OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR

U S Intervention into Russia 1918-20

Ross L Wilson
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Clausewitz described war as fighting, "a trial of moral and physical forces through the medium of the latter" and "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will " But not all military activity is fighting and military forces are not always employed in armed combat. We now have a term for such military activity operations other than war These operations have characteristics and present issues in ways that challenge the precepts of 19th and early 20th century military theorists -- and 1994 leaders An interesting example is the U S intervention in Russia after the November 1917 Bolshevik coup d'etat This operation, the first of its kind by the United States outside the Western Hemisphere, presented a number of problems that have recurred in operations other than war mounted more recently: poorly designed strategy without a clear end point, poor comprehension of the purpose and nature of the U S. deployment, inadequate knowledge of the local situation, inadequate cooperation and coordination between the State and War/Defense Departments in Washington and overseas, and bad alliance politics. This paper, which does not pretend to look comprehensively at America's policy toward Russia during this period, seeks to illuminate these and other issues that played out in this early operation other than war [1]

Setting

In early 1918, Britain and France began pressing the Untied States to contribute forces to a combined allied military expedition to northern Russia and Siberia The Europeans had complex motives, but their strategy had two broad elements (1) to prevent war materiel supplied earlier by the allies to Russia from falling into German hands and (2) to influence political developments within Russia toward securing some combination of its re-entry into the war on the Eastern front, restoration of Czarist rule, and/or defeat of the Bolsheviks Looking toward the post-war world, they wanted a friendly Russia that would help contain Germany and maintain the European balance of

power, and to blunt the subversive influence the Bolsheviks represented toward their own publics Japan, among those engaged in Siberia, also sought influence and/or territory in the Russian Far East

President Wilson distrusted allied intentions in Russia He saw their activities as the worst sort of intervention in Russian affairs and an affront to the self-determination he brought America into the war to advance The President's remarks to allied leaders that "there was certainly a latent force behind Bolshevism which attracted as much sympathy as its more brutal aspects caused general disgust" [2] were indicative of the ambivalence of his feelings toward the Bolsheviks While accepting the utility of an Eastern front, Wilson wanted to concentrate U S forces where they would do the most good the fastest -- in France on the Western front. Secretary of State Lansing urged U S participation in the intervention in the interests of alliance politics and as a way to check allied intentions and activities. Ultimately, President Wilson agreed to provide two limited contingents, overruling the objections of Secretary of War Baker and Army Chief of Staff March One joined an allied expeditionary force on the Kola Peninsula and the other deployed to Siberia to join multinational forces there

Analyzing the Mission: Policy Based on False Premises

The U S. intervention into Russia began with a statement of policy, but no real strategy A July 17, 1918 "aide memoire" from Secretary Lansing to the allied ambassadors [3] stated that U S forces would (1) seek to guard military stores from German capture, (2) facilitate the evacuation of the Czechoslovak Legion to Vladivostok and the Western front, and (3) help "make it safe for Russian forces to come together in organized bodies" and "steady any efforts at self-government or self-defense in which the Russians themselves may be willing to accept assitance" -- all in the context of (4) non-

intervention in Russia's internal affairs How non-intervention would be reconciled with the third objective was not clear The aide memoire emphasized that the U S and overall allied effort should be limited, a larger effort would "add to the present sad confusion in Russia [and] be of no advantage in the prosecution of our main design, to win the war against Germany " (When, after the German surrender, the British tried to expand the allied force, the President said "it would be fatal to be led further into Russian chaos." [4]) Secretary Baker reports that President Wilson regarded U S involvement as a way to moderate European and Japanese actions and ambitions in Russia, though how was unclear also [5] The aide memoire, worked personally by President Wilson, was also given as policy guidance to Major General Graves, commander of the 7000-man U S contingent in Siberia, as well as to his counterpart in northern Russia, Colonel Stewart, and U S. diplomatic missions in Russia It was the only real policy guidance Graves and the military received

The aide memoire was based on false premises and was a poor basis for the deployment of U S forces to Russia. First, the only threat to the military supplies came from parties involved in Russia's civil war, not Germans, and protecting those supplies served mainly to help the anti-Bolsheviks, who were generally better provisioned and had a tendency to take the supplies themselves (with European and Japanese acquiescence) This, of course, amounted to the intervention against the Bolsheviks the President eschewed. Second, the Czechoslovak Legion in fact was, at the behest of the Western powers (including the U S State Department), deeply involved in internal Russian affairs, controlled both Vladivostok and long stretches of the Trans-Siberian Railway and adjacent cities, and turned out to be relatively well provisioned These two policy objectives were overtaken by the November 1918 armistice and subsequent events, but no new policy/mission statement was ever conveyed to General Graves Finally, the aide memoire was useless as a guide for Graves in the maelstrom of civil war He could deduce little as

to his military objectives and mission other than to go to Russia It gave him no guidance on whom to deal with and how to behave toward the factions competing for power in Russia Its language regarding Russian self-government was so vague that U S interventionists could and did use it to justify a strongly pro-Kolchak policy, but so wanting that nothing required Graves to act on behalf of Kolchak even when U S policy shifted to support the White leader In short, it inadequately defined U S interests and how to advance them

