the Polar Bear mission has been forgotten and muddled in history.

The events that led up to the U.S. intervention in Russia started after the United States entered WWI. Shortly after the U.S. joined the war effort, Russia withdrew its forces because of the Russian civil war where the Bolsheviks claimed victory. After much negotiation, the Germans and Russians, signed the peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which gave Germany much land and raw resources. With German reinforcements now able to transfer from the eastern front to the western front, the Allies became concerned about their western front positions.² Britain and France concluded under these new conditions the Allies must establish an eastern front through a military intervention in Russia, and in June, the Supreme War Council recommended sending a joint allied force to Murmansk and Archangel Russia.³ The Allied commanders concluded that the ice free ports of Murmansk and Archangel held great strategic importance because of their location near the railroad system, which connected these cities to Petrograd.

¹ David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 26.

² Ibid, 15.

³ Leonid Strakhovsky, "The Allies and the Supreme Administration of the Northern Region August 2-October 7, 1918. A Page in the History of Allied Intervention in North Russia," *The American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies* 1 (1941): 102.

They believed that possession of these ports would enable Allied forces to reopen the eastern front.

While Britain and France asserted the necessity of an Allied intervention in Russia, President Wilson argued that the United States should not interfere in Russia. He proclaimed in his Fourteen Points Speech that all foreign governments should allow Russia an "opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy."⁴ Shortly thereafter, Wilson further expressed his opposition to a military intervention in Russia when he stated that the establishment of an eastern front "would be merely a method of making use of Russia, not a method of serving her."⁵ President Wilson believed that the Allies should allow a democratic Russian government to form. Paradoxically, although President Wilson fervently opposed American intervention in Russia, he later ordered an American expeditionary force of over four thousand men to land on the frontiers of Russia where they would engage the Soviet forces.

While Wilson intended to allow the Russian people to decide their own political future, his advisors persuaded him that the Germans had installed the Soviets into power and that the United States should in turn send an "experimental" probe of U.S. soldiers to Russia to spark a Russian uprising against the Soviets.⁶ This experimental probe proved to be unsuccessful because he gave British commanders control over U.S. troops, refused to send reinforcements to north Russia, and he refused to define the ultimate goal of the expeditionary force, which ultimately crippled American troop morale.

⁴ Woodrow Wilson, "Wilson Proclaims U.S War Aims: The Fourteen Points, 1918" in *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, ed. Dennis Merrill (Boston: Wadsworth, 2005), 32.

⁵ Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*, 202.

⁶ PRFA, 1918, Supplement on Russia, Vol. II, pp. 287-290.

Many scholars have looked into the apparent hypocrisy of Wilson's Fourteen Points address in light of his actions in North Russia, but they have not come to a consensus as to why Wilson ultimately ordered the intervention. George Kennan, in his 1958 piece *Decision to Intervene*, claimed that Wilson never really understood the events that took place in Russia.⁷ Moreover, Betty Unterberger in her work *Woodrow Wilson and the Bolsheviks "The Acid Test of Soviet-American Relations,"* argued that Wilson had no idea that American troops engaged Bolshevik forces and that he only agreed to send troops to North Russia as a way to appease coalition diplomacy.⁸

Kennan's and Unterberger work came under scrutiny when revisionists such as William Appleman claimed in his *American Intervention in Russia, 1917-1920* that anti- Bolshevik sentiment drove Wilson's decision for a military intervention.⁹ George Schild added support to this argument when he asserted that Wilsonian policy "alternated between ideological preconceptions and considerations of realpolitik."¹⁰ Further, David Foglesong wrote in *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* that Wilson's Puritan upbringing gave him a natural disdain for the Bolsheviks. He asserted that a "Wilsonian style of intervention" used clandestine measures in an attempt to cripple the Bolshevik government, which ultimately failed.¹¹ This "Wilsonian style of intervention" stemmed from Wilson's experience with the intervention in the Mexican revolutionary war, where he waged military and economic warfare against Mexico. Most scholars have concluded that George Kennan's groundwork about the intervention was important; however, revisionists

⁷ George Frost Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene: Soviet-American Relations 1917-1920*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁸ Betty Unterberger, "Woodrow Wilson and the Bolsheviks "The Acid Test of Soviet-American Relations," *Diplomatic History* 11 (Spring 1987):71.