Instead of agreeing on the kind of war on which they are embarking as "the first, supreme [and] most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make" as Clausewitz would have them, Washington sent Graves off without a clue as to what he should do and failed to follow up when events rendered even the limited guidance it provided obsolete Clausewitz was stood on his head Instead of policy being "the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument," military presence was the policy Strategy was in a fog. The means for achieving the miazma of ends postulated as U S policy on Russia -- establishing a military presence in Russia -- became the end The ways for utilizing those means were essentially left to Graves and Stewart to figure out

Course of Action

For all the foreign participants, this was an engagement like none that came before During the Napoleonic era, armies had engaged in interference in the purely internal affairs of other countries, but this was generally for the purpose of gaining power and hegemony over some place or people Governments had meddled within their empires, hoped-for empires and spheres of influence (e g , France during the American War of Independence, the United States in Latin America, many countries in China) But perhaps never had many governments colluded through the mechanism of a military operation other than war

so broadly in the internal affairs of a major European power whose government and society had almost completely broken down Each participant, not least the United States, groped for a policy and over strategy, objectives, and tactics That groping resounded particularly loudly in the West after the implications of a failed intervention -- a hostile Soviet Russia -- became clear

Although U.S policy on Russia and the limits to our intervention were spelled out, neither the President nor his policy advisors gave much thought as to specific military objectives or courses of action -- in short, what this force would do Operations other than war do not, of course, involve battles or even indirect actions of the type described by Jomini, Clausewitz, Sun Tzu and other theorists who discuss classic war where troops deploy and usually fight. In engagements short of war, political and symbolic issues weigh more heavily than purely military factors. Presence is often the chief aim -- presence that may, by passive or active measures, influence the course of events and/or make contributions on the margins of those events, e.g , humanitarian aid to the civilian population

General Graves arrived in Siberia in September 1918 aware that his forces would not have as their objective the destruction of any army, the seizure of any territory, or the overthrow of any established government Though Graves and the War Department did not see it in this way, the main role of these forces would be political, a demonstration that the United States had a stake in the resolution of Russia's domestic political crisis General Graves deployed U S forces along the sector of the Trans-Siberian Railway assigned to the United States (other foreign troops had other sectors) They were to guard the railway, adjacent cities, and critical supply depots with the purpose of keeping the railway in operation In Vladivostok and other cities, they guarded military supply depots, as well Finding a center of gravity on which to focus support of democracy

proved difficult Fundamentally it ran directly counter the aide memoire's injunction against getting directly involved -- so Graves basically ignored this instruction Since only Congress could declare war and had not done so, Graves believed his forces could not be deployed in hostile military action for or against any belligerent in Russia, especially in the absence of a direct order from President Wilson to do so

The injunction of Clausewitz to display secrecy, speed, and cunning in military operations seemed inappropriate, the whole point was to be a visible, above board presence But it was less clear how to handle challenges to U S control of the Trans-Siberian Railway, react to terrible atrocities by Russian factions on the civilian population, and respond to gross allied interference in the struggle for power in Russia. Handling the gap between reality on the ground and stated U S. purposes for being there was among General Graves' greatest challenges He got little help from Washington and his Commander-in-Chief.

Sizing up the Situation. (Not) Knowing the Enemy

Clausewitz would include knowing the enemy in the appraisal that statesman and military leader should make on the kind of war to fight Sun Tzu emphasizes the importance of knowing the enemy and oneself for success in a military operation Experience in dealing with similar situations is Clausewitz's "lubricant" for overcoming the friction of war These points seem no less true for an operation other than war

In sizing up Russia, the United States was not successful General Graves knew little of Russia He described his predicament

> "I have often thought it was unfortunate I did not know more of the conditions in Siberia than I did when I was pitch-forked into the melee at

> Vladivostok At other times, I have thought that ignorance was not only bliss in such a situation, but was advisable " [6]

His understanding of the geostrategic context was limited and he could barely assess enemies, friends and local restrictions on his operations because he arrived almost totally ignorant of them Graves also admitted he had little experience in international affairs In Siberia, each national unit operated independently and had to coordinate its activities closely with the others Graves quickly alienated most of his allied counterparts -- as much due to his handling of day-to-day issues and problems with them as to a U S policy the allies disliked (Colonel Stewart was no better and his relations with the British commander of the allied expeditionary force in northern Russia were so bad they required consideration on the margins of the Paris Peace Conference before Stewart's first year in Russia was out.) Although Graves learned quickly and by the end understood the Whites better than U S diplomats, surely the United States would have been better served by someone knowledgeable of Russia and with some experience in foreign affairs Aside from the fact that the Army probably had few (if any) such generals in mid-1918 who were not en route to France, Army Chief of Staff March presumably selected Graves for this operation based on a reputation for sound judgment and circumspection earned during his several years service as March's principal aide. On both counts, Graves bore out March's judgment, but this did not rebound to the success of U S policy