⁹ David McFadden, "Did Wilson Have a Russia Policy?" *The Johns Hopkins University Press* 24, no. 4 (1996): 624.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*.

such as Appleman, Schild, and Foglesong concluded that Wilson did in fact create a policy on the intervention in North Russia, which now most historians accept.

While some historians believed that U.S. military intervention in North Russia went against Wilson's belief of self-determination, Wilson himself declared otherwise. Wilson approved the military intervention because he believed that the Bolsheviks power stemmed from German agents and that the Soviets did not represent the Russian people. Providing evidence that Germany meddled in Russian political affairs, Edgar Sisson, U.S Committee on Public Information officer stationed in Petrograd, Russia, informed President Wilson that "the present leaders of the Russian Bolshevik government were installed by Germany."¹² Ambassador Francis, the last ambassador to czarist Russia and a wealthy businessmen, lent support to these allegations when he wrote to the Secretary of State, "[I have seen] evidence that the Soviet government submits to German demands without protest and am almost convinced that Lenin and possibly Trotsky are pliable tools if not responsive German agents."¹³ General Poole further proclaimed in order to restore democracy in Russia the Soviet government should dissolve, which would enable allied forces to expel German influence in Russia.¹⁴ These reports helped convince President Wilson that the Bolshevik government was an unrepresentative government installed by a hostile power.¹⁵

In addition to claiming that the Germans nefariously imposed themselves into Russian politics, American political figures in Russia provided evidence to Wilson that the Russian people fervently hated the Soviets and yearned for a new government. Ambassador Francis

¹² *Ibid.*, 199.

¹³ Francis to Secretary of State, May 23, 1918, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia*, Pt. I:538.

¹⁴ Poole to Secretary of State, May 24, 1918, *FRUS, 1918, Russia*, I:540.

¹⁵ Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*, 190.

predicted that the Russian people would indeed support a U.S. intervention when he wrote to Washington that, "Information from all sources demonstrates dissatisfaction with the Soviets and indicates that [an] Allied intervention would be welcomed by [the] Russian people."¹⁶ Three days later, Francis reported that the head of the Greek Church in Russia had claimed that the church would support a new government revision of the Brest Treaty.¹⁷ With one of the larger Church organizations in Russia aligning against the Soviets, the conversation lent credence to the idea that the Soviet government did not represent the Russian people. These depictions of Russian sentiment helped Wilson conclude that an Allied intervention in Russia would lead to an anti-Bolshevik movement among the Russian people, and in turn, help facilitate self-determination in Russia. Secretary of State Robert Lansing stated this as the U.S. policy towards Russia:

In the view of the earnest desire of the people of the United States to befriend the Russian people and lend them all possible assistance in their struggle to reconstruct their nation upon principles of democracy and self-government.¹⁸

To the disdain of Lenin, an agreement between the local Murmansk Soviet government and the Allies on July 6, 1918 for an Allied expedition landing finally pushed Wilson to back a U.S. intervention in Russia.¹⁹ Lenin angrily telegraphed the Murmansk Soviets about the deal with England by stating, "[England's] direct intention is overthrowing the workmen's and peasants power."²⁰ Still being attacked by the Germans after the Brest-Litovsk treaty the Soviet Murmansk government replied, "It is all very well for you to talk that way, sitting there in

¹⁶ Francis to Secretary of State, May 21, 1918, *FRUS, 1918, Russia*, I:538.

¹⁷ Francis to Secretary of State, May 24, 1918, *FRUS, 1918, Russia*, I:540.

¹⁸ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 2, 23-33.2.

¹⁹ Halliday, *When Hell Froze Over*, 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

Moscow."²¹ Wilson believed that this agreement between the English and Murmansk government formally showed that the Russian people invited foreign troops in Russia. However, uncertain of how vigorous the Russian people would respond to an Allied intervention, Wilson commented that he initiated a limited "experimental" military operation.²² On March 18, Wilson declared:

The United States will avail itself of every opportunity to secure for Russia once more complete sovereignty and independence in her own affairs ... the whole heart of the people of the United States is with the people of Russia in the attempt to free themselves forever from autocratic government and become makers of their own fate.²³

President Wilson thoroughly believed it would help the Russian people by providing Allied troops to North Russia, and thus he was being consistent with the ideals that he proclaimed in his Fourteen-Point address or his March 18 speech.

Although the Murmansk Soviet government had invited the Allies to North Russia, the British nevertheless planned to overthrow the local Soviets upon their arrival and install a democratic government. The British government sent funds to Commander George E. Chaplin of the Russian Navy to organize a counter-revolution in Archangel.²⁴ The British hoped that on August 2, 1918 when British General Poole arrived in Archangel, an uprising against the current Soviet government would occur. After the Soviets heard of the British intent to plan an uprising, the Soviets evacuated the city and fled south along the Dvina River.²⁵

British efforts to overthrow the local Soviet government provided Chaplin with the opportunity to organize a replacement government. Chaplin promised the British he would select

²¹ Ibid.

²² PRFA, 1918, Supplement on Russia, Vol. II, pp. 287-290.

²³ Halliday, *When Hell Froze Over*, 23.

²⁴ Strakhovsky, "The Allies and the Supreme," 103.

²⁵ Ibid.

a democratic government that held openly pro-Allied views. Chaplin appointed a veteran socialist member of the "Union for the Regeneration of Russia" Nicholas V. Chaikovski. The new government quickly made a public announcement to the townspeople in Archangel, proclaiming, "The provisional government comes into existence under unique circumstances at a time when war is being waged against the Bolsheviks and Germans."²⁶ The proclamation asserted an anti Bolshevik sentiment, which fulfilled the British demands for the new government to hold pro-Allied views.

Although the Allies were satisfied with the Provisional Government's anti-Bolshevik views, problems with the government occurred before the United States expeditionary force arrived in North Russia. These problems centered on Chaikovski and his leadership. The Allied commanders complained that Chaikovski refused to, "realize that his government very existence depended upon military support of the Allies."²⁷ In addition to Chaikovski's arrogant style of governance, the Allied governments worried that most of the provisional government members were socialists.²⁸ This ideological conflict then transformed into disputes over which group held ultimate authority between the Allied commanders and the provisional government. For example, the issuing of red flags across Archangel drew stern criticism from the Allied commanders. General Poole wrote to Chaikovski about removing the red flags; however, Chaikovski replied explaining why he used red flags. General Poole sternly replied, "I have the honor to inform you that the city of Archangel as well as the whole province are at present under martial law... Therefore I have given orders to the military not to permit any display of red flags

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 109.

²⁸ Ibid., 106

in Archangel."²⁹ Through these letters, General Poole asserted his role as the chief commander of the Allied forces in Archangel and demonstrated his power was greater than Chaikovski.

Allied suspicions about Chakiovksi prompted them to diminish his role as the head of the provisional government. Ambassador Francis commented, "The president [Chakiovksi] is a theorist, if not a dreamer."³⁰ This pointed out that Chakiovksi did not hold pragmatist views about the problems his government faced. In turn, the Allies appointed a military governor to reduce the role of Chakiovksi to gain hold of the situation.³¹ The British government went a step further when it attempted a coup; however, the coup failed and Chakiovksi remained in power.³²

Upon the arrival of American troops, Chaikovksi remained in power, and the troops received a warm reception. A colonel of the U.S. Army J.A Ruggles commented, "The Bolshevik forces had fled from Archangel and the populace was waiting for us."³³ A U.S. naval captain noted upon arrival that the populace "simply went wild with joy to an extent almost beyond imagination."³⁴ In addition, C.T. Williams, Deputy Commissioner of the Red Cross, commented that peasants in North Russia generally viewed President Wilson favorably. The U.S. troop's positive relations with the Russians would prove to be short lived after military operations against the Bolsheviks commenced.

The positive feeling of American troops after their landing in North Russia quickly dissipated after Colonel George E. Stewart received orders from Washington to report to British

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 107.

³² Ibid.

³³ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 2, 23-33.6.

³⁴ Halliday, *When Hell Froze Over*, 38.

General Poole.³⁵ President Wilson allowed the supreme war council to declare that British commanders would command the northern Russian expeditionary force. President Wilson believed that if the British commanded the troops, his political accountability in the expedition could be minimized. This political decision led the U.S. troops and commanders to become quickly discouraged by the situation in Russia after the realization that the British commanded the entire North Russian Expeditionary Force. American Captain Martin commented that the "American troops in Russia had been loaned to the British for a certain period of time." He further stated that the day the American troops left Russia they would gain their American freedoms back.³⁶ In the historical account of the Polar Mission, Lieutenant Lewis Janis noted that coupled with the frustration that the British General had overall command of the expeditionary force, a general belief among the American troops was that, "Many of the British officers were decorated with insignia of high rank but drew pay of low rank. It was done over and over again to give the British officer ranking authority over the American officers."³⁷ This showed the general sentiment concerning British officers commanding American officers did not settle well with American troops.