On the civilian side, matters were scarcely better State Department reporting from diplomats posted in Vladivostok, Irkutsk, Samara, Moscow, and elsewhere was less than objective Graves believes that their ties to officials and friends in the Czarist regime made these diplomats strongly anti-Bolshevik and willing to overlook (and not report on) shortcomings of Kolchak and other Whites It is certainly true that they (a) operated with little information virtually all of which was second or third hand and (b) understood what Bolshevism meant and therefore viewed the alternative Whites more positively than did

the somewhat naive and idealistic Graves Leaving aside the issue of who was right, clearly the United States could have been better served had the key players' understanding of the situation been better

Poor State/War Coordination

Clausewitz didn't put it in these terms, but surely believed that effective government policy requires unity of policy in war, as well as in peace (Perhaps the "bureaucratic politics" of his day was sufficiently simple that the problem of interagency coordination and disunity of policy arose less frequently) This ranks high among the problems the U.S. intervention faced As noted above, reporting to Washington was uncoordinated and inconsistent Graves' reporting was extremely negative on the prospects of Kolchak and other Whites against the Red Army, focused on the Whites' gross abuse of the civilian population and anti-democratic/Czarist tendencies, and was hostile regarding allied ambitions Diplomatic reporting, by contrast, extolled Kolchak, played down the Whites' failings, and stressed unity with the allies The State Department's solution to this disparity was to send Graves a message advising that its representatives were to be the sole source of information on events in Russia and that his reports would be disregarded! [7]

Worse than the intelligence gap was the policy gap Graves took the State Department aide memoire as gospel and refused to waver from his strict construction of it -- i e , non-interference in Russia's internal affairs -- to the exclusion of that document's third point on support of Russian self-government State Department representatives, drawing upon instructions from Secretaries of State Lansing and Colby, emphasized point three, ultimately abandoned non-intervention to support Kolchak, and pressed Graves to do so, too This led Graves to request clarification from Washington When State and

War disagreed, the issue was referred to the President Preoccupied at the Paris Peace Conference, the President never replied Chief of Staff March informed Graves that, in the absence of a change of policy by the President, the aide memoire (i e , as interpreted by Graves) remained the basis of Graves' mission, the United States continued to think and act with two discordant voices in Russia (It is worth nothing that equivocation over support for Kolchak also led the U S Charge in Russia to submit his resignation, which Washington subsequently asked to him to keep quiet for a time so as not to endanger U S troops in northern Russia and Siberia. [8])

Conclusions

In hindsight, U S policy on Russia was awry from the start. Had we joined in a combined Western effort to suffocate Bolshevism in its crib, the world might have been spared 70 years of Communist agony visited upon some two billion people that cost untold lives But the stakes were not obvious in 1918. U S. isolationism and the moral imperative that self-determination represented may have made a full force intervention unpalatable even had the consequences of Lenin's consolidation of power been clear at the time That, however, is not an excuse for the half-policy (or, more correctly, several divergent policies) and half-measures employed in Russia in 1918-20 -- or in 1994 Bosnia Nor does this excuse making the means to influence events in Russia -- U S forces providing presence on the ground -- the ends of our policy Ways, means and ends were out of kilter, there was no strategy

The great military theorists of the 19th and early 20th centuries did not discuss operations other than war, but the holistic concept of war that is contained in Clausewitz's writings makes clear that he would have argued that, in some respects, the one is not so different than the other In operations other than war as in total war several points seem

clear there must be a strategy that relates ways and means to some definable ends, these ends must be connected somehow with more or less specific actions that the military can undertake, policy and operations on the ground should be planned and developed with some understanding of local circumstances -- arguably more so than in war where some local factors can be rendered irrelevant by overwhelming firepower or changed circumstances on some other front; diplomats and the military must coordinate and cooperate closely if the influence and resources of the United States are to be effectively brought to bear, and coordination with the coalition partners/allies must be attended to rigorously by a commander in a multilateral endeavor and not allowed to fail

Russia in 1918-20 demonstrated some of these lessons It isn't clear that we learned them then or that we've gotten it right yet If the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is correct that operations other than war will dominate the world we live in for the next decade or more, then getting it right is among the greatest challenges the U S military and Defense and State Departments will face in the years ahead

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Notes

1. For the purposes of economy, this paper mainly addresses the example of the U S military intervention into Siberia to illustrate the points discussed It includes only scattered references to the northern Russia effort and omits reference to the U S role vis-a-vis the southern Russia opposition to the Bolsheviks, the various U S missions to establish a dialogue with the Lenin government, and the various direct (economic and humanitarian) efforts undertaken during this period and later

2 Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919, Russia, p 13

3 Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia, Volume II, p 287-90

4 Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919, Russia, p 72

5 Baker, Newton D , "Foreword," in America's Siberian Adventure by William S Graves, Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, New York, 1931, p vii-xvi

6. Graves, William S , America's Siberian Adventure, Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, New York, 1931, p 69

7. Graves, p 112

8 Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919, Russia, p 47

Additional source

Lasch, Christopher, The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution, Columbia University Press, New York, 1962.