In addition to U.S. commanders reporting to British commanders, the British ordered the American troops to the frontlines where the brunt of the battles occurred, which created ill feelings towards the British. C.T. Williams, reported, "The British high command has distributed the Allied Forces at nearly all the positions in which fighting with the Bolsheviks is likely to

³⁵ Ibid., 45.

³⁶ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 2, 23-36.1.

³⁷ Jahns, *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolshevik Campaigning in North Russia 1918-1919*, 17.

occur."³⁸ He portrayed the British command as putting American troops in the fiercest battles against the Bolsheviks instead of the British, creating harsh resentment among the American troops. A soldier from the Ambulance Company, Waggoner Weimiester, stated, "The British, we all hated, and I mean everybody."³⁹ Weimiester showed that American troops resented the British. This resentment would create a low morale amongst the U.S. troops as they anguished over the losses of American soldiers under British command.

In addition to the belief that American troops fought most of the battles against the Bolsheviks, many American troops thought the British commanders inefficiently managed the troops. According to Williams, "The allied forces in North Russia have been seriously mismanaged because of the inefficiency of the British."⁴⁰ Further, Colonel Ruggles reported, "several of these British officers have been grossly inefficient."⁴¹ Lieutenant Mead worried that the British disregarded the safety of American troops. He commented:

Allied intelligence was certain a larger force lurked nearby in the vast Arctic forest, and a strong attack was expected. In spite of this knowledge, British command had ordered A Company, without reinforcements, to hold the sector at all cost.⁴²

Ruggles concluded that the British leadership created "friction" between the U.S troops and the British. This mismanagement of the troops created harsh tensions amongst the Allied forces and ultimately affected U.S. troop morale.

The friction between American troops and British commanders extended to a national level. Although President Wilson "gambled" that he could limit the expeditionary force to a

³⁸ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.1.

³⁹ *Quartered in Hell*, 181.

⁴⁰ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Quartered in Hell*, 181.

supportive role until the anti-Bolshevik forces gathered around the Allied "nucleus,"⁴³ this wager failed when the British began to pursue their own objectives in North Russia. British leaders planned to expand their military expedition to the southeast in order to connect the Czechoslovakian forces to North Russia.⁴⁴ David Foglesong asserted through his research that President Wilson "exploded" with anger when he learned that the Allied forces had been sent southern the Ural Mountains.⁴⁵ American General Tasker Bliss believed that the British planned for a more aggressive intervention.⁴⁶ Although President Wilson gambled wrong about British policy in North Russia, he refused to withdraw American troops because of the fear that he would appear to alienate his allies during the war.⁴⁷

In addition to the British offensive strategy in Russia disturbing President Wilson, American troops looked upon the British strategy with great skepticism. The U.S. troops thought President Wilson sent them to take a defensive position in Archangel and secure munitions supplies under direct threat from German forces. However, after marching 200 miles south of Archangel, Ruggles commented, "[U.S. troops] believe that they are being used to further selfish designs of England upon Russian territory and resources."⁴⁸ American soldiers believed that the British used the mask of creating an eastern front in order to pursue imperialistic goals. Weimeister commented in his diary, "There were no supplies. Actually the British wanted to occupy and conquer the state of North Russia in order to obtain the pine from the forests."⁴⁹ These comments reflected the great disdain U.S. troops held for the British leadership in North

⁴³ Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*, 209.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁷ Betty Unterberger, "Woodrow Wilson and the Bolsheviks "The Acid Test of Soviet-American Relations," *Diplomatic History* 11 (Spring 1987):71.

⁴⁸ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.1.

⁴⁹ *Quartered in Hell*, 179.

Russia. The skepticism of U.S. troops prompted Ruggles to fear that U.S. troops might refuse to obey their British commanders. He opined, "At the time grave doubts were expressed by many of our officers that orders for aggressive operations would be obeyed."⁵⁰

The U.S. expeditionary force began to doubt if fighting the Bolsheviks really helped the war effort against Germany. Although great doubt rippled through the American troops, British General Poole devised an aggressive strategy to deploy Allied forces down south through the Trans Siberian railroad. He assumed the Red Army comprised of starving peasants and the North Russian people "would rally behind the Allies."⁵¹ With these assumptions, he hoped the Russians in Archangel and Murmansk would create a massive volunteer army led by the new provisional government. This volunteer army would bolster the relatively small Allied in Russia. However realities on the ground proved to contradict General Poole's assumptions. In actuality, the Red Army resisted Allied forces instead of deserting, the North Russian people did rise en masse against the Bolsheviks, and the Allied force was too small to push its forces to Petrograd without American reinforcements. The British commander reluctantly retreated back to Archangel and Murmansk. This provided for a long winter as American troops wondered why they were fighting the Bolsheviks instead of the Germans, and President Wilson's had refused to send appropriate reinforcements.

The British's initial offensive strategy proved to be successful against the unorganized and ill equipped Soviet army. A United States intelligence report revealed that food shortages and starvation threatened the entire Soviet Union.⁵² This made U.S. officials to believe that in

⁵⁰ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.1.

⁵¹ Halliday, *When Hell Froze Over*, 39.

⁵² U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.1.

Petrograd the people started to turn anti-Bolshevik.⁵³ Allied officials observed the food rations of the Soviet army were grossly inferior to the Allied rations.⁵⁴ These reports suggested to the Allied commanders that the expeditionary force could take advantage of the dire situation in Russia and collapse the Soviet government.

The Soviet army also faced shortages in necessary raw materials such as coal, which ultimately crippled the mobility of the Red Army. An extract from the Bolshevik Press stated, "The Riga Orlov Railway has stopped all goods traffic owing to shortage of coal."⁵⁵ Furthermore, in densely populated Petrograd, trains stopped running due to coal shortages and many of the towns lost electricity.⁵⁶ The frequent stoppages in the railway system led the Allies to conclude that movement of Soviet reinforcements to the front would be difficult to accomplish. Moreover, with the lack of raw materials the Soviet Union army itself faced low morale problems.⁵⁷ Allied intelligence confirmed that low amounts of essential resources pushed the Soviet army to the cusp of defeat. A U.S. intelligence report stated, "The Bolsheviks in Petrograd are showing signs of nervousness. The Obukhov, Liteyney, Troitsky, and Nicolai bridges have been mined."⁵⁸ This showed that the Soviets expected the Allied offensive to reach Petrograd as they prepared for a last defensive stand.

While the Allied offensive strategy appeared to have great success, the momentum of Poole's campaign stopped abruptly after the realization that there would not be enough troops to support an Allied offensive down to Petrograd. Captain H.S. Martin of the United States Army

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-23.1.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

later argued, "I believed then and believe now that a strong Allied assistance in North Russia could have saved the entire situation... Our force was too small."⁵⁹ The expeditionary force, which Wilson sent as an "experimental" force, proved too small for an aggressive operation against the Bolsheviks.

Although Wilson hoped that the Russian populace would gallantly support the small expeditionary force, and fight the Bolsheviks, no massive volunteer Russian army evolved. The lack of local populous support ultimately forced the Allied troops to take a defensive stand against the struggling Soviets. A volunteer army did emerge after the expeditionary force landed in Russia, it was severely disorganized and suffered major defections.⁶⁰ General Stewart commented that anti-communist Russian forces, "mutinied on two occasions and are generally credited with being unreliable and have little sympathy with the allies."⁶¹ Captain Moore further injected that the Russian troops were "liabilities" to the Allied effort. In effect, most of the Allied commanders held suspicious views about the Russian soldiers because they worried that they held Bolshevik views. After several field reports reached Newton Baker, Secretary of War, the United States government declared on September 26 that, "no gathering of any effective forces by the Russians is to be hoped for."⁶² After this date President Wilson would not send any reinforcements for the cause of an Allied offensive. This military decision led to the reorganization of Soviet forces and severely affected the morale of the United States troops.

⁵⁹ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 2, 23-33.2.

⁶² *Ibid.*

After the British commanders abandoned the offensive in North Russia, they adopted a defensive position outside of Archangel and Murmansk which allowed the Soviets to re-group gain strength and set up punishing long ranged artillery attacks on Allied positions.

The Bolsheviks used the foreign intervention as a propaganda tool to rally the Russian people to its cause. C.T. Williams of the American Red Cross noted, "The presence of the Allied Expedition in North Russia constitutes one of the strongest pillars of the Bolshevik government."⁶³ The Soviets used the foreign intervention as a tool to facilitate anger of the Russian people against the Allied presence. For example, a leaflet handed out by the Soviets labeled "Antanta" depicted Uncle Sam and British capitalists holding leashes of anti-Bolshevik leaders.⁶⁴ This propaganda for the Soviets proved successful, as the Soviet army grew stronger. A U.S. military intelligence summary stated, "Within the last two months the whole Bolshevik forces have been re-organized and a serious attempt is being made to create a large, well-disciplined army on a European model."⁶⁵ Before long, the strengthened Soviet Army mounted an offensive against the Allies. An Allied intelligence report worriedly stated, "[the] enemy is systematically accumulating troops on all fronts with the view of a general offensive before the thaw."⁶⁶ Furthermore, the reinvigorated Soviet army bombarded Allied positions with long ranged artillery.⁶⁷

Throughout late 1918 and early 1919, Allied officials pleaded with President Wilson to send reinforcements to Russia to counter the new Bolshevik offensive. The troops received

⁶³ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.1.

⁶⁴ Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*, 142.

⁶⁵ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-23.1.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

constant bombardments of artillery from the Soviets and faced a very cold winter. The majority of American troops stayed on the front lines and did not filter back to Archangel. General Stewart sent an urgent letter to the Secretary of War stating, "The enemy are becoming more numerous on all fronts and are more active. The allied command is small and we have no reserves."⁶⁸ Wilson's administration did not respond to the calls for reinforcements. Further pleas by U.S military officials to the White House administration stated that knowledge of reinforcements would "improve the morale of troops after their long winter."⁶⁹ Moreover, the British embassy in Russia made "urgent" appeals to the state department for reinforcements.⁷⁰ While the military officers of the Allied forces requested reinforcements, President Wilson maintained that the force should remain small in order to allow the Russian people to decide their own political fate. While President Wilson remained steadfast in his determination to keep the American Expedition Force small, Major Francis Riggs urged him to send reinforcements that would allow, "General Poole to move to more populous regions where he could secure volunteers."⁷¹ His refusal to heed this message depicted the ultimate shortcoming of Wilson's policy of no reinforcements. With Wilson refusing to send more troops, it paralyzed any effort to rally the Russian people against the Bolsheviks.

On November 11, 1918, the Germans surrendered to the Allies, however, the battle against the Bolsheviks continued. With American troops coming home from the western front, and the American Expeditionary force continuing to fight against the Bolsheviks an anxious U.S. army waited to hear its official objective in Russia. Captain H.S Martin wrote:

⁶⁸ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 2, 23-33.2.

⁶⁹ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.1.

⁷⁰ The British embassy to the department of state, 1918, *FRUS, 1918, Russia*, I:469.

⁷¹ Quoted in Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*, 209.

They [U.S. troops] stated that they were drafted to fight Germany, not the Bolsheviks. That they had been sent here to guard supplies and not carry on aggressive warfare; that after the signing of the Armistice with Germany their job was finished and if the government wanted them to stay on and fight Bolshevism it should say so and announce some definite policy regarding Russia.⁷²

American troops expected that President Wilson would explain why they still were fighting in North Russia, but to their dismay President Wilson fervently expressed to the press that the United States was not at war with the Bolsheviks.⁷³ Captain Ruggles wrote to General Pershing, "The morale of our troop has been low since the signing of the armistice with Germany. The men and some of the officers seem unable to understand why they should be kept in Russia after fighting has stopped with Germany."⁷⁴ These reports and letters depicted the American troop's weariness of fighting Russia. With the question of why they fought in Russia, American troop morale rapidly declined.

After the signing of the Armistice, Chicago and Detroit press, home to most members of American Expeditionary force, depicted a dire situation in North Russia to their readers. The majority of the sources used by the newspapers came from censored letters sent from the soldiers. Usually, the newspapers published the exact letters in full.⁷⁵ Moreover, sometimes the journalist would interpret the letters and even exaggerate the harsh conditions. The newspapers often produced political caricatures of the situation in North Russia. For example, after reports that Allied forces were outnumbered six to one in some battles, the *Chicago Tribune* depicted a large bear, symbolizing the Soviets, towering over a single American soldier.⁷⁶ In addition, the newspapers started to question why American troops were still fighting in Russia if the war was

⁷² U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.1.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

over. For instance, the Chicago Tribune published a cartoon that depicted two American soldiers in Archangel asking each other, "Say when did we declare war on Russia?"⁷⁷ Furthermore, an editorial in the Chicago Tribune commented, "our men are dying for a cause, the purpose of which they are no more certain than we in America. America has not declared war on Russia, but Americans are killing Russians or are being killed by them."⁷⁸ These editorials showed the American people that President Wilson did not have a policy in North Russia and that the American troops faced an enemy that outnumbered them.

After the U.S. troops read some of the national papers, it had a significant impact on the American troop's morale. American troops became quickly discouraged about the object of their mission. Many times newspapers received their information from Soviet propaganda, which in turn predicted an ominous future for American troops. In the *History of the American Expeditionary Force*, written by three members of the American expedition, they recalled that:

When a man's own home paper printed the same story [as Bolshevik propaganda] of the million men advancing on Archangel with bloody bayonets fixed, and told the horrible hardships the soldiers endured... many of them were indeed severe hardships although most of the news stories were overdrawn and untruthful... the doughboy's spirit was depressed.⁷⁹

The American newspaper stories eventually circulated in Archangel, which ultimately hurt American troop morale. After several months in battle against the Bolsheviks and reports from papers of their ultimate demise, the United States troops faced questions of how long before their positions would be overrun.

⁷⁷ Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*, 141.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁷⁹ Joel Moore, Harry Mead and Lewis Jahns, *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviks* (Detroit: The Polar Bear Publishing Co., 1920), 224.

With news coverage painting an increasingly negative picture of the Expeditionary forces predicament, the local public the Midwest started to pressure their congressional representatives to bring their boys back home, which led to a bill that failed to withdraw the troops from North Russia. Republican house representative from Michigan J.M.C Smith read to the congress about his constituents appeal to bring the troops back home.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Republican Senator Hiram Johnson of California took the lead to push for the return of the troops. Johnson sat on the Senate Armed Forces committee and voted against declaring war on Germany. The senator pushed the Secretary of State to reveal the actual objectives in Russia through a resolution, which ultimately failed. Moreover, he argued on the Senate floor that the United States had not declared war on Russia. Republican Senator Henry Lodge joined the effort for the call of the withdrawal of American troops. He argued that the President did not send enough troops to North Russia at the start and now that Germany surrendered, American troops should be brought home. On February 14, the Senate voted on the bill S.R. 444 to withdraw American troops. However, the bill voted to a tie and the Vice President expectedly voted against the bill. The vote for the bill remained along party lines, where the Democrats backed the President and the Republicans voted to withdraw the troops.

After the Senate failed to pass the resolution to withdraw United States troops from North Russia, American troops morale continued to decline which led to the alleged mutiny. On March 30, 1919, a United States Sergeant ordered four men to load their sleds and move to the front. American Lieutenant May reported that the men refused to load their sleds and Captain Horatio Winslow "immediately" called a meeting of the men.⁸¹ Colonel Stewart met the men at the local

⁸⁰ Douglas Habib, "Playing Into the Hands of Isolationists: Woodrow Wilson's Russian Policy, 1918-1920" (Master's thesis, San Jose State University, 1995), 31.

⁸¹ *Quartered in Hell*, 177.

Y.M.C.A and talked to the soldiers. According to Lieutenant May, the soldiers complained that, "They had never been supplied with an answer as to why they were there, but the Reds were trying to push them into the White Sea and that they were fighting for their lives."⁸² After an extended conversation, the men eventually agreed to move to the front, and Colonel Stewart noted that he did not take any disciplinary action against any of the soldiers.⁸³ While the event seemed small and insignificant at the time, the official report to the Secretary of War was that a mutiny had occurred in Archangel. This report would lead to a whirlwind of speculation among the press and further the pressure on President Wilson to withdraw the United States troops.

After receiving reports from the War Department that a mutiny had occurred, the papers published alarming accounts of the incident that created a backlash against the President's policy in North Russia. On April 11, the *Washington Post* headline read, "U.S. TROOPS MUTINY ON ARCHANGEL FRONT."⁸⁴ This article noted that four soldiers had refused to go to the front and predicted that a "general mutiny" would occur if the troops were not withdrawn immediately.⁸⁵ *The Washington Post* claimed that four men started the mutiny while another 250 were involved.⁸⁶ The article depicted harsh conditions for United States soldiers, and further questioned why the troops still fought in Russia after the armistice. The *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* likewise overstated the significance of the event.

On the following day, the newspapers thrashed President Wilson for his policy in North Russia. The editorials depicted families pleading in telegrams to Wilson to "immediately"

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Moore *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviks*, 226.

⁸⁴ U.S. Troops Mutiny On Archangel Front, *Washington Post*, April 11, 1919.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid

withdraw American troops.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the papers accused the British of censoring the soldiers' letters to home in order to conceal the harsh conditions in Russia.⁸⁸ Moreover, the paper criticized President Wilson for sending inadequate forces into Russia, and claimed that Wilson had sent the American troops into a hopeless situation. These reports applied pressure on President Wilson to withdraw the troops.

In response to the whirlwind of the press reports, Senator Johnson renewed his appeal to withdraw the troops in order to gain political momentum against the League of Nations. Wilson believed that collective security, managed by such a league, was the key to a lasting postwar peace. Republican Senator Johnson stated his resentment against the British authority over American troops to build his argument against a League of Nations. The *Washington Post* quoted Johnson saying American troops faced, "harshness" from their British commanders. Moreover, Johnson titled his response for an American withdrawal, "Let's be Americans Again."⁸⁹ Johnson stated that the administration's response about the status of American troops in North Russia was, "in the hands of the allied council in Europe."⁹⁰ In addition, he argued that a proxy League of Nations already existed with the allied council. Finally, Johnson asserted that if the United States joined the League of Nations, the U.S. would be drawn into conflicts like the one in Russia without the assent of the American people:

This allied council is nothing but the existing league of nations. If the American people desire war, let it be declared, and if declared by Congress, the soldiers sent to fight would amply supported, but under the orders of foreign nations Americans wage war without declaration by the American Congress or the consent of the American people.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Letters from Archangel Front Tell How Troops There Had to Suffer, *Washington Post*, April 12, 1919.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ U.S. Troops Mutiny on Archangel Front, *Washington Post*, April 11, 1919.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Senator Johnson used the American people's anger about the Allied war effort in North Russia to galvanize resistance to American membership in a League of Nations. Coupled with the firestorm of anti-intervention reporting done by the media, Senator Johnson gave a focused voice for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. In turn, the political backlash toward the President forced his administration to consider ordering an immediate withdrawal.

U.S. Army brigadier General Wild Richardson arrived in Archangel on April 17, and after evaluating the circumstances in Russia, he advised the War Department to withdraw all American troops as quickly as possible. He believed that the American troops faced severe fatigue due to the lack of reinforcements.⁹² After his recommendation, American troops finally left the North Russian hell and returned home. In order to replace the 5000 American troops, British reserves arrived in Archangel. Soon thereafter, the Bolsheviks overran their positions and retook Murmansk and Archangel.

Now penned the "Polar Bears," troops arrived back home and reported that the press vastly over exaggerated the mutiny. A soldier from Company I told the *NY Times*, "We kicked like hell, but we didn't mutiny."⁹³ The press confirmed that indeed no mutiny had occurred, but the reports about the harsh British commanders and the troops yearning for an explanation of why they fought in Russia were completely accurate. The troops ultimately felt that the administration undermined their mission by limiting the amount of American troops in North Russia and by failing to define their mission.

In conclusion, Wilson hoped that a small American expeditionary force that landed in North Russia would spark a Russian revolt against the Soviets, whom he believed had been

⁹² U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919," M 924, Roll 1, 23-11.4.

⁹³ Deny American Unit Mutinied in Russia, *New York Times*, June 16, 1919.

installed into power by Germany. This ultimately failed because the British command led the expeditionary force on an offensive campaign in Russia. This offensive proved to be very successful, however, because Wilson refused to send more troops to Russia, the offensive operations ceased and the Soviets were able to regroup.

After the surrender of Germany, Wilson refused to signal a U.S. policy in Russia. The American public began to wonder why American troops still fought on foreign soil. In turn, the public pressured congress to order the President to withdraw U.S. troops. While this failed, it gave the troops great anxiety as to why they were fighting, which ultimately led to the alleged mutiny. The press spread the rumor that an alleged mutiny had occurred in North Russia. Senator Johnson and the American public urged President Wilson to withdraw the expeditionary force immediately. After immense pressure from the public and commanders on the ground, Wilson ordered the withdrawal of United States forces from Russia, which allowed the Soviets to defeat the allies resulting in the fall of Murmansk and Archangel.

